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Editor's Foreword

This issue of *Tequesta* offers readers three diverse essays beginning with Christopher E. Meindl's "On the Eve of Destruction: People and Florida's Everglades from the late 1800s to 1908." Meindl is an assistant professor of Social Science and Florida Studies at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg. In this article, which chronicles the discussion and opinions surrounding drainage of the wetlands, Meindl provides insight into a little known but important aspect of a the state-sponsored drainage program. The article is especially timely because the proposed "restoration" of the Everglades is a major news story. I believe Meindl's article will serve as an important reference for understanding the buildup to a project that dramatically reduced the size of the "River of Grass," altered the environment of South Florida, made possible a vast population surge, and led to the creation of Everglades National Park.

Jacqueline E. Clancy's "Hell's Angel: Eleanor Kinzie Gordon's Wartime Summer of 1898," offers an interesting look at a heretofore ignored element in the story of Camp Miami, the jerry-rigged, tented facility that stood north of downtown Miami in 1898, and served, briefly, as home to seven thousand soldiers during the Spanish-American War. Eleanor Gordon, Clancy's protagonist, labored tirelessly in establishing and administering a convalescent hospital in the camp. Clancy, who teaches American History at Columbia College, Fort Stewart, gained access to both the Gordon Family Papers and the Spanish-American War Journal of Eleanor Kinzie Gordon in preparing this article. Few scholars have seen this material.

William M. Straight, M.D., Florida's preeminent medical historian, retired internist, and a frequent contributor to *Tequesta*, brings us, "Early Miami through the Eyes of Youth," a brief account of the city's early years by Ethel Weatherly Sherman, who arrived in Miami at age ten in 1896. Straight has carefully edited and annotated a rough, elliptical manuscript authored by Sherman, and transcribed an interview with her, to provide readers with an invaluable look at the nascent city that arose on the banks of Biscayne Bay and the Miami River at the end of the nineteenth century. First person accounts of early Miami are rare, which makes Sherman's observations, and Straight's contributions, even more valuable to us.
Many thanks to Sara Muñoz, managing editor of *Tequesta*, for her inestimable work in preparing this edition of the journal for publication. Sara has again been ably assisted by Kelly Geisinger, copy editor. Finally, I encourage our readers to visit the Historical Museum, which continues to enhance its already splendid offerings. “Tropical Dreams: A People's History of South Florida,” the Museum's permanent exhibition, remains a popular attraction, especially with the fossils and artifacts that were added to its “First Arrivals” segment little more than one year ago. Also available is *First Arrivals, The Archaeology of Southern Florida*, an insightful, wonderfully illustrated work that examines the increasingly more bountiful and complex archaeological heritage of Miami and southeast Florida. We know you will enjoy and learn from all the Historical Museum has to offer, as well as from this edition of *Tequesta*.

Paul S. George
Editor, *Tequesta*
On the Eve of Destruction:
People and Florida’s Everglades from
the late 1800s to 1908

Christopher F. Meindl

Florida’s Everglades have been the subject of much public discussion
during the past century, and most of the current discourse deals with
efforts to restore parts of the region to some semblance of its pre-
drainage condition. Furthermore, most of the recent scholarly literature
regarding the Everglades treats technical aspects of the region’s physical
characteristics such as geology, hydrology, soils, chemistry, and ecology.
Much less has been written about people’s historic relationship with the
Everglades (or “Glades”). Certainly the work of Marjory Stoneman
Douglas, Charlton Tebeau, Nelson Blake, and David McCally provides
much needed perspective on the human experience in the Everglades.
These writers agree that few people paid much attention to the Glades
until the late nineteenth century. Accordingly, we could rely upon wet-
land scholars such as William Mitsch and James Gosselink who observe
that “from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the
twentieth century, the United States went through a period in which
wetland removal was not questioned. Indeed, it was considered the
proper thing to do.” An editorial originally appearing elsewhere but
reprinted in the Miami Herald in 1911 illustrates the mood of many
people during this era. Referring to the numerous wetlands in the
southeastern United States, one writer comments: “As they are, they are
without value—in fact, they are a menace to health, being breeding
places for malaria-carrying mosquitoes…”
Yet something is missing; we still have an incomplete portrait of people's perceptions of the Everglades from the late 1800s to 1908, when large scale reclamation gained momentum. Should we assume that everyone during this time period favored reclaiming all wetlands everywhere, and that Florida’s Everglades were doomed to destruction as a result of such attitudes? If citizens of Florida and the rest of the U.S. are now prepared to spend in excess of $8 billion in an attempt to repair some of the ecological damage inflicted upon the Glades this past century, we ought to know more about the attitudes of people who lived on the eve of full scale efforts to reclaim the Everglades. The objective of this article, therefore, is to learn if clear connections can be made between popular perceptions of the Everglades and early reclamation efforts (or lack thereof) in the region.

Wetlands posed several problems for nineteenth and early twentieth century Americans. For one, it was thought that swamps and marshes produced foul air that caused malaria, a common disease of the time. Even after it was discovered that certain species of mosquitoes transmitted malaria, wetlands remained frightening environments because they were home to the insects that spread the disease. Furthermore, inasmuch as many people used to earn their living as farmers, wetlands were a nuisance because they not only precluded the planting of traditional crops, they served as a home for birds that consumed crops produced on adjacent uplands. Of course, for people traveling mostly by horse and buggy or even early automobiles on crude roads, wetlands hindered transportation development.

Despite substantial military activity against the Seminole Indians in South Florida prior to the Civil War, South Florida—especially the interior—remained terra incognita for most people throughout the nineteenth century. Wetlands covered more than half the state and almost all of South Florida. The general lack of interest in the Everglades until the early twentieth century was probably the result of a relative abundance of good farm land in other parts of the United States, Florida, and even the slightly more elevated coastal ridge of southeast Florida. Dissatisfied with the state of affairs after joining the union in 1845, Florida officials begged the federal government to study the Glades and determine the practicability of reclaiming southern Florida’s swamps. In 1847, the federal government authorized Buckingham Smith to prepare such a report, which he submitted a year
later. In his report, Smith combined personal observations of the Everglades with testimony from military officers who worked in the area during the recent Seminole War. He could not think of a solitary inducement to offer any prospective settler except that the area experienced frost-free winters, a mistaken assertion highlighted by later boosters. It is hard to overstate the idea in the minds of upper class white males during the nineteenth century that land must be made to produce tangible products for people to be of any value. Accordingly, Buckingham Smith concluded that the Everglades could and should be drained by digging canals across South Florida. In 1850, Congress tried to help by passing the Swamp Land Act which granted to Florida and other states all of the swamp and overflowed lands within their borders. The act stipulated that proceeds from the sale of these lands were to be used only for the construction of levees and drains needed to reclaim these wetlands. Florida created an Internal Improvement Fund to sell wetlands and spend the revenue on drainage, but due to a lack of interest in the region, there remained little cash with which to carry out Smith’s recommendation. Philadelphia businessman Hamilton Disston single-handedly rescued the state in 1881 by purchasing four million acres of swampland in central and southern Florida for $1 million. Disston and his Atlantic and Gulf Coast Canal and Okeechobee Land Company were initially most active in central Florida, at the northern end of the Everglades watershed. Yet he eventually turned his attention farther south, eyeing the Glades. Because excess water in Lake Okeechobee used to overtop the big lake’s southern shore and then ooze across the Everglades on its way to the end of the peninsula, Disston and his chief engineer James Kreamer soon agreed that they must lower Lake Okeechobee if they wanted to reclaim wetlands in the southern portion of the watershed. In a war-torn and poverty-stricken South, such activity began to attract interest. According to one newspaper editor in 1882, the Everglades were “a region mysterious, unknown, beautiful—a terra incognita—of which as little is known as the center of ‘the dark continent.’” Yet Hamilton Disston’s efforts to drain and farm swamp land in peninsular Florida began to change this attitude. Indeed, Disston’s work encouraged two expeditions into the Everglades by people associated with the New Orleans Times-Democrat. During the early 1880s, the Times-Democrat
was one of several newspapers actively promoting economic development in the post-Reconstruction South.5

The first Times-Democrat expedition took place near the end of 1882 and began in the lakes and wetlands at the northern end of the Everglades watershed, moved down the Kissimmee River to Lake Okeechobee, through Disston’s canals to Lake Hicpochee, to the headwaters of the Caloosahatchee River and on to the Gulf of Mexico at Fort Myers. The expedition’s leader, former confederate soldier Archie P. Williams, could hardly contain himself: “Concerning the richness of the soil I make the broad assertion that its equal is not within the bounds of the United States.” The first expedition whetted the appetites of those interested in Everglades development, including many newspaper editors in the North and West who reprinted Williams’s accounts in their papers. At about the same time, Will Wallace Harney reported on Disston’s reclamation activities in In 1881, Hamilton Disston saved Florida from bankruptcy by purchasing four million acres of swampland in central and southern Florida. Courtesy of the Florida State Archives.

area of fertility unrivaled even by the loamy bottoms of the Mississippi.”6

The Times-Democrat sponsored a second trip which began in late 1883 at Fort Myers. Archie Williams led his group up the Caloosahatchee River to Lake Okeechobee, and then down the sawgrass marshes of the Everglades to extreme southwestern Florida. At the end of this second expedition, however, a disappointed Williams reported that “in my opinion their drainage is utterly impracticable, and even if it were practicable the reward for such an undertaking would be lands that could be utilized for no other purpose than as a grazing ground for livestock. They are nothing more nor less than a vast and useless marsh,
and such they will remain for all time to come, in all probability.” Williams’s dejection apparently convinced the editor of the *Times-Democrat* who lamented in early 1884 that the Everglades were in fact far different from what had been previously imagined: “We regret to learn this,” the editor observed, “but it is better that it should have been brought out now, instead of the world being encouraged into the mistaken belief that the Everglades could be redeemed.”

John W. P. Jenks read Archie Williams’s assessment of the Glades and he undoubtedly agreed. In 1884, Jenks privately published a short book on his experience hunting in Florida and the “miasmatic swamps and everglades around Lake Okeechobee” ten years earlier. Jenks claimed that his Florida sojourn was for the purpose of collecting biological specimens for the museum at Rhode Island’s Brown University. After reaching Jacksonville in early 1874, he inquired as to the best route to Lake Okeechobee, but found that the lake was *terra incognita* even to Floridians. More important, however, is Jenks’s recognition that the learned people of his time read many of the same things. After commenting on the raw character of the Florida landscape, Jenks adds: “Into such a wild region you must go if you would study nature first hand instead of second. Hence the reason so few naturalists do anything more than study books and take the observations of others and use them second-handed.” In other words, it is likely that impressions of the region developed by a handful of people may have become very widespread.

In a similar vein, Frederick A. Ober—who participated in writing a series of adventure books about places in Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and other parts of the tropics—published a book in 1887 entitled *The Knockabout Club in the Everglades: The Adventures of the Club in Exploring Lake Okeechobee* [sic]. Although only two chapters of this work treat Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades, Ober’s comments are instructive. He correctly relates that at the time, the big lake had no well defined outlet and that “the accumulated drainage of thousands of square miles of territory slowly percolates through the Everglades by thousands of channels with countless ramifications.” When his fictitious exploring party finally encountered the southern shore of Lake Okeechobee, immediately adjacent to the Glades, they found sleep impossible due to swarms of mosquitoes. Regarding their departure from the region, Ober notes: “It was a fitting ending to our dreary voyage along the Everglade shore that we should leave the forsaken stretch of marsh
and swamp, and enter upon the home stretch with the repulsive features softened and chastened by the moonlight. Farewell, forever, to the Everglades!"

Frederick Jackson Turner may have declared that the frontier in the United States disappeared by 1890, but most of peninsular Florida at this time remained a virtual wilderness. The 1890 census recorded less than 400,000 people in all of Florida and less than 2,400 on the peninsula south of Lake Okeechobee. Indeed, according to the 1890 census, "a large proportion of the area of the peninsula of Florida is practically without settlement. This appears to be due in part to the direction of the general movement of population, which has been westward from Georgia and the Carolinas; in part to the want of good harbors, and other inducements to settle upon the coast, and thus to create starting points for the settlement of the interior; but also, and very largely, to the fact that a considerable portion of the area is swampy and difficult of access, and, consequently, remote from markets."

Few people knew much about South Florida (let alone the Everglades) in the 1890s, but there are some sources that deal with perceptions of the region. Travel books are one such source of information. As John Jenks observed earlier, many authors of travel books probably did not visit such isolated places as the Everglades, but relied on hearsay, opinion, and other published sources to write descriptions of the region. In 1889, for example, James Davidson published his guide for Florida tourists and settlers and included comments on southern Florida. Of this region, he believed "there can be nothing but insects, vermin, mud, malaria, Indians, desolation, abomination, discomfort, disease, black death, and poverty—where nothing will grow but comptie [from which an edible starch was produced] and mangroves, and where nobody lives anyhow." Davidson noted that the Glades were usually covered with drinkable water from an inch to several feet deep, and that tree islands dotted the landscape. He acknowledged Disston's efforts in South Florida, suggesting that friends of the enterprise are hopeful that the Glades could be drained, while admitting that others were less hopeful. Davidson concludes that "it does not seem impossible that at least a part of these Everglades waters may be drained off. It seems to be a question mainly of canal capacity."

A year later, Charles Norton produced the first edition of his *Handbook of Florida*. He contended that Dade County was inaccessible
to the ordinary tourist and unavailable to the average settler. Norton argued that in addition to the remnant Seminole Indian population, “only the most enterprising and adventurous hunters and cowboys” visited South Florida’s interior. In 1895, Norton produced a third edition of his handbook. He described the Glades thus: “It is not a swamp in the ordinary meaning of the term, but rather a shallow lake with a hard rock bottom, and grass growing to a height of four or five feet above the surface of the water.” Like Davidson, Norton noted the presence of tree islands and mentioned numerous canoe-width channels, but he warned that it was easy to become hopelessly lost in South Florida’s uncharted interior.

During the early 1890s, railroad developer Henry Plant considered the possibility of extending his lines across the Everglades. To satisfy his curiosity, Plant told one of his leading lieutenants, James E. Ingraham, to organize an expedition across the Glades in early 1892. Wallace Moses (official secretary for the twenty-one men who comprised the expedition) and Alonzo Church later wrote detailed accounts of their experience, which were published in separate issues of Tequesta more than a half century ago. In addition to their own views, Moses and Church recorded perceptions of the Glades expressed by others.

In any event, the group began their three week long expedition from Fort Myers to Miami in March 1892. Moses remembered that some
locals thought the party would turn back shortly while others believed they would successfully cross the Glades. Church maintains that before he left, locals offered several accounts of the Everglades. One man claimed that sawgrass "extended all the way across the Glades and would be an impenetrable barrier to our advance." Another informant insisted that the Glades were a "labyrinth of bayous running through a dense jungle of tropical growth," and that they would soon become lost and starve before finding their way out. Still others were aware that Seminoles cultivated many of the region's more elevated tree islands. Church also remembered being told of "mosquitoes, red bugs, alligator fleas... and a thousand other horrors, known and unknown." All of this frightened Church, but he remained captivated by the prospect of exploring what he and many others considered a mysterious region. The fact that the group later verified most of these stories suggests that most southwest Floridians understood the Glades reasonably well.\(^\text{1}\)

The expedition's leader, an engineer named John Newman, encouraged his men before departure: "Should our expedition be successful it may result in good to the whole country, for if this land can be rendered fit for cultivation it will be the most productive of any in this state. It would be a glorious undertaking, for charity could ask no nobler enterprise, ambition no higher glory and capital no greater increase than would result from the redemption of this land."

On March 22, Wallace Moses observed that the land "seems rich and would be easily cultivated once the water is permanently removed." A week later, however, Moses conceded that "this has been a terrible strain on everybody. Locomotion is extremely slow. The bog is fearful and it sometimes seems as though it would be easier to stay in it than to go on. Both legs up to the waist in mud... the boats are very necessary to enable one to pull himself out of the mud, and even then the labor is most exhaustive." Church concluded that "it is enough to make a man swear to be contented ever afterwards with a board for a bed and a clean shirt once a week." Sydney Chase also made the trip and later asked Church if he wanted to invest in Everglades land, but Church had had enough: "Not on your life," he responded, "I wouldn't be caught dead with any of this property." Fifteen years later, Wallace Moses had moved to West Palm Beach and thought "there is good land along the east side but doubtful if the main part of the Glades are of much value."\(^\text{15}\)
In the meantime, Hamilton Disston's company dug several canals in central and southern Florida connecting many lakes in Florida's heartland between the town of Kissimmee and Lake Kissimmee—the southern edge of which becomes the Kissimmee River—a sinuous waterway (before channelization in the 1960s) that empties into the north shore of Lake Okeechobee. He also helped connect Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee River. Despite some initial modest success, the nationwide Panic of 1893 dealt a crippling blow to this enterprise. The Florida Legislature attempted to boost confidence in the project by preparing a pamphlet that outlined Disston’s work in Florida. Yet after a tremendous storm in September 1894 flooded almost all of South Florida, some farmers on the edge of the Everglades complained that Disston’s canals were responsible for the associated flood damage. Swamped with financial difficulties, Disston took his own life in 1896, ending his company’s reclamation efforts in South Florida.¹⁶

Other persons in the late nineteenth century engaged in what turned out to be premature efforts to promote Everglades reclamation. In June 1896, John MacDonald commented in the Miami Metropolis that “the improvements in machinery for draining, dredging and excavating, as well as of the steam plow, render these rich sugar lands of Florida a very safe and highly lucrative field for the investment of capital.” MacDonald also noted the relationship between wetlands, mosquitoes, and malaria. “And it is the universal doctrine,” he assured his readers, “that countries do grow more healthful as drainage progresses, while countries requiring extensive irrigation grow more malarial.” The fact that these comments appeared on page six of an eight page newspaper suggests that many South Floridians paid little attention to the Everglades at this time.¹⁷

In 1898, the Florida East Coast Drainage and Sugar Company announced plans to reclaim eight hundred thousand acres of Everglades land. One of the company’s officers, Rufus E. Rose, told the Miami Metropolis that draining the Glades seemed “wild and visionary.” Yet he insisted that it “requires only a visit to similar lands in the Kissimmee Valley [where Hamilton Disston had been active], formerly vast marshes, now fertile fields, to convince impartial minds of their great agricultural future.” Rose later became Florida’s state chemist and remained a constant promoter of Everglades development. Unfortunately, Rose also helped promote the impression in the minds of many that freezing temperatures would not visit the Glades. “Frost to damage the most
tropical fruits and tender vegetables,” he insisted, “has never occurred.”
In any event, little became of the enterprise.¹⁸

Meanwhile, Hugh Willoughby explored the Glades in 1897, and published a book about his trip a year later. He argued that “the popular impression has always been that the Everglades is a huge swamp, full of malaria and disease germs.” He insisted that “the general impression of what constitutes the Everglades is absolutely erroneous.” Willoughby noted the explosive development in and around Miami, commenting that the region’s “wilderness has been rudely marred by the hand of civilization.” In the next breath, however, he asserted that it is in the nature of things that wilderness must gradually be encroached upon. In all likelihood, Willoughby found people too busy clearing land along southeast Florida’s Atlantic Coastal Ridge to pay much attention to the Everglades. Indeed, editors of the *Miami Metropolis* published a list of “things we would like to see” in a June 1896 issue. They called for bridges, sewers, new houses, and other infrastructure—but absent from this list was any mention of Everglades drainage. Turn-of-the-century South Floridians may have avoided the Everglades because they feared malaria, but more likely, they were busy with plenty of other profitable opportunities along the slightly more elevated coastal strip.¹⁹

While sailing from Miami to the southwest Florida coast, Willoughby noticed several off-shore springs which he correctly believed originated in the Everglades. Indeed, while paddling his boat through the water-covered Glades, he noticed springs everywhere. “All this moving water cannot be accounted for by the rain alone,” he thought, “and the water is too hard for rain water, so in all probability more comes from below than above.” Willoughby had no idea that he was traversing the Biscayne Aquifer—one of the most productive aquifers in the world. It is hard to gauge how much Willoughby’s writing influenced others, but later authors of travel books repeated the misconception that much of the water in the Glades came from distant groundwater sources rather than precipitation in South Florida that entered the Biscayne Aquifer.²⁰

Jacksonville’s *Times-Union* initially expressed approval of wetland drainage in the Glades and elsewhere in Florida. “Besides the millions of acres that will be reclaimed in south Florida,” the editor argued in 1898, “there are thousands of others only second in productiveness, and these will be reclaimed from Pensacola to Miami.” Hinting that some people did not agree, the editor concluded that “the immediate future
will prove an era of phenomenal development for this State, and this men may retard but cannot stop even when they are so unpatriotic as to use power or influence to that purpose.”

Finally, writing in 1899, long-time South Florida resident I. L. Roberts supported Everglades reclamation. He claimed that he made an effort to attract businessmen to the Glades in 1876, “and has ever since stood astounded at the negligence and disinterestedness of capital on this subject.” To him, it seemed incomprehensible. As far as Roberts was concerned, “it seems as if nature has placed this wonderful cornucopia at our hands and merely asks us to empty it at our pleasure.”

On the other hand, the editor of the Miami Metropolis probably came closest to most people’s view of the Glades in the late nineteenth century when he suggested that visitors to Miami should “not fail to take a trip up the [Miami] river to the rapids and look upon that vast mysterious waste known as the Everglades.”

Prior to 1900, the federal government had nothing to do with wetland reclamation. As part of the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899, however, Congress authorized a survey of the Kissimmee and Caloosahatchee Rivers with a view to improving navigation. Low water during the winter dry season hindered navigation, a vital concern for people who lived where there were no roads. W.H. Caldwell conducted a preliminary survey of the region in 1899 for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Caldwell found many settlers along the Kissimmee River all the way down to Fort Bassinger. Yet the last twenty to twenty-five miles of the river were uninhabited and “bordered by an impenetrable marsh, which extends back from the river for many miles on either side.” Caldwell added that “Lake Okeechobee’s borders are similar to the lower end of the Kissimmee River.” He found the lakeshore almost deserted except for a few orange groves on the north shore near Taylor Creek, the beginnings of a town eventually named Okeechobee. As for the Caloosahatchee River valley, Caldwell found fruit and vegetable farms from Fort Myers inland to Fort Thompson, but he found almost nobody living between Fort Thompson and the big lake.

As a result of this reconnaissance, Caldwell argued against improving the entire waterway from Kissimmee to Fort Myers. He suggested improving the Kissimmee River between Kissimmee and Fort Bassinger, and the Caloosahatchee River from Fort Thompson to Fort Myers. The intervening area was virtually uninhabited and Caldwell concluded that
it had no immediate future. Furthermore, farmers and ranchers along
the inhabited stretches of the two rivers spoke out against improving
the entire route. Kissimmee River people feared that improving the
lower portion of their river might permanently lower water levels
throughout the river. Caloosahatchee River residents resurrected charges
that improving the upper section of their river would allow excess water
from the big lake to flood them out. Finally, Caldwell contended that
“the only interests demanding a through route from the Caloosahatchee
to the Kissimmee are tourists, but such travel is too insignificant to be
worthy of consideration.” Again, it appears that central and south
Floridians rejected moves that would lead to Everglades development,
not because they disapproved wetland development generally—but
because they were trying to develop their own property elsewhere.25

The late 1890s and early 1900s represent the heart of the Progressive
Era, a time when government at all levels abandoned laissez-faire policies
for greater involvement in social and economic issues. For example, most
early twentieth century Progressives believed that the nation could (and
should) make better use of its natural resources. Charles MacDonald,
former president of the American Society of Civil Engineers, made the
case for human intervention in his annual address for 1908: “If it can
be proved that two blades of grass can be grown where one has hereto-
fore been found to be the limit, it is certain that the sources of power
in Nature have been scientifically utilized, and the general wealth of the
country correspondingly increased.” Converting the apparently “useless” Everglades into productive, tax-generating farmland was a Progressive dream. Jacksonville’s Times-Union appeared to agree when it argued in 1899 that Everglades reclamation would “make us independent of the sugar tribute now demanded [from foreign sources], and change the unfortunates of our slums into self-respecting self-governing American farmers.” In South Florida, F. A. Hendry made the case for reclaiming the Everglades in 1906: “Old Dame Nature has been fixing up this trick for ages. She never does it all, but always leaves something for man to do. It is here [in the Everglades that] she temptingly invites man to roll up his sleeves and pitch in.”

At the turn of the century, preservationists—a relatively small but vocal minority—placed much more emphasis on recreation and aesthetics than conservationists of the time. On the other hand conservationists, as Samuel Hays maintains, were “the apostles of the gospel of efficiency [and they] subordinated the aesthetic to the utilitarian.” Everglades drainage became part of a nationwide movement in the early twentieth century to eliminate natural resource waste. Imbued with the Progressive spirit, Congress passed the Newlands Reclamation Act in 1902, legislation that funded irrigation projects designed to make arid lands throughout the West agriculturally productive. At the same time, drainage organizations around the country lobbied for a similar national drainage service to help reclaim wetlands. Congressman Halvor Steenerson (from Minnesota) introduced such legislation in 1906. The Pensacola Journal supported the bill: “It means that tens of millions of acres of the most fertile lands imaginable, which has lain idle for ages, may be converted from dismal and pestilential swamps and useless bogs into highly prosperous homes, to become the garden spots of the nation.” The hoped-for drainage service never materialized, but agitation to “make better use” of wetlands continued and Congress created a Bureau of Drainage Investigations within the USDA’s Office of Experiment Stations in 1902.

As a result of the Ingraham Everglades exploring expedition in 1892, Henry Plant lost whatever enthusiasm he may have had for the Everglades, but Henry Flagler hired James Ingraham to help extend his railroad down Florida’s east coast during the 1890s. The railroad reached Flagler’s intended terminus—the Palm Beaches—in early 1894. A devastating freeze in early 1895 inflicted substantial damage upon
many Florida farmers, yet Miami had been spared. South Florida pioneer Julia Tuttle suggested to Flagler that he extend his line to Miami, and by April 1896, Miami had a rail connection to New York. Two months later, Miami's first newspaper, the *Metropolis*, raved that the trip from South Florida to New York could be made in forty-four hours. Before the railroad, it took two days to go from Miami to Lake Worth, just sixty-three miles to the north. It would be several more years before Everglades development, but Flagler's railroad began the process of radically transforming South Florida.\(^{28}\)

The pace of change in South Florida accelerated after 1900. People poured into the region and some of these spilled into the Everglades. For one thing, fishermen began to settle the shores of Lake Okeechobee. Commercial fishermen took tremendous numbers of catfish from the big lake. Hunters also settled the shores of Lake Okeechobee at the turn of the century. They pursued higher-priced otter and raccoon skins during the winter months, and plume-producing birds in spring—a significant source of income. Plumes were in demand because they commonly adorned women's hats during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Florida passed bird protection laws in 1877, 1879, and 1891, but these proved ineffective. In 1900, the federal government passed the Lacey Act which prohibited interstate commerce in birds protected by state law. The National Audubon Society provided wardens for South Florida, the most famous of whom was Guy Bradley who was shot to death in 1905 after confronting plume hunters. Kathryn and Alfred Hanna painted this graphic picture of plume hunting: “To get the most beautiful plumes, birds had to be shot while on their nests. After they dropped, the plumes were torn off and the bird cast aside. Back in the nest the young weakened and starved to death or fell from the nest through sheer inability to stand up and were drowned. Nesting areas frequently included hundreds of birds. When such a colony was shot up nothing was left but a scene of desolation with dead birds strewed about, feathers scattered among the starving young, while vultures wheeled in for a square meal.”\(^{29}\) When Julian and A. W. Dimock complained to an old “Florida Cracker” about the slaughter of birds, they received the following response: “Every egret and long white that's shot in this country is killed on an order from New York. Your rich merchants send agents down here to hire hunters and Indians to get plumes for them.” Dimock's informant added most plume hunters
struggled to survive, while northern tourists “bring with them an automatic shotgun and a repeating rifle and bang at everything that flies or crawls.”

In 1904, Charles G. Elliott, a drainage engineer within the USDA’s newly created Bureau of Drainage Investigations, made a preliminary investigation of the Glades in an effort to determine the feasibility of draining a small tract for experimental use. He noted that Henry Flagler’s Florida East Coast Railroad had already spent a great deal of money trying to clear and enlarge existing rivers along Florida’s lower east coast. Their operations were intended to enhance winter fruit and vegetable production by reducing flooding along the short rivers and adjacent arms of the Glades that extended across the coastal ridge toward the ocean. Elliott observed that no Glade land had been adequately drained to produce crops during the entire year. He recommended gradual development of the Everglades as demand for produce increased, using dikes to protect individual farms. This suggestion met with little favor among those who had high hopes for Everglades development, but in any case, Elliott’s report attracted little attention because relatively few people cared about developing the Glades.

Only with Napoleon B. Broward’s decision to run for governor of Florida did the Everglades attract more widespread attention. It was Broward, more than anyone else, who forced the issue of Everglades drainage upon the public. Broward canvassed the state in 1904, promising (among other things) to drain the Glades. One author contends that Broward adopted the Everglades issue in an attempt to put some political distance between himself and other candidates. This same author adds, however, “in allowing the land question to begin to dominate his speaking, Broward was faced with all the rhetorical liabilities surrounding the issue.” Despite winning the Democratic primary elections (and eventually the general election) in 1904, Broward lost Lee and Dade Counties during both Democratic primaries. Broward’s failure in these counties suggests that many of the region’s voters (virtually all white males, most of whom were Democrats) were uncertain or even apathetic regarding Everglades drainage. Moreover, there were those who favored Broward but not Everglades drainage. For example, one South Floridian later wrote the Fort Myers Press: “I voted for Governor Broward in both primaries, but not on account of his drainage scheme, as that, to my mind, is anything but a wise or practical operation.”
Shortly after his inauguration in early 1905, Governor Broward called for legislation creating a drainage district encompassing much of South Florida. This district would have the power to levy taxes, but courts soon declared the legislation unconstitutional. Broward then went to South Florida to make his own inspection of the Everglades. Acting as his own engineer, he devised a plan for draining the Glades and used the few remaining dollars in Florida's Internal Improvement Fund to obtain a couple of dredges to begin digging canals from the southeast coast to Lake Okeechobee in July 1906. Broward spent a tremendous amount of energy supervising and attending to drainage details and explained his enthusiasm for Everglades development: "This land would have remained a wilderness and would have been inhabited by the Indians until the dawn of the millennium had those who preceded us been as weak as the majority of those who quibble now, and stand on the bank and shiver and shake, instead of plunging in and doing something."

In 1906, the governor backed an amendment to the Florida constitution, which overcame the court's objections. Broward engaged in yet another public relations campaign on behalf of his Everglades drainage project. As part of this campaign Broward made speeches around the state; he even prepared an open letter to the people of Florida. He insisted that "it would indeed be a sad commentary on the intelligence and energy of the people of Florida to confess that so simple an engineering feat as the drainage of a body of land twenty-one feet above the level of the sea was beyond their power." Broward sincerely believed that draining the Glades was a simple matter, and that the total cost would not be more than a dollar per acre. Confident of his plan, Broward claimed, "I can do the whole business in five years at the outside and turn the everglade swamps into an earthly paradise... . The main canals would lower the level of the lake so that settlers could move in even before the lateral canals were completed." When somebody suggested that South Florida's peat soil would burn after drainage [as it eventually did], Broward retorted that "if such a thing as a large area of land catching fire and burning up as the opponents claim had been possible, the great bogs of Ireland would have been ash heaps long before St. Patrick drove out the snakes." Asserting that Lake Okeechobee was twenty-one feet above sea level and that water would run "downhill" toward sea level upon
completion of the canals, he branded those who maintained that the Glades could not be drained as tools of corporate interests.

Florida's newspapers recorded much of the discussion regarding Everglades drainage in 1906. Some writers questioned the feasibility of Broward's plan; others questioned its desirability; still others favored drainage but not Broward's plan. Finally, many people confessed that they simply did not know much about the Glades. For instance, the Ocala Banner cautioned that "care should be taken to distinguish between the naked proposition that the Everglades can be drained...and the method adopted by the board to accomplish this gigantic enterprise." One Kissimmee resident went even further, simply ridiculing Broward's plan. "The profile drawings attached to the governor's appeal must have been made in a kindergarten. They are absolutely valueless....To show one body of water [Lake Okeechobee] higher than another [sea level] on a plain and then draw a straight line from the highest to the lowest point and call that an engineering drawing is something very novel."

After initially supporting Everglades drainage, Jacksonville's Times-Union eventually assailed practically everything Governor Broward called for, including Everglades reclamation. In March 1906, the Times-Union pointed out that only one million of Florida's thirty-seven million acres of land were in cultivation. The paper suggested that the state would be better off devoting its energy to attracting immigrants from other states to farm this unoccupied land closer to the heart of Florida's existing population. "It is not yet certain that the Everglades can be drained," the Times-Union editor maintained; "it is not yet certain that they are worth draining."

In August 1906, the Times-Union insisted that draining the Glades (or any other wetlands) would cost far more than Broward's suggested
average of one dollar per acre. The editor contended that no one can know how much it will cost to drain the Everglades until they are surveyed—and the state had no plans for a survey. Making the case as plain as possible, the newspaper drew this analogy: “Now if a stranger should come along and give you this advice—to drain land you didn’t need, to commence digging without knowing how much it would cost, without knowing if you could drain it or whether it would be worth anything if drained... you would leave and not be slow about it.”

No less a figure than the father of Marjory Stoneman Douglas—Frank B. Stoneman—had much to say regarding Everglades drainage. Frank Stoneman helped establish and edited for many years the Miami Evening-Record, which eventually became the Miami Herald. Like many people of his time, Stoneman initially supported wetland drainage in South Florida. In April 1906, he spoke in favor of Broward’s activities:

“The wonder is that there should be found any in the State who object to it.” Indeed, Stoneman thought that the Times-Union’s change of heart came as a result of influence from railroad corporations who believed that they were entitled to receive the Everglades in return for constructing lines in the state. He argued in April 1906 that “the only opposition to the governor’s operations has been manufactured and festered from one source. The Jacksonville newspapers, whose interest in the people has always been subordinate to their interest in receipts from the corporations... are the center of opposition to the great movement.” Claiming that other newspapers that opposed Everglades drainage were simply following the lead of the Jacksonville press, Stoneman insisted that “the sentiment is manufactured and the factory is located in Jax.” Later that year,
however, Stoneman changed his mind. He received a letter in October 1906 from Alfred Newlander, a civil engineer from St. Augustine, who argued that Broward’s reclamation plan was inadequate. Stoneman immediately became an outspoken critic of drainage operations and called for more thorough investigation of the matter. In February 1908, Stoneman argued that “the ardent advocates of the drainage of the Everglades show a lamentable ignorance of conditions in this section of the state.”

Up to this time, Stoneman’s competitor—the Miami Metropolis—remained relatively quiet on the drainage question and on Broward’s proposed constitutional amendment creating a drainage district for the Everglades. In April 1906, however, one South Florida farmer wrote the Metropolis, complaining that he was tired of periodic flood damage. He favored draining the Glades, admitting that some say it is not possible. If it is not possible, he asked, why were the railroads still interested in these wetlands? He viewed corporate interest in the region as a sign that the Glades could, in fact, be drained. On the other hand, a central Florida citrus farmer expressed local concerns in a letter to the USDA. His farmer friends thought that large and deep canals in South Florida “might lower the groundwater level of practically all of the state that is adapted to citrus fruits and consequently injure [our] groves by robbing the of their supply of moisture.”

In September 1906 the Miami Metropolis reprinted articles from several of Florida’s newspapers regarding the Glades. The articles reprinted suggest that many Floridians remained unconvinced of the efficacy of Everglades drainage. For example, the Pensacola Journal commented on the Everglades debate between Broward and Pensacola’s State Senator John S. Beard. Beard argued that the court still had not decided whether or not the state owned the Everglades. Therefore, it would be foolish to begin draining the Glades if the court later determined that corporations were entitled to the land. The Journal insisted that “we do not say that this point alone should determine the whole question of supporting or opposing the drainage amendment, but we do say that it is a question that will cut a large figure in the case and ought to be answered.”

The Punta Gorda Herald summarized what was probably true for many people of the time: “the reason that the Herald has had nothing to say on the much discussed problem of drainage of the Everglades is
simply and candidly that the *Herald* knows nothing about it.... The *Herald* is utterly obfuscated.” Continuing, the *Herald* summarized the debate: “On one side is arrayed the Governor of the State, a number of respectable and honest newspapers and many reputable, upright and intelligent citizens.... On the other side, however, there are a number of capable and honorable newspapers and a good many patriotic, able and conscientious citizens who contend that the drainage of the Everglades is impractical, wholly unnecessary and not worth the cost.”

The *Tampa Times* remarked that the coming election on the drainage district constitutional amendment “will not reflect any discriminating knowledge of the subject on the part of the voters, for 95 percent of us don’t know enough about the subject to warrant us in voting one way or the other.” The *St. Augustine Record* agreed and advocated caution: “A majority of the newspapers of Florida come frankly with the statement that they are unable to get their bearings on the Everglades drainage discussion and the constitutional amendment. That being the case, would it not be very unwise to vote for something admitted to be an uncertainty?”

A week after votes were cast on the Florida drainage amendment in November 1906, the *Times-Union* reported complete returns for twenty counties, partial returns from twenty others, and nothing from six panhandle counties. In addition to being incomplete, these returns generally reflect the opinion of the relatively few white males who voted. Furthermore, a person’s vote on the amendment was not necessarily a reflection of one’s attitude toward drainage or the Everglades. Nevertheless, these returns do reveal much ambivalence regarding Broward’s plan to drain the Everglades. Throughout Florida, 6,007 voters favored the drainage amendment but 10,725 were opposed. Just nine counties reported a majority in favor of the amendment, eight of which lie north of Orlando and the Everglades watershed. Lee County stood alone among central and southern Florida counties favoring the amendment, with a lopsided tally of 419 in favor and 14 against. This may reflect the strong support of the *Fort Myers Press* which lobbied in favor of the amendment. It may also reflect the views of Caloosahatchee River valley farmers as indicated by these comments found in the *Fort Myers Press* on September 28, 1906: “The settlers say as a rule they went there almost penniless and have managed by hard labor to bring their groves into bearing which now promise them handsome incomes
but are liable to be destroyed at any time by overflow and they appeal to the voters of the state to protect them from this threatening disaster.” Yet Monroe County voted solidly against the amendment (76 in favor, 254 against), as did Dade County (350 for, 487 against). Perhaps this reflected, in part, Monroe County’s relatively small stake in the Glades. It may also have reflected the opposition of Frank Stoneman and his newspaper.43

After having similar legislation declared unconstitutional in 1905 and failing to pass a constitutional amendment on the issue in 1906, Florida’s legislature created the Everglades Drainage District (EDD) in 1907—a poorly conceived entity which managed (for a time) to avoid constitutional scruples. When Governor Broward requested assistance from the USDA, James O. Wright was instructed to investigate the Glades. His mission was to ascertain the suitability of soils for agriculture; to determine if the Glades could be drained and if possible, to prepare a drainage plan; and to estimate the cost of such a project. Wright found the data Broward used and placed surveyors in the Everglades during the winters of 1906-7 and 1907-8.44

Wright’s leader of Everglades field work during the first winter, John T. Stewart, prepared a report of his investigations shortly after his return to Washington, D.C., in May 1907. Referring to the Big Cypress Swamp and land immediately north, Wright’s subordinate insisted that “there can be no drainage of any large section in this area without affecting that of another as the divides are only noticeable during low water.” Stewart noted that they needed to do much more work in order to determine the best routes for canals, estimates of their cost, and value of land once drained. “There is some doubt in my mind about the value of the Everglades proper for agricultural purposes if drained,” Stewart concluded, “but the country lying east and west of the Glades [along the coasts] are the lands which need immediate attention and will be greatly benefitted by the lowering of Lake Okeechobee.”45

Stewart advocated interviewing older residents regarding their views on draining the Glades as a way of gaining their confidence and learning how to satisfactorily answer any objections. In fact, he spoke with many South Floridians before he wrote his own report. Stewart observed that “many in the vicinity of Miami do not want the Glades drained.” He noted that one surveyor and tax collector in Miami thought that “there is land enough without the Glades.” This person prophetically added
that “they [the Glades] would not be a desirable place to live on account of the distance from markets and poor roads.” Several people expressed their fear of overproduction if the Glades were drained for agriculture, and others told Stewart that the Glades warmed the cold northwesterly winds during the winter. “What they want,” Stewart concluded, “is enough drainage to prevent flooding [along the Atlantic coast] in the rainy season.”

As seen earlier, however, residents of the Caloosahatchee River valley spoke out in favor of Everglades drainage largely because they became convinced that controlling Lake Okeechobee would prevent flooding along the river. Yet not everybody in Lee County favored drainage. One former Indian agent and Fort Myers resident argued that “climate is really the only thing of which this country can boast.” The Lee County Superintendent of Schools argued that only the lands immediately south of Lake Okeechobee would be worth draining. Finally, a timber estimator from Fort Myers shared a belief held by many people on both east and west coasts that soils of the southern Glades were too thin and rocky to be worth reclaiming.

On February 28, 1908, the front page of the Miami Metropolis blared: “It is not a difficult task to drain the Everglades, said U.S. Government expert Wright, in an able discussion last night.” Apparently Wright could not resist the temptation to address the region’s potential—even before he had finished collecting data necessary for his forthcoming report. By this time, the Miami Metropolis had swung solidly in favor of draining the Glades. Despite the fact that no one had ever tried to drain such a large wetland as the Glades, the Metropolis assured its readers that “he [Wright] has done enough work of this kind to show that there are no engineering difficulties to overcome in the draining of the Everglades.” Almost parenthetically, the Metropolis added that Wright’s opinion of the Glades is at least partially based on drainage projects he had been associated with in Louisiana, “and he sees no reason why results should be different here.” Wright (like Broward) unwisely led people to believe that the project was simple and that all of the soil would be extremely productive when drained.

Finally, turn-of-the-century non-fiction writers usually expressed a combination of attitudes toward the Glades. Some, for example, appreciated the region’s beauty and mystery. Writing for Century Magazine, Edwin Dix and John MacGonigle contend that “no description of the
physical features of the Everglades can possibly convey any true idea of their beauty and their charm.... Both charm and beauty blend in a strange, sweet sense of mystery, which even one least responsive to this new mood of nature cannot possibly escape.” As drainage became imminent, however, other writers took a different approach. After crossing the Glades, another author remarked that his experience was that “one meets delay in the Everglades, but not danger.... Crossing the Everglades of Florida in a canoe is not an adventure, it is a picnic.”

A utilitarian tone creeps into other discussions of the Glades: “The demand for the work is so universal, its benefits so obvious and the engineering difficulties so inconsiderable, that the time cannot be far distant when the South Floridian will fear the floods that afflict him to-day no more than the Dutchman dreads the Zuyder Zee.” Yet another author detailed the hardships suffered by the federal government’s engineers as they collected data while crossing the Glades during the winter of 1907-8. He maintained that draining the Everglades

Turn-of-the-century non-fiction writers usually expressed a combination of attitudes toward the Glades, including an appreciation for the region’s beauty and mystery. HASF 81-31-3.
would be a simple matter. “There is no difference of opinion on the part of the engineers who have investigated the conditions,” he incorrectly contended, adding that “their recommendations are unanimously in favor of pushing the work.”

In the meantime, Broward’s inadequate dredges slowly cut through the rock comprising the Atlantic Coastal Ridge near Fort Lauderdale into the Glades. In 1907, after nine months of dredging, the engineer in charge reported one canal a little over a mile long. Yet when a committee of state legislators visited South Florida that year, they “could clearly see that the effect of the canal has been to drain the land for, say, one-half mile or more on either side of the canal and for a considerable distance in front of it.” They estimated that 750 acres had been reclaimed. What the committee did not see—what they could not see—was that water levels more than a half mile from the canal were probably little changed. Similarly, land promoters later hauled countless investors up and down South Florida’s canals in an effort to convince prospective buyers that the Glades were being drained.

At the end of 1908, as Governor Broward’s term drew to a close, two dredges had cut canals a little over six miles each from both North and South forks of Fort Lauderdale’s New River into the Glades. Lack of dredging progress may be attributed to two causes. First, since large landowners refused to pay Everglades Drainage District taxes, and since few farmers were willing to purchase swamp land from the state—the trustees of Florida’s Internal Improvement Fund had little cash with which to pursue drainage operations. Second, dredging was necessarily slow because most of the digging thus far had been through limestone rock underlying the Atlantic Coastal Ridge rather than the relatively soft muck of the Glades proper. As 1908 drew to a close, Broward made one last attempt to extend the work—he persuaded Richard J. Bolles to buy five hundred thousand acres of Everglades land for $1 million. Like Florida’s earlier deal with Hamilton Disston, the Bolles sale not only provided much needed revenue for the project, but also paved the way for radical efforts to change people’s perception of the Everglades. Bolles and other real estate people simply accepted Broward’s pledge that the state would, in fact, drain the Everglades, and they relied heavily upon this pledge as they launched their campaign to sell the cheaply acquired swampland for profit starting in 1909.
In conclusion, there appears to be no evidence that would justify abandoning the generalization that most people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries took a rather dim view of wetlands. These environments were viewed as pestilential waste lands in need of redemption. In terms of draining the Everglades, however, such a generalization requires much qualification. On one hand, there were many people who insisted that action be taken to convert the Glades from an apparently useless marsh into fertile agricultural land. This was particularly apparent during the late 1800s. Yet very few people lived in South Florida until after 1900 and even fewer had any idea what the Everglades were like. Despite this, patchy evidence from the late nineteenth century suggests that there is a connection between people's abhorrence of wetlands generally and their support (or tolerance) of Everglades reclamation. By the early 1900s, however, several people raised voices of caution regarding such a project, and for a variety of reasons. Some, like Miami's Frank Stoneman, called for more thorough investigation of the task before spending money on Everglades drainage. In a 1908 editorial, Stoneman explained that "the News-Record is not opposed to the drainage of the Everglades if draining them will extend the area of arable land...but it does believe that the great problem should be carefully investigated by experts and scientists before much money is spent or possible irreparable damage incurred." This was indeed a prophetic statement because much of the subsequent flooding and human suffering in the Everglades during the 1910s and 1920s stemmed from relatively superficial investigations of the region's hydrology—and heavy reliance upon early plans to reclaim the Glades. Others feared that draining the Glades may be problematic because such activity would stimulate excessive agricultural production (which would hurt existing farmers on the coastal ridge); others expressed concern over possible adverse changes in local climate that might occur in the wake of such a project; and still others believed that the enormity of such an endeavor would make the cost prohibitive.

Aesthetics and ecological values would not become important issues until the 1950s and 1960s. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century discussion regarding Everglades reclamation appears to have been set squarely within the context of the Progressive Era quest for efficiency. Even those who spoke out against draining the Everglades did so for utilitarian reasons; some questioned the project's cost...
effectiveness while others were concerned about the creation of too much farm produce, and still others feared drainage might cause adverse local climate change. Although many early twentieth century people remained unimpressed with the Everglades and other wetlands, these voices of protest against reclamation were ignored. Today, scientists are prepared to spend in excess of $8 billion in an attempt to restore portions of the Everglades to something resembling their condition prior to reclamation.
Notes


5 The quotation in this paragraph as well as the idea for this paragraph can


7 Mary K. Winteringham (ed.), “North to South Through the Glades in 1883: the account of the second expedition into the Florida Everglades by the New Orleans Times-Democrat, part II” reprinted in Tequesta 24 (1964): 93, 35.

8 John Whipple Potter Jenks, Hunting in Florida in 1874 (Privately Published 1884): 57.


14 Alonzo Church, “A dash through the Everglades,” 19, 16.

15 John Newman as quoted in Alonzo Church, “A dash through the Everglades,” 20-21; Wallace Moses, “The Ingraham Everglades exploring expedition,” 14, 19; Alonzo Church, “A dash through the


17 *Miami Metropolis*, 5 June 1896, 6.

18 *Miami Metropolis*, 21 October 1896, 2.


21 *Jacksonville Times-Union*, 5 October 1898, 4.

22 I. L. Roberts as quoted in the *Miami Metropolis*, 14 April 1899, 5.

23 *Miami Metropolis*, 30 October 1896, 3.


*C. Mailing as quoted in the* *Jacksonville Times-Union*, 1 November 1906, 2.

*C. Mailing as quoted in the* *Jacksonville Times-Union*, 3 March 1906, 6.

*C. Mailing as quoted in the* *Jacksonville Times-Union*, 17 August 1906, 4.

See Christopher F. Meindl, “Frank Stoneman and the Florida Everglades During the Early 20th Century” *Florida Geographer* 29 (1998); *Miami Evening-Record*, 3 April 1906, 4; *Miami Evening-
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Record, 20 April 1906, 4; Alfred Newlander to Frank Stoneman as quoted in the Miami Evening-Record, 27 October 1906, 2-3; Miami Morning News-Record, 5 February 1908, 2.

Miami Metropolis, 20 April 1906, 7; 23 March 1906, 8.

Miami Metropolis, 7 September 1906, 3.

Ibid.

Jacksonville Times-Union, 11 November 1906, 1; Fort Myers Press, 19 October 1906, 2; 1 November 1906, 4; 28 September 1906, 2.


*Miami News-Record*, 5 February 1908, 2; Christopher F. Meindl, “Importance of Environmental Claims Making”, in press.
In August 1898, the Chicago Times Herald paid tribute to her: “When the story of the [Spanish-American] war is written Mrs. William W. Gordon [Eleanor “Nellie” Kinzie Gordon] will figure in its pages as one of its heroines.” Newspapers from all over the country praised this “Heroine of War” and claimed that Nellie “was a Red Cross camp in herself.” Yet her contributions to the war effort at Camp Miami, Florida, have been hardly mentioned in the Spanish-American War histories. Usually she was inaccurately depicted as merely a woman who just “arranged for the purchase of mosquito netting.” Before she was to meet her husband, William (Willie) Washington Gordon II, in Miami, Nellie began a journal that would reveal her tireless efforts in establishing and administering a convalescent hospital at Camp Miami. Willie’s brigade suffered from malaria and typhoid fever because of the
camp's location and lack of facilities. To meet this situation, Nellie organized and, with the assistance of her daughter, Juliette Gordon Low (Daisy), operated a large convalescent hospital. In a matter of a few days, the hospital went from a circular tent with twenty-three patients to a dilapidated warehouse that cared for seventy to eighty sick men at a time. Nellie's journal entries, newspaper articles published in the summer of 1898, government documents, and letters from soldiers prove that she did more than run helpful errands for the soldiers stationed at the camp, a jerry-rigged facility housing seven thousand men. Her ingenuity and tenacity would warrant her the title of the "Good Angel to the Boys in Blue." If it had not been for Nellie's own written account, few people would have known of her behind-the-scenes work. It would take 104 years for historians to discover what contemporaries knew about her important yet long-forgotten contributions.

Nellie first mentioned her plans for the "Convalescent Ward" in the July 13 entry of her journal. But, she had begun recording her war experience in May 1898 while anticipating news of her husband's official appointment as Brigadier General of the United States Army. She had always used journals to keep a meticulous record of her and her family's lives. On the first page, Nellie wrote: "What is the record—in a few words this." Her "record" would detail the many weeks she spent accompanying Willie and his brigade first to Mobile, Alabama, then to Camp Miami, Florida, and finally to Puerto Rico. Completely unaware of what would await her at Camp Miami, Nellie never suspected how useful this chronicle would be to historians in the future.

In May 1898 Nellie Gordon was sixty-three years old. She and her husband had been married more than forty years and had five adult children: Eleanor Gordon Parker, Juliette (Daisy) Gordon Low, William Washington Gordon III, Mabel McLane Gordon, and George Arthur Gordon. Although her own parents had died decades earlier, Nellie still bore the imprint of their influence. She was born on June 18, 1835, to John Harris Kinzie and Juliette Magill Kinzie in Chicago, Illinois. The Kinzies were one of the first families to reside on the area's frontiers. Nellie's memoirs detail her mother's lessons of "cooking, sewing, housekeeping, nursing, gardening, clothes-making, shoe-making—in fact everything which might be required of a woman separated from the conveniences of civilization."

Nellie's numerous experiences nursing family members, as well as experiences with illness and death, "hardened" her, and prepared her to
deal with sick and dying men. Her first memories were connected with the death of her six-year-old brother, Wolcott. Although she was only three years old at the time, his tragic death made a deep impression on her. Throughout her childhood she witnessed firsthand the need and importance for women to act as nurses. Nellie watched her mother care for her twenty-month-year-old brother, Frank, when he was severely burned. In the Kinzie's kitchen, he fell into a small green tub, filled with boiling hot, sudsy water. Instantly Juliette poured cold water on his head, she then lifted him out of the tub and used a knife to cut off his clothes. Nellie and her mother began applying "soft linen cloths dipped in lime-water and sweet oil every few minutes" until the doctor arrived. To the amazement of doctors, Frank lived, but it took two years for the burns to heal. Frank died six years later during Chicago's cholera epidemic of 1850-51. Four of the Kinzies were stricken and only one recovered: Frank and three servants died. Her parents spent part of every day nursing the sick at the hospital and made "a big cauldron of mutton broth" to take to them. Nellie neither contracted nor feared the disease even though she "went among the cholera patients freely."

Juliette Kinzie was not satisfied with her Nellie's useful skills and "wished her daughter to finish her education with a polish, which, even if not essential to the frontier, would enable her to cultivate her mind, and enjoy her leisure moments." She made sure that Nellie's education included both practical skills and the benefits of an eastern boarding school. As a little girl, Nellie attended a public school, Kinzie School, named after her father. In her teenage years, Nellie enrolled in Madame Canda's school in New York where she became an expert pianist, an amateur artist, and a linguist who spoke French and Italian fluently.

While attending Madame Canda's, Nellie met Eliza Gordon of Savannah, Georgia, and Ellen and Florence Sheffield of New Haven, Connecticut. Eliza Gordon's mother, Sarah, moved to New Haven because she wanted her sons, George and Willie, to receive their college education at Yale. During the Christmas holidays of 1853, Nellie spent her time with the Sheffields rather than traveling home to distant Chicago. She claimed that her visit sealed her "fate" in life when she was introduced to Eliza's "Brother Willie." On December 21, 1857, Nellie and Willie were married in a Chicago church and moved into the Gordon home in Savannah, Georgia.
Early in her marriage, Nellie demonstrated her devotion to Willie and her stubborn refusal to be separated from him, traits that would play a role in her later accomplishments at Camp Miami. In the summer of 1858, while Nellie was expecting her first child, Savannah faced a yellow fever epidemic. Most of the Gordon family fled the city, but Nellie refused to leave Willie, who for business reasons, was obliged to remain there. At the onset of the Civil War, Nellie adamantly resisted her father's advice to go to Chicago where he believed she could be safe. She remained in Savannah to be near Willie, and she took many difficult trips to Virginia to visit him. With courage and determination, Nellie and her two young daughters by her side, followed Willie to Richmond where she stayed with friends, keeping in touch with him at his various posts while he was with James Ewell Brown Stuart's cavalry.

More than thirty years later in 1898, her devotion to Willie remained strong. In May, with President William McKinley's second call for volunteers during the Spanish-American War, Willie was elevated to the rank of general. Nellie's euphoria over her husband's achievement was apparent in her description of the day's events: “Thus came mild whoops, & laughter, & dancing around the room, till the telegraph messenger thought he had got into a Lunatic Asylum!” Willie received orders to repair to Mobile, Alabama. He was to take command of the Second Brigade, First Division, Fourth Corps, which consisted of the Second Texas Regiment and the Second Louisiana Regiment. Several days later, when Willie boarded a train for this assignment, Nellie was by his side. A large group of Savannahians gathered at the station to say farewell to the new general. Amidst all the hoopla, it must have been difficult for them to remember that they were going to Mobile to prepare for war.

Willie’s orders to Camp Miami came soon after the Gordons arrived in Mobile. In an entry dated June 19, 1898, she wrote about these and added: “I do hope they have good water and plenty of shade at this new Post.” Camp Miami’s contaminated water caused widespread troop sickness. Conditions were so horrible that the camp was referred to by soldiers then as “Camp Hell”.

On July 2, 1898, Nellie arrived at Miami’s train station in the northern end of Camp Miami and was touched that her “poor General was waiting all the time in the depot” for her. Willie and Nellie rode in Henry M. Flagler’s magnificent horse-drawn carriage to the Royal Palm
Hotel, near the confluence of Biscayne Bay and the Miami River. The hostelry housed officers’ wives during the war. Pleased with her accommodations, Nellie wrote that “the hotel is new, & big, & handsome, & well-kept in beautiful order.” Willie secured Nellie a private resort-style corner room overlooking the grounds, landscaped with “tropical scenery & plants.”

Nellie however, was unimpressed with Camp Miami. She first inspected Willie’s quarters the day she arrived. After “it stormed hard this A.M. for 2 hours then cleared,” Nellie “went in a cab over to the 2nd Brig Hdqts” where she “saw Willie for a few moments.” During this brief visit, Nellie saw the consequences of the camp’s hurried construction. She noted her immediate concerns about the camp in her journal: “This spot is a pleasant spot—not too hot—but there’s no depth in the soil. Tents blow down in high wind. The water is full of lime, disagrees with the men, & gives them dysentery. Stationing troops here looks like a ‘job’ for Mr. Flagler!”

In the spring of 1898, Henry Morrison Flagler, whose Florida East Coast Railway opened Miami to development in 1896, saw the prospect of war as a means to enhance Miami’s visibility and financial well being. In mid-May 1898, a United States inspection team, led by Brigadier General James Wade, toured Miami as a potential campsite. After their analysis was made, the officials refused Flagler’s offer of Miami land for a military base. In June 1898, a second inspection team visited another proposed area in Miami, but they too hesitated to recommend it as a campsite because of concerns over the lack of facilities, of warehouses, and especially of a waterworks system. The inspectors realized that although Miami accommodated its population of twelve hundred adequately, adding an influx of soldiers would be a tremendous strain on the city.

Nearby camps in Lakeland and Tampa were not well prepared either, but there were other reasons for their inadequacies. Although Lakeland experienced problems with its food supply, Tampa suffered from overcrowding, and the water supplies of both cities were often contaminated. Lakeland and Tampa were firmly established cities with well-tuned infrastructures. And unlike Camp Miami, these camps had support from the surrounding community in difficult times, and citizens were not naive to the potential problems for their city. Both cities, Lakeland and Tampa, possessed a communal identity, and they were not looking to use the camps as tools for city promotion. Finally, the situation at
Camp Miami differed from other camps because of Flagler, who, as noted, viewed Camp Miami as a great business opportunity—not merely a training facility. Nellie's comment, “Stationing troops here looks like a ‘job’ to benefit Mr. Flagler,” demonstrated that she recognized Flagler's intentions.\(^{12}\)

In spite of the inspection teams’ position, Major General Nelson A. Miles, commander of the army, established Camp Miami. On the morning of June 24, the *Metropolis* reported that the first installment of troops had arrived and, by the first week of July, the entire division, redesignated the First Division, Seventh Corps, of seven thousand volunteers had settled in the camp. In their report, the inspectors had specified that “if military necessity requires it, a camp of 5,000” could be established in Miami. As inspectors feared, the additional two thousand troops compounded the camp's disarray.\(^{13}\)

Donna Thomas, in an article, “Camp Hell: Miami During the Spanish-American War,” argued that all military camps at this time had problems, and that “Camp Miami’s record in terms of sickness was probably no worse than the records of most other camps of the Spanish-American War.” But Camp Miami differed from other posts because many of its problems could have been prevented. In a letter to *The Florida Times Union*, Willie expressed anger that the inspectors’ recommendations were not followed when preparing the camp. Since
Miamians were unaware of the camp’s deficiencies, the *Miami Metropolis* and *The Florida Times Union* succeeded in portraying his brigade “as troublemakers and spreaders of rumors” because Willie made his feelings known publicly. Willie’s purpose with this letter was “to protest against communications published” in the newspaper (*Miami Metropolis*) and “to state certain facts concerning Miami and the Encampment there.” He stated that “the owners [Flagler] of the property had underestimated the necessities of a camp for over 7000 men, overestimated the resources of the place and the troops who suffered the consequences had just cause for complaint.”

Willie claimed that when he arrived it was clear that the city was not prepared to house the camp. More importantly, he believed that precautions were not taken to ensure the soldiers’ health. In July and August 1898, the *Metropolis* reported that only a few soldiers in the area became ill, and the sickness was due to Miami’s heat and humidity. Willie dismissed this explanation, contending that since “the hot sun had not produced these results in Mobile and elsewhere, it was necessary to seek some other cause,” like contaminated water. When his brigade arrived, the water was “at first almost the color of milk on account of the quantity of lime in it and it gave everyone diarrhea, which in some cases ran into more serious complaints.” After several more days and additional reports of illness, the Second Brigade discovered that their drinking water “was not from the water works tower, but from the railroad tank, which got its water from the two 24 feet wells, located between the two brigades, and into which was surface drainage from both brigades.” After many failed attempts to supply clean water, such as using water from the Everglades, “orders were given that no water should be used for drinking or cooking unless it had been boiled at least an hour.”

With hundreds of men on sick call daily in both brigades, Willie and other officers struggled to find ways to care for the soldiers effectively. Willie tried to make life better for his men in Miami, by turning to his wife for help. On July 9, Willie mentioned his concerns to Nellie, and they concluded that the men were not receiving sufficient care at the military hospital. More importantly, Willie and Nellie believed that the men were sent back to work before they were fully recovered from their illnesses.

After her conversation with Willie, Nellie wrote in her diary: “We intended going to Church, but Willy got hold of General [J. Warren]
Keifer & had so many important things to discuss with him about the sick in his brigade, etc., etc.” The couple concluded that the overcrowded division hospital was not equipped to handle the high number of patients since it consisted of many tents “crowded together on a lot covered with weeds in the middle of town.” Many men who inspected the site noticed that “sinks and garbage, emitting a most offensive odor, surrounded the place, which gets in consequence little pure air.”

After Lieutenant-Colonel Curtis Guild, Jr., Inspector-General, Seventh Army Corps, toured Camp Miami, he observed that, “The men in quarters sick with measles and other diseases begged me in passing not to be sent to this place.” In his official report, Guild wrote: “I can not comprehend why such a filthy locality should ever be chosen for any camp, especially for a hospital.”

These investigations of the division hospital led to additional inquiries that revealed the inattentiveness of hospital staff. Owing to the hospital’s overcrowding, hospital administrators had been forced to release those who were in a less critical state in order to make room for the seriously ill. As commander of the Second Brigade, Willie witnessed the hospital’s negligence firsthand when soldiers returned to duty before they had fully recovered. Though not medically trained, the Gordons were familiar with the care necessary for assisting Camp Miami’s ailing soldiers. During their previous summers in Savannah, Willie and Nellie experienced yellow fever epidemics, and watched over family and friends who succumbed to many of the same deadly illnesses that affected Camp Miami’s soldiers. If proper care was not made available to ill soldiers soon, they knew that the likely prognosis for these soldiers was death.

Nellie decided that she would administer a convalescent ward to care for the men who were well enough to be released from the hospital, but not strong enough to return to duty. Soon after General Gordon had extended his influence, preparations for the convalescent hospital began. Although it would be in operation for just two weeks, Nellie’s efforts here brought relief to many ailing soldiers.

On July 13, Nellie “had a talk with Major Appel about the sickness.” She “suggested having a ‘Convalescent tent’ in which the men could get suitable food for a few days after they were discharged from the Division Hospital.” Nellie wrote that Major Appel, “was delighted at the idea—said he would give me a big circular tent & have it floored; I
promised to look after the cooking dept. of it.” Since the Army generally lacked supplies and spare soldiers, Appel, chief surgeon of the division, must have appreciated Nellie’s initiative. He may have also been relieved that she would be willing to be responsible for this venture without much assistance from him or from his soldiers.  

On the following day, July 14, Lieutenant-Colonel Louis M. Maus, Chief Surgeon Seventh Army Corps, Lieutenant-Colonel of Volunteers Oliver E. Wood, Chief Commissary of the Seventh Corps, and Lieutenant Colonel Curtis Guild, inspector general, “came down from Jacksonville on an inspection tour.” After receiving complaints about the troops’ health, Maus wanted to examine the camp’s conditions for himself. After inspecting Flagler’s wells, he remarked that the water possessed “a disagreeable taste, an offensive odor, and in my opinion, [the water] contains a large percentage of organic and vegetable matter,” and concluded that the water could not be “wholesome in summer.” He did not, however, condemn camp conditions, which disappointed many of the officers stationed in Miami. Indeed, in a letter to Maus after he left Miami, some of the First Division’s surgeons informed him that they believed the water supplied by Flagler was “thoroughly contaminated, infected, and too dangerous to utilize for drinking purposes.”

During their tour, Nellie “got an opportunity to speak to Col. Maus & Col. Wood about a convalescent tent. They were heartily in favor of it. Likewise General Keifer.” Despite Army supply shortages, these high-ranking officers helped Nellie to obtain the necessary supplies and the equipment to open her facility. First, she acquired a “large circular tent,” but was soon forced to adjust her plan because of the rising number of potential patients in her husband’s brigade.

Nellie quickly found a vacant makeshift building near the Royal Palm Hotel. “I got a big building 100 by 40 feet...The building was only slatted but had windows with glass, and a solid roof—I had shades of waterproof roofing paper hung to keep the sun and rain from coming through the slats.” The *Metropolis* announced Nellie’s plans: “Mrs. Gordon is hurrying forward the work of the building to be used as a convalescent camp rapidly. In a few days those who are discharged from the hospital will have a cosy [sic], pleasant place to spend a few days while they are recuperating.” The *Metropolis*’ promotion of Nellie’s efforts sounded more like an advertisement for a Florida vacation spot than a description of an unconventional recovery area housed in an
abandoned warehouse. In her journal, Nellie itemized what needed to be done in order to open her “Ward”: “It needs a floor—as it really is a warehouse just built. We can get it ready with electric lights & water in it & an outside kitchen, in 2 days. The Red Cross will give us 100 lbs. of ice a day.”

While she waited for the building to be ready, Nellie put her amateur nursing skills to use. She sent bottles of a homemade remedy to “Dr. [Major John J.] Archinaud [Brigade Surgeon of the Second Brigade, Seventh Army Corps] for his sick men-& had a little left over in a tumbler which I gave to Chaplain Watts, who is ill with typhoid fever.” This concoction was made with milk, which was always in short supply: “If I only could get the milk. But it seems impossible!” She ordered “packages of wine jelly” that were distributed to six ill soldiers. The wine’s alcohol content was thought to ease their symptoms of dysentery. Nellie wrote that Major John J. Archinaud of the Second Louisiana Volunteers, who was assigned temporary duty as Second Brigade’s surgeon, was caring for a man with dysentery “who was said to be dying yesterday,” but after a dose of the wine jelly, the doctor “reports him better to day [sic].” On the back inside cover of her journal, Nellie wrote another homemade remedy she frequently used, “1 teaspoon full of salt, 1 tablespoon full good vinegar to one tumbler of water, and a tablespoon of gin,” and she administered it hourly to the men.

As Nellie became more involved in caring for the sickly soldiers, she and Willie discovered that the cause for the division hospital’s poor conditions not only derived from its locale and supply shortage, but also from the hospital staff’s negligence. In a journal entry dated July 18, Nellie wrote: “In the afternoon Willy came over & had a very stormy interview with the Drs—Appel & Vilas—He and Archinaud & Col’s [Major J.M.] Mood[y], Cox, & Oppenheimer brought up plenty of proof of the neglect & outrages that exist in the Division Hospital... The Doctors are getting thoroughly scared at last. Col. Maus had said now the Hospital must be moved.” Willie confronted the doctors using specific examples of the “outrages” that another officer witnessed in the division hospital. “Major Hughes was in that hospital & saw a man lying there dying with the flies crawling all over his face & into his mouth & the attendants did not pretend to keep them brushed away.” General Gordon claimed Hughes had observed more abuse: “A very sick man asked for water & Major H—said to one of those Stewards—
Why don’t you give that man some water? ‘I’ll give him a club!’ was the brutal reply.” In what must have been his attempt to downplay the episode, Appel tried to convince Willie that Hughes failed to see the obvious humor, and said, “Oh, the steward was just joking!!” But Appel’s response only further convinced Willie of the crisis at hand.

When Gordon placed the blame on Appel, the discussion heated as “Willie did not spare Appel.” Nellie recalled: “He told him that he (Appel) was responsible for all those outrages—that if he attended to his duties properly the Hospital would not have been carried on in the shameful way it had been.” Appel refuted Willie’s accusations by faulting the federal government for only allowing two hundred beds. “Willie swore that if the Gov’t & Medical Board did not give all the cots needed—or presumed to dictate how many sick men should be provided with cots & how many go without—he would rouse not only the Authorities at Washington—but all the United States. He would not submit to such outrage!” Willie later fulfilled his promise during the government’s probe of Camp Miami. Appel only found the comments offensive, so Willie added: “I have stated facts—if they are insulting you can consider that they are said, not by your Superior Officer, but as man to man—and you can do as you like about it.” Appel rejected this candor, and stormed out of the room.

By the end of the day, Willie and Nellie became more determined to help when they learned three more men died. They viewed the opening of the convalescent hospital not as a convenience for Camp Miami’s sick soldiers, but as a must in order to save lives. Two days before Nellie’s project was ready, she wrote that more water testing occurred which meant there was still concern over contamination: “The water sent to N.O.’s [New Orleans] has returned today—it was full of
typhoid germs & every other horror!” But she and Willie were distrustful of additional tests, and implied that a federal cover-up was possible:

“Some [water] has been sent to the ‘Smithsonian’ also—I don’t know what they will discover—Possibly they may be bought over & find nothing.”

On July 19, Nellie wrote, “Our Convalescent building is nearly ready.” Finding supplies to furnish the ward was difficult because necessities were scarce, and because requests took time to be processed, “Everything is so slow here,” she complained. In order to open the facility quickly, at his own expense, Willie ordered “50 cots & 1 doz camp chairs” from a store in Jacksonville, Florida, and Nellie “went to a Furniture shop here & got 25 cots & 1 doz camp stools & sent them to the Ward.” She also found in town “six wash-basins & a lot of toweling.” These items were purchased by the Gordons at their own expense.

Initially, the couple found enough materials to open the ward, but as more and more men checked-in, Nellie and Willie found themselves short-handed again.

Nellie’s self-reliance served her well, but she knew that more help was necessary in order to give good care to the soldiers who came to her ward. Throughout the country, soldiers at other camps were also fighting the war on disease without enough experienced medical officers who had knowledge in military medical training and in preventative medicine. With only half the manpower needed to work as nurses, or stewards, the Army began pulling infantrymen from their units to serve in hospitals. These men lacked motivation and training, and most resented this assignment because they preferred combat. His options thus limited, Surgeon General George Miller Sternberg then looked at employing women as nurses. Requesting of the War Department the authorization to hire a large number of female nurses. After receiving permission, Sternberg, with the help of Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee, established the Nurse Corps Division. Since the Medical Corps’ common attitude towards female nurses “was condemnation at best, contempt at worst,” women were sent to serve in the Keys or Puerto Rico. Without adequate nursing care, infected soldiers in stateside camps rapidly lost the battle against diseases like malaria and typhoid because of the military’s poor planning.

What made matters worse for the sick soldiers at Camp Miami was not just a lack of nurses, but that the newly chartered city still resembled a frontier community in 1898. The city offered no institutionalized
health care and no professionalized medicine. It was not until 1908 that a hospital was organized in Miami. For the relief of mild aches and pains, most citizens purchased over-the-counter medicine at the Brickell trading post. Otherwise, women of the community acted as the primary caretakers of the sick in Miami. If the women’s remedies did not work, actively ill people were taken by boat to Key West where many highly trained physicians had set up their practices.

Nellie asked “Dr. McGuire of 1st Brigade to take charge,” and he would act as the men’s primary physician. Aware of the need for additional help, she wrote: “If Watts had a really good nurse he would do much better—His wife is in the way here.” When assistance was available, Nellie was selective: “Mrs. Cosens writes offering her services—must write & decline. We need good men-nurses.” Although the military did not assign nurses to Miami, Nellie probably could have found the additional help she needed from what must have been a well-known network of women caregivers in the city. By discrediting other women’s capabilities, Nellie saw herself as an exception to the negative stereotype of female nurses, and she wanted others to do the same. Not only did Nellie believe that she was up to the task, but she also wanted others to hold that impression.

Nellie’s self-confidence, and her apparent comfort in a man’s world, sometimes caused her to see other women’s efforts as less noteworthy: “Some fool woman trotted herself up to my room to day (sic) to talk to me about the Red Cross, & the W. C. T. U. Society—was much surprised to find I knew nothing about either!—I could hardly get rid of her!” Although she finally acquired some help from a few male-nurses, none of them were satisfactory to her, and they often caused her a great deal of frustration.

On July 20, Nellie opened the newly converted warehouse, and “23 men came in & were very comfortable there. The men are of present fed & from the Div. Hospital.” The next evening, Daisy arrived and “is perfectly delighted with the place & thinks it is the coolest climate she has felt since leaving England.” Intending for Daisy to stay near her, Nellie reserved connecting rooms at the Royal Palm Hotel before she left Mobile. Almost immediately, Nellie took Daisy “to look in on the Ward,” where she discovered 14 more men. They “found one man weak from fever—and all wanting fans.” That evening, Nellie wrote about the day’s activities, “Daisy bought a dozen (for $3.00) of fancy
fans,” and gave them to the men in the ward. After giving them the fans, they “made a campaign for 1 tumbler of fresh milk, then whiskey, then ice, and finally got a milk punch” to help relieve the man with the fever. Milk was considered the best nutritional food for the sick, but if soured, the milk could be the most hazardous food causing diarrhea and dehydration. Most of the milk supply came from Flagler’s dairy in St. Augustine, Florida. He sold eighty quarts per day to the military for hospital use. Disgusted with what she considered the exorbitant price Flagler charged, Nellie complained, “He charges us 80 cents a gallon—and milk sells everywhere else for 20 cents. There’s a Shylock for you!” To keep the milk cool and fresh Nellie bought a small ice box with the twenty dollars the chaplain gave her.33

General Gordon’s brigade had about 350 men, or approximately 10 percent, on sick call daily, whereas, the First Brigade usually had about 250 soldiers on sick call. The rampant illness caused City of Miami officials to worry. Coinciding with Maus and Wood’s inspection of the camp, the Metropolis attacked the camp’s critics, attempting to dissuade its readership from the opinions of military officials regarding the healthfulness of Miami. “Miami was never in better condition in the
matter of health than it is at present,” argued the *Metropolis*. When the *Metropolis* specifically mentioned the situation at Camp Miami, it maintained that newspapers outside of Florida purposely exaggerated stories concerning the camp. The *Metropolis* claimed “…all such twaddle—though furnishing sensational news for the saffron-hued journals,” would not harm Miami’s reputation “as the general good health of our State is too well known to be hurt by unscrupulous attacks.” “From our sources of information,” the *Journal* added, “we are satisfied that there is no cause for apprehension as to the health of the troops encamped at Miami; and we are confident that all Floridians feel assured that Mr. Flagler will do all in his power to remedy any evils—should they exist…”

Without the help of Flagler, military officials took their own precautions to slow the rising numbers of men on sick call. Believing food outside the camp could be made with contaminated ingredients, “Colonel Stevens issued an order forbidding vendors of ice cream, pies and similar items from entering the camp.” The *Metropolis* maintained, somewhat disingenuously, that this order was necessary because “physicians have reported that many of the men now ill in the First Brigade are sick from the overindulgence in food of this kind,” while dismissing charges that the city’s negligence was to blame. The newspaper did not identify these physicians and implied that all physicians, civilian as well as military, agreed with this diagnosis.

In another article, the *Metropolis* described instances where soldiers demonstrated disregard for their health: “Yesterday we noticed walking through the streets, soldiers...totally unmindful of the torrents of rain that was falling. This means an increased sick list.” Throughout the report, the newspaper admonished the soldiers for the lack of common sense in rainy weather, and, with a patronizing tone, added: “The utmost care should be observed by the soldiers in keeping their feet and clothing dry, and under no circumstances go out in the rain if it can be avoided.” The *Metropolis* shifted the blame away from Flagler and Miami, while focusing it on the soldiers “who brought sickness onto themselves.” Perhaps, the *Metropolis*’ denial of the city’s responsibilities was meant to defend Flagler and his interests against possible charges of negligence by the federal government.

Nellie did not write in her journal again until July 26. Her silence coincided with the escalation of her duties at the convalescent ward. She wrote: “No time for journaling—my time has all been taken up
with the Convalescent Ward—men keep coming in, & more, & more, & more cots & [mosquito] nets & camp stools and fans, & dishes & knives & forks had to be bought.” In addition to this pause, the writing style and the voice of her journal dramatically change at this time. Her writing now appeared erratic. Instead of communicating in an upbeat tone with thoughtful, long, descriptive sentences filled with witty commentary, she now wrote short incomplete sentences that ended with dashes rather than periods or other standard punctuation.

For the first time in the journal, Nellie expressed insecurity and panic, and a general feeling of being overwhelmed by the size of her task. Her endeavor was becoming much more than a place to provide a restful atmosphere and suitable food for a few sick men. Within one week, the number of patients in Nellie’s ward climbed from twenty-three to seventy. Nellie wrote that “The number of deaths from typhoid has increased. The number of sick from various causes—malaria, dysentery, measles, etc.—greatly increased. All the men are demoralized, and the officers are discouraged.” Nellie, too, was disheartened as she became disillusioned with her “Bright Idea.”

Nellie nevertheless, continued to carry out her duties. She grew attached to Willie’s men and enjoyed helping the soldiers, as well as her husband. Health conditions in Camp Miami remained poor because the drinking water remained contaminated. Nellie complained, “Bringing troops here, where they had bad water, is what has been a really criminal piece of jobbery to fill Mr. Flagler’s pockets.” She “tried to get distilled water for them to drink—but the machinery of the factory got out of order.” Military officials ordered that all water had to be boiled to prevent more sickness, but the soldiers did not follow orders because it was considered inconvenient. “It is almost impossible to make them do so,” she complained, and noted that “Willy has got down casks and kettles from Jacksonville for their use.” The medical situation continued to deteriorate: “There are 400 men sick in the 2nd Texas—I have 70 in the C. W.—20 of them too ill to eat solid food—Daisy has spent all her time making beef tea—jelly, etc for them.” Nellie made a milk punch for the men, which she admitted, was “not much.”

The Metropolis continued to downplay illness in the camp, claiming in one article, that “The character of sickness now prevailing is a mild type.” Misleading information was a constant problem in the newspaper. Reports like, “There was a large number of patients discharged yesterday
morning," led readers to believe that the soldiers were on the mend. The editors failed to mention that the patients were still sick, and they had been sent to Nellie's ward because of hospital overcrowding. "In fact some of them were very sick."  

While the Metropolis' articles downplayed the camp's predicament, Nellie's journal entries, instead documented the camp's "horrible state of things." Since her ward opened, she spent every day "ransacking these wretched stores for things—the most simple things—and can't find them." When she did find supplies, Nellie locked them up in a storage closet inside the ward. She tried to control the unhealthy environment of the ward on her own by using whatever means she could to ensure that her patients did not contract more disease: "I have got it arranged so that all [water] we use is boiled. I have a man detailed to see to it, & keep two large casks filled—I insist on ice water for them day and night." Contradicting the Metropolis' reports, Nellie explained in a letter to her uncle that the sickness was worse. "There are 75 cases of typhoid fever and 12 more have died from it. Any number have dysentery & measles & mumps. The two latter we don't mind much—They are easily managed. It is the typhoid that worries us."  

As the number of sick increased daily, inspections carried out by high-ranking military officials from Washington continued. Army surgeons surveyed the camp and made recommendations to stop the spread of typhoid fever, but all of their suggestions were ignored. Washington officials received conflicting reports from soldiers, reporters, and even Henry Flagler concerning the camp. Accordingly, some of them believed the medical situation was exaggerated. Flagler wrote to Secretary of War R. A. Alger to explain the "very unfavorable reports" that were sent to him "regarding the sanitary conditions, as well as discomforts of the camp at Miami, Florida." Flagler claimed that the reports "if not wholly untrue they are grossly exaggerated," and he asked, "as a personal favor that you suspend judgment until Secretary Bliss returned to Washington, whom I saw yesterday, and who is thoroughly posted." Flagler's letter only caused more inquiries, and judgment continued. It was suggested that an officer be sent to Miami "for the purpose of investigating and reporting upon the sanitary conditions of the camp." Implying Flagler's influence over the situation, "this officer should be dispatched promptly and quietly, in order to avoid all advice and suggestions from the agents of those who have financial interests at stake."
Nellie was aware of all the potential here for a "whitewash". After she learned that Major-General Fitzhugh Lee, Commander of the Seventh Army Corps, was expected to examine Camp Miami again, Nellie wrote: "Genl Lee is expected to come here—I trust the wicked & corrupt officials who are trying to fool Keifer (and is he fooled, or only indifferent or wicked?) won't be able to fool Genl Lee." It seems that conditions did not improve as a result of the inspections, which infuriated Nellie: "Oh, this is such a damnable hole for a camp—I hope everyone who had a pull at sending troops here will go to Hell!"

Whether it was because of supply problems or the administration's mistakes, the division hospital's conditions worsened, and "the men won't go there if they can help it." As Nellie observed, "The Army regulations provide Hospital accommodations of [with] 200 beds to each Division. There are now here only two-thirds of a Division and we have a thousand men sick! Think of it!" The nurses assigned to the hospital were "only men the Surgeons pick up from among the soldiers." As nursing duty was given to "the privates in the regiment" or as a form of punishment, the soldiers assigned to the division hospital were "the most worthless and troublesome men in the company." They often resented being placed in a hospital instead of on the battlefield, which may have made them more abusive and unsympathetic.

When the division hospital was grossly overcrowded, sick soldiers were sent to Nellie's ward, which now acted more as an intensive care unit than a place for convalescence. On July 27, she and Daisy were caring for eighty-six men, and they "had to buy & buy & buy to keep with the increase of men." Nellie received two hundred dollars from the Colonial Dames of Georgia, which she helped establish in 1894. With these funds, she could provide each patient with "a mosquito net and a nice cot." Since the converted warehouse "only holds 90 men," Nellie was granted "permission to use the new Episcopal church which has never been consecrated—and we will overflow into that if necessary." Every morning for two weeks, Nellie went to her ward "right after breakfast." "I got everything going there; fed several people who had not had enough, [and] made a list of supplies." Relieved to have her daughter's help each day, Nellie wrote: "Daisy spent two hours making & distributing cups of chocolate which the men greatly enjoyed."

Although much of the treatment was improvised, the medical care the soldiers received from the Gordon women must have been effective. On
July 28, Nellie sent thirteen men back to duty—"well." She wrote: "It is quite flattering I declare, to meet so many who tell me what a God-send the C. W. is—and 'bless me'—and say how the men love me—etc., etc—I shall be quite spoiled!" Nellie was proud that she and Daisy helped the soldiers recover: "The change in their looks since they came there, is wonderful. Such a hopeless, sad, indifferent, weak lot as they were! Now they are alert, cheerful, hungry, satisfied, and interested in the books & papers on supply to them."

Years later, in her "Reminiscences," Nellie explained why she never became infected: "In fact I am not afraid of disease, and never catch anything. I went through a violent epidemic of cholera in Chicago in 1852 and of Yellow-fever in Savannah in 1858 [and in 1876] and was never ill a moment, so I consider myself 'immune.'" By late July 1898, newspapers from all over the country praised her efforts. In a letter to Nellie, her close friend, Lizzie Nicholas, wrote, "You are every bit as great as Miss Nightingale & everybody has heard of [the] Miami tent convalescent hospital! It has been mentioned in New Haven papers & ever so many others." Proud of her mother's work, Arthur wrote, "I hear all sorts of good reports about you and your invaluable help to Papa."

In the last days of July, Willie's brigade was ordered to Camp Fairfield in Jacksonville, Florida. As Nellie concluded her July 28 entry, she wrote: "The great news I kept for the last item! We are to move!" Although Willie and Nellie couldn't wait to leave, they emphatically told Keifer, "we could not leave our sick men here, & if they do not go, we would stay here with them." Keifer agreed to send the men by hospital cars to wherever the Gordons requested. Nellie wrote of her and Willie's decision: "All the Convalescents will be sent by Hospital train. The very ill will be left here in charge of competent physicians—and the sick who can safely be moved, will go on a Hospital train." Demonstrating her sincere dedication to her patients, Nellie was willing to go "a day or so in advance to secure accommodations for the Convalescent Ward" without Willie.

The military arranged for Nellie and Daisy's transportation to Jacksonville. She filled her journal with details of her trip, but her main concern was still the convalescent hospital: "I hope the Ward is doing well. Dr. Maus has rented a good sized hotel at Pablo Beach, on the ocean—an hour from here by train where all the convalescents are to go—It will be fine." A soldier's wife wrote to Nellie pleading to have
her sick husband moved with his regiment soon from that “Pest-hole Miami.” The worried wife believed Nellie could help her. “Seeing by the papers you and your noble work of seeing to the sick soldiers. I hope you will pardon me for addressing you.” She begged Nellie “to please let me know what kind of care he [was] left in or if he should be able to be moved to Jacksonville.” If Nellie could do her this favor, “I will be under lasting obligations to you to see how he is & if he has all that is needed for a speedy recovery.”

Except for entries consisting of two or three short sentences, there was another break in Nellie’s journal because of her work. For a little over two weeks, Nellie spent most of the day overseeing the sick soldiers’ transfer to the convalescent hospital at Pablo Beach, which meant one-hour train rides each way. Unlike her experiences in Miami, Nellie appeared to be assured that the new convalescent facility was adequate. On August 5, she made her first visit to Pablo Beach with Daisy “where we found every thing delightfully & conveniently arranged for the Convalescent Ward.” This time Nellie also had capable help in establishing the ward, and full support with its maintenance. A committee of the medical officials’ wives, which included Nellie, was elected by Maus’ wife to inspect the daily operations of the brigade’s hospital. The committee also went with Nellie to oversee the daily operation of the ward. Despite her appreciation for their assistance, Nellie still wanted to be the heroine of her ward: “A Mrs. Guest from Cincinnati has been here on this Ward from some Relief Society. She has a son—a private in the 2 La.[Second Louisiana]. When she told him she was coming out to inspect the Brigade Hospital, he told her she needn’t trouble herself with that; Mrs. Genl Gordon was taking care of them, & no one could do anymore for them than she did!”

Nellie remained in Jacksonville with Willie until he received orders for Puerto Rico. For months after the men left the ward, the Gordons looked after the soldiers by telling all who would listen about the “outrages” at Camp Miami. In late August, newspaper reporters told Nellie’s story in published articles that helped to bring more inquiry into Camp Miami’s medical history. She also sent letters to several people in Washington, including the president, explaining the trying conditions that soldiers endured at the camp. Willie published an editorial, “The Truth About Miami. General Gordon’s Conservative Review of the Conditions There,” that appeared in newspapers across the country.
Earlier, during their heated argument, Willie had warned Appel, chief surgeon of Willie’s division in Miami, if the camp’s situation was not improved, he would “rouse not only the Authorities at Washington-but all of the United States.” Together the Gordons were committed to fulfilling his promise.

Before Nellie left Jacksonville for her home in Savannah on August 22, she finished one last journal entry. “This page ends my Army life for the present…” This last reflection did not mention any of the pride she must have felt for what she did for the soldiers in Miami or the attention she was receiving at the time. Instead, she wrote about Willie without a remark about herself: “The papers are full of complimentary notices of him across the country. Bless him!” Nellie’s loving words revealed that “my General” was still foremost in her life. Nellie may have been remembering the end of the last war, and Willie’s dire sense of loss as she wrote: “The Recognition has come at last & in such complimentary form!” Perhaps it was important to Nellie that the last page of her “record” paid tribute to her “General.” In the afternoon of August 22, General Gordon accompanied his wife to the train station, and “bid me goodbye.” On August 24, believing that only peaceful times lay ahead, Nellie began a new journal.

Years later, Nellie’s son, Arthur, averred that the best words to describe his mother’s traits were “Like a flash.” In his memoirs, he added: “With her, action followed thought at once, and inevitably. Obstacles and difficulties merely stimulated her.” At Camp Miami, Nellie just did what had to be done “like a flash.”
Notes

1 “Heroine of War, Mrs. W.W. Gordon,” Massachusetts Times Union & Citizen (Boston, Massachusetts), 26 July 1898.

2 Donna Thomas, “‘Camp Hell’: Miami During the Spanish-American War,” Florida Historical Quarterly 57 (1978), 150; “Good Angel to the Boys in Blue, Chicago Times Herald, 25 August 1898.

3 The Spanish-American War Journal of Eleanor Kinzie Gordon, May 1898, Gordon Family Papers, Box 12: Folder 126, Item 2844, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

4 Nellie Kinzie Gordon, “Reminiscences” (unpaginated manuscript notes), Gordon Family Papers, Box 13: Folder 131, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.


9 The Spanish-American War Journal of Nellie Kinzie Gordon, 3 July 1898.

10 Ibid.


13 Miami Metropolis, 24 June 1898; United States Senate, Document 221, 56th Congress, 1st sess., Report of the Commission Appointed By
the President to Investigate the Conduct of the War Department in the War with Spain, 8 vols. (Washington, 1990), VII, 3364.


Ibid.


16 The Spanish-American War Journal of Nellie Kinzie Gordon, 9 July 1898; Senate Document 221, VIII, 82.


18 Ibid.


22 Eleanor Kinzie Gordon to David Hunter, 28 July 1898, Gordon Family Papers, Series 1, Subseries 1.5, Folder 142, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Miami Metropolis, 16 July 1898; The Spanish-American War Journal of Eleanor Kinzie Gordon, 17 July 1898.

23 Eleanor Kinzie Gordon to David Hunter, 28 July 1898, Gordon Family Papers, Series 1, Subseries 1.5, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; The Spanish-American War Journal of Eleanor Kinzie Gordon, no date.


25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.


32 Ibid.
35 Ibid., 15 July 1898.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 *Miami Metropolis*, “At the Division Hospital,” no date; Eleanor Kinzie Gordon to David Hunter, 28 July 1898.
40 Ibid.
41 Senate Document 221, VII, 92; Ibid., 73.
42 The Spanish-American War Journal of Eleanor Kinzie Gordon, 26 July 1898; Eleanor Kinzie Gordon to David Hunter, 28 July 1898; Senate Document 221, VII, 92-93.
43 Eleanor Kinzie Gordon to David Hunter, 28 July 1898.
44 Gordon, “Reminiscences;” Elizabeth Byrd Nicholas to Eleanor Kinzie Gordon, 10 August 1898, Gordon Family Papers, Box 4: Folder 50, Item 1201, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia; George Arthur Gordon to Eleanor Kinzie Gordon, 11 September 1898, Gordon Family Papers, Series 1, Subseries 1.5, Folder 144, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
46 Eleanor Kinzie Gordon to George Arthur Gordon, August 2, 1898, Gordon Family Papers, Series 1, Subseries 1.5, Folder 143, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Mrs. M. S. Bledsoe to Eleanor Kinzie Gordon, 2 August 1898, Gordon Family Papers, Box 4: Folder 51, Item 1200, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.
47 The Spanish-American War Journal of Eleanor Kinzie Gordon, 5 August 1898; Ibid., 11 August 1898.
48 Senate Document 221, VIII, 92-93; William Washington Gordon II,

Early Miami Through the Eyes of Youth

William M. Straight, M.D.

Introduction

The following account of early Miami is composed of an edited face to face interview with Ethel Weatherly Sherman who came to Miami as a child of ten in 1896, and an unsigned, undated manuscript undoubtedly written by her perhaps to be used for a talk or paper by her. The audiotaped interview was done by Valerie Fisher Lassman, Ph.D., on July 25, 1978, and transcribed by this author. Present at the interview was Hal Mordaunt, Jr., Sherman's son by her previous marriage to Hal Mordaunt, Sr. Apparently he was sitting a distance from the microphone so that often I was unable to perceive what he was saying on the audiotape. To indicate this, I have left a short blank line followed by [H. Jr.]. A copy of the undated manuscript was given to me by Christopher Eck, Administrator of the Broward County Historical Commission, in August 2001, when he was Director of the Office of Historic Preservation, Miami-Dade County. Copies of both of these sources may be found in the archives of the Historical Museum of Southern Florida. I have quoted from each of these sources material that is not easily available; this material focuses on day to day events as seen through the eyes of a youth. Further, I have deleted interjections, and repetitious expressions, and I have included in brackets and the endnotes, missing words, corrections and supplemental information. Although quotation marks do not appear, the whole of this narrative is contained within a quotation; I have left misspellings, as well as lack of capitalizations and punctuations in the narrative which follows.
Mama, small sister Edna and I arrived in Miami, from Kissimmee in the Fall 1896 [Miami was incorporated a few months earlier]. To get here we had to go to Palatka to change trains then lay over and spend a night in New Smyrna, then on to Miami.

When we came from the train it really looked hopeless—no depot, no paved streets, shacks and shanties lined the rocky road [now Flagler Street]. We walked over to the site of the 2 tents my father [Capt. William Henry Weatherly] had provided for us. Mama was disgusted and heartsick—we had left a lovely little home in Kissimmee, with nice flower & vegetable gardens, a cow & lots of room, beautiful old oak trees, not far from the lake—and to come to this awful camp, our new “home” was a shock. If our home in Kissimmee had not been sold, I’m sure mama would have returned to it the next day. Our tents were situated on the NE corner of what is now East Flagler St. and NE 1st Avenue, under huge old oak trees, surrounded by a thicket of wild growth, papayas—palmettos & vines, etc. Twelfth St. [today’s Flagler Street] had not been paved, it was a rough tangle of rocks and roots—but there were a lot of people living along both sides in tents & Shacks (built mostly of scrap lumber mostly from the Royal Palm Hotel which was under construction a few blocks away). Each shack had its own water pump, and sometimes the pumps brought up water thick with lime, and a terrible taste.

Our furniture consisted of a cot for each of us, a few Kitchen chairs, a Kitchen table and a 2-burner Kerosene oil stove and other camping inconveniences. Life was really rough—the mosquitoes devoured us day & night—the only way you could sit out doors afternoon & at night was by huddling in the smoke over a tub of smudge [made of] dried coconut hulls sprinkled with “mosquito powder” [possibly pyrethrum] we bought from the Townley Bros. little drug store across the street, and rags. The Townley brothers, John, Tom & Vernon also came from Kissimmee as did John & Ev Sewell. The Sewells opened the first shoe store here in the Miami Hotel a small wooden bldg. which was situated on Avenue D (now Miami Avenue) not far from the [Miami] river. The hotel burned, [December 25, 1899] when it was only a few years old, in a big fire that destroyed several small businesses in the vicinity.

We’d been living in tents for months and months and months before we got into the house because there was no other place to live. My father had these tents built for us and after the houses were built [the
Flagler cottages along today's southeast first and second streets], of course, they let us move into one of the houses. We had two tents, both of them together were not as large as this patio. Just ordinary like soldiers tents but he did have wooden floors in them and they had what they called a fly over 'em—one big sheet of canvas to keep the hot sun from getting on the roof of the tent itself, you know. Just with screening all around. It was just the roughest rawest kind of living.

We were capsized when we were living in the tent. I went out just for the fun of sailing. I had never been on a boat and I know my mother hadn't and probably papa either. This Mr. [A. L.] Gravelle that was a friend of his, he was a carpenter on the Royal Palm, had a little sailboat so he took us out sailing and we capsized and were not rescued until the following day. We were out there twenty-two hours. We just clung to that boat—it was under water. You know the boat would have a curve like this, it was on its side. So my mother and father, my mother holding my little baby sister, we were all just crowded together on that rounded part of the boat that was...well, we were still in water up to our necks, the boat was so far under water. And there we...well, we couldn't do anything. I remember seeing the sun go down and I'll never forget that as long as I live. The only outline of Miami that we could see was the framework of the Royal Palm Hotel. It was up about two stories it wasn't even anywhere near finished. But luckily my mother
had a brother [Charles Wynne] living in Miami, young fellow, he was about eighteen years old, and when we didn't get home that night, he was alarmed and began telling everybody Weatherly and his family didn't get back from this sailing trip and he knew where we were supposed to go across the Bay to see if we could find shells on the beach. By the next day people were alarmed enough to began getting in what boats there were. There were only probably five or six boats, not very many. And one of them belonged to a Mr. [Wesley M.] Featherly as luck would have it. So we were Weatherlys being rescued by Featherly. Featherly was the owner and editor of the old Miami Metropolis. I've got the newspaper with that account in it. It was Charlie, Charlie Wynne, got so frightened and worried. Somebody suggested that if anybody has binoculars, get up as high as you can go on the framework of the Royal Palm and see if you can find them out there in the Bay somewhere. Somebody said well Mr. [A. L.] Knowlton had this surveyor's instrument, you know the telescope. Mr. Knowlton plotted the layout of Miami. So they got hold of Mr. Knowlton, he was a very old man even at that time. Had a long white beard; I'll never forget it. And they got Mr. Knowlton up there and with that instrument he spotted us out there. He said it looked like just coconuts out there because we were in the water up to our necks. But he said go there and see if that's what it is. So it happened it was all of us perched on that capsized boat. He located us with that instrument and sent the Featherly boat out there after us. But it was very windy and chilly, I don't remember exactly what date it was and what month but it's in the newspaper. They had to send a rowboat over to pick us up. The Featherly boat was named The Ethel Pearl, I think. But they sent the rowboat out and picked us up and took us on there [on board] and then they took us back to shore and a lot of people were living on houseboats at that time. And they were anchored along just little makeshift homemade docks that ran out from the shore.

There was a family named [N. D.] Coates, I think some of them are still around, it was a large family. The Coates people invited us to come aboard their houseboat because my mother was in terrible condition. She had been badly hurt in sitting astride this overturned boat. She had to sit astride of it and hold Edna in her arms, so the movement of the boat wore off the flesh of her ankles right down to the bone. It took her a long time before she was able to get around. Dr. [James M.] Jackson
[the new city’s first physician] took care of her, got her back and straightened out again. But, anyway the Coates kept us there on their houseboat for several days, maybe a week and just made everything wonderful for us. That’s one thing at that time everybody was neighborly and they did everything they could for each other, you know.

I’ve got pictures of Hal’s father, [Hal Mordaunt, Sr.] he was an actor, a very handsome wonderful looking man. He had I guess the first plays ever presented in Miami. He was a professional actor and later I went on the road with him. He was born in San Diego.

He had recruited a group of amateur actors here. There was Charlie Dillon and Redmond Gautier, that was Bunn’s [R. B.] father and Charlie Dillon who was the son of Captain [G. W.] Dillon, the captain on that Key West boat, and Cecil Watson and [Gustav] Von Moser, the German who was such a character here in Miami and oh I don’t know, there were eight or ten of us. Hal and my mother made the scenery, stitched it together and Hal painted it. If it was a forest scene, a living room scene, whatever, and then these plays were put on in the school auditorium, just a little bitty stage. What school was that? It wasn’t the high school—the Central Grammar School. Where the Federal Building is [on today’s Northeast First Avenue between Third and Fourth Streets]. This was a wooden building, just a big old wooden frame building. We went to school there and later on and that’s where Hal’s father’s company had come to Miami to put on some plays, Gagnon Pollack Stock Company (?). That was the first thing the Picketts and the Gagnons, that put on the first plays here then Hal put on these amateur plays where he had all these young amateurs, Priscella Budge and all the kids. He taught them how to dance and he put on these plays—later on we put on plays with two or three acts in them. I was in an amateur play with Von Moser and Cecil Watson and all these people and Hal’s company was here, they were to use that theater and they were delayed one day because we had engaged that night for our show. So Hal’s father was sitting in the audience with the rest of his company and watching these amateurs play. So he came back stage and introduced himself to me and that’s how I met your father. And I went home—he stayed and took me home from the play. And he took me to his home which was also my home, he had rented a room in mama’s house. Across from the San Carlos Hotel.
In clearing land for the grounds of the Royal Palm Hotel, a large Indian Mound had to be removed—Papa was in charge of a crew of laborers who began at the eastern base and gradually brought it down. They found a great many skeletons, lots of items which may have belonged to soldiers stationed at Ft. Dallas such as handmade metal canteens, odds and ends of pottery jars—glass beads and other objects. We had several of these but over the years have lost all except some blue & white glass beads and a handmade flattened gold earring found in a grave occupied by a small skeleton. This mound no doubt had been started many years before even the Brickells settled on the point across the river as papa found among bones of a skeleton near the bottom of the mound a beautiful gold crucifix, evidently belonging to a Catholic priest. He presented this wonderful find to Mr. J. A. McDonald who was in charge of all of the Flagler development, a contractor who supervised the building of the Royal Palm. Other skeletons found higher up in layers near the top of the mound were removed and the bones deposited in barrels, the Skulls ranged up on boards placed on the top of barrels. After all bones were removed and placed in barrels, they were buried in a deep sink-hole not far away. This was a natural deep pit, with a large wild fig tree growing tall with its top many feet above the

Clearing the grounds for the Royal Palm Hotel, March 1896. Miami River, Brickell Point and the Brickell family home are in the background. HASF 62-24-185.
rim. The pit was gradually filled and [the] ground leveled. As near as I can recall, this pit was located about what is now SE Second Street & Second Avenue. The Watson [John W. Watson] home in later years was built on this spot. The gold earring and beads mentioned are now deposited in the Loxahatchee Historical Museum, 805 North US 1, Jupiter, Florida.

I was at the opening [of the Royal Palm Hotel] and it was a beautiful event [January 17, 1897]. They had a wonderful Italian orchestra. The hotel itself was just magnificent, it was beautifully carpeted and furnished with handsome wicker furnishings and big mirrors everywhere and the most beautiful ballroom. I was just a kid, I guess I was ten years old then. It was on the river side of the hotel but before we got to that ballroom we went through a big rotunda and the place for the orchestra and then there was the dance floor. And at this opening everybody in Miami was invited. They were very gracious and nice. The manager was—his last name was on the tip of my tongue—it'll come to me [Henry W. Merrill]. But anyway they just issued a blank invitation to everybody come. And there was more scurrying around for people trying to buy material, to buy a new dress, to wear to this thing, I remember mine quite well, it was a very stiff blue organdy and I'll never forget when I sat down, it was all just sticking to me, wrinkled up, and you know how some cloth will just crinkle up and just stay like that. But everybody got new clothes, new shoes, and all got fixed up for this thing and it was the first orchestra I think I'd ever heard in my life and I was completely fascinated like all the children were. And they let the children ride in the elevators, the beautiful hallways with all these elevators running up. They had young women operating the elevators and they were so nice to us. I guess they all had their orders to take these poor little crackers and give 'em a good time. But they'd run the elevators up and down and let us ride them and we'd go in these beautiful rooms where all the mirrors were and beautiful furniture that we'd never seen before.

What kind of things did your mother used to do for you at home? Everything, sewed, cooked, kept house—just did everything except the laundry. What kind of things did she like to cook? Everything southerners like. We had ham and bacon, plenty of eggs, cereals, vegetables—turnip greens, collard greens, corn—just everything that southerners like. Did you have a little garden in the back? Oh no,
there was no room for the garden because the Flagler houses were built back to back around the street so there was not much space. I don't remember anybody having a garden.

How did you get your dairy products and your groceries? Well, there were two grocery stores, little things. I think the first one was operated by a Mr. Brady, E. L. Brady, who moved here from Titusville and J. E. Lummus—and later on T. N. Gautier. There were three just general like old country stores, they had everything, you know, but pretty good supplies.

Were they delivered to your house? Oh yes, in those days Mr. Lummus came to the back door to take my mother's kitchen order and Bradys never did that. Mr. Lummus, I think, came after Brady and he had to build up business. So they'd come around—I can remember seeing Mr. Lummus with his little book jotting down the things mama wanted. And in those days you bought a barrel of flour and a great big strip of bacon, just everything in big quantities. And it was a long time before we had ice. A man named L. C. Oliver had a little ice factory up about where Sixth Street—it was Sixth Street then, I believe, it stayed Sixth [the only street in Miami that retained its original number name after the new system of numbering and name streets was adopted in 1920].

The streets, of course, were just this coral rock just pounded up and the streets were just snow white, they'd put your eyes out. And they were pounded down. They put down coarse rock first then the fine rock and then the colored workers would string out across the street with their tamps [an instrument for packing dirt or sand in a hole] and sing these beautiful Negro spirituals and they tamped [and] they kept time. People all over town, the few lawyers that were here like Mr. [H.F.] Atkinson, Bob [R.H.] Seymour and Robert [R.] Taylor and people like that, they kinda just — it was like going to a show. Just stand there and watch these men work and hear them singing. It was really wonderful. But of course I was so young, it was a wonderful experience for me. I was a roamer, I was everywhere, I went all over town. I had a little bicycle and as the streets were paved and there was some place to go I went there I wanted to see what it was.

What do you recall about the Seminoles in particular? The only thing I remember about them was their costuming, really, and their shirts and the beautiful turbans. They wore these turbans that they made and
the—you've seen the Indian women, the women's clothes. They used to put so much work on those beautiful shirts it was just amazing the colors that could combine. And the men, of course, the shirts came down to their knees, and they were barefoot, they didn't wear shoes or socks or anything like that, they just had real tough soles with their feet. But those costumes were wonderful. They used to have these long canoes that were hollowed out of big trees, big pine trees. And they poled them, they didn't have oars. The man would stand in the stern of the boat and put the pole down and push it, push the boat ahead. I remember seeing those, a great many of them especially around the Brickell Point where they used to do a lot of trading [at the Brickell family's trading post]. It was across the river from the main part of Miami.º

Did you ever see the Indians come into town much for any reason? Oh, yes, they came in all the time. You could hardly go out on the street, especially down on the river across from Brickells but what you'd see them. Oh, it wasn't a rare sight at all. They were friendly. There was a family here named Girtman, they had a little grocery store [Girtman Brothers: Grover C. and James D.] on Twelfth Street between the railroad and Avenue D. and the Indians used to do a lot of trading there. You couldn't go into the Girtman grocery, hardly, without seeing Indians. They were just a fixture in that store and great friends of the Girtman family. They had a daughter named Rosebud, Rosebud Girtman, and—I've forgotten the names of the males in the family, there were several that comprised the grocery business.¹¹

During the Spanish American war everybody kept boarders and on 13th Street, in the first Flagler house that we lived in when I was a child, we lived next door to Burdines and all the houses were built with nice big attics. When there was a chance to rent a room the family moved into the attic and rented that room. Burdines did, we did, the Hahns, everybody did it.

A little while ago we were talking about what Miami was like during the Spanish American War. It was just a quiet little town and the soldiers were camped up on the Bay. They were orderly, they behaved themselves. We knew people in one of the Texas regiments we were quite friendly with. And I don't know how many regiments there were but there were several because they occupied a lot of ground there. It must have been several blocks. They were here, I think, on account of
being close to Cuba—they might have to go over there anytime, you know. They used to drill in the streets—it was like a show for the people, they enjoyed it. The town, itself, was just a nice quiet town, everybody was behaving themselves. Everybody knew everybody else we were all friendly. There were stores cropping up and businesses going here and there. The town was growing very fast.12

I went to the East Florida Seminary in Gainesville and learned stenography, learned shorthand and typing. And I went to work for this old friend, Bob Seymour, who was from Kissimmee, and a lawyer named Atkinson and for the whole big sum of three dollars a week. And I wasn’t any more of a stenographer than one of these puppies around here. But I could after a fashion write what they told me to write, but I was far from a good stenographer. Anyway the Brickells were clients of Seymour and Atkinson, the law firm. And I often had to take papers over for Mrs. [Mary] Brickell to sign. Mr. Seymour had a rate with a stable, Correll’s, Adam Correll’s Stable. They would rent a horse and a little buggy, a little single-seater buggy, and I’d go over there and get a horse and buggy and drive across the little old wooden bridge to the Brickell’s house.13 There was just this little old narrow paved road that the bridge joined up with, and ‘cause that was the only way you could get across except with a boat. When Mr. Seymour had papers for Mrs. Brickell or some of the family to sign why they would send me over there with them.

You know as I think of Mrs. Brickell she looked to me more like some pictures that you see of Queen Victoria. Really? Yes, that type. She was English and a very nice person. And there were two or three sons, there was Charles and William, I remember, and there was Edith, I think she was the oldest and Belle and Maude was the youngest. One of them was killed I think after the 1926 storm [September 12, 1924]. She was electrocuted in her own garden walking around and she ran

Mary Bulmer Brickell, ca. 1870. HASF, Stan Cooper Collection, 1990-521-1.
into a live wire—that was Belle [Alice]. Miss Edith was really the business manager for the Brickells. As they grew older and didn’t want to have anything with anything but just trying to rest, you know. But anyway, that’s how I knew Mrs. Brickell and I admit if there was any of them in the room she’d introduce me to them. So I met a good many of them. Do you recall Mr. Brickell personally? No, I just remember how he looked. I met him but that’s all.

How was their house? Well it was like pictures that you see of the old Victorian houses full of bric-a-brac and beautiful old furniture. And, as I recall, I never saw Mrs.[Mary ] Brickell standing. I don’t know whether she could walk or not because she was always sitting in the big easy chair. She was always nice to me, they always had crackers and cookies and tea. So I had quite a little visit there while I was waiting for her to read and sign the papers and everything like that. And I used to wander around the place. I saw a good deal of it. They had a family graveyard in the ground and I don’t remember who was in it but I know it was just a family graveyard. I think the mausoleum is still there. They may have built the mausoleum on the spot where these people are buried, but at that time I know they were just buried, you could see the headstones. I never examined them ‘cause I didn’t want to get called down about prowling around other people’s property.
I knew Mrs. Tuttle; I used to steal pansies from her pansy bed and I got scolded many a time. They had a pansy bed along in back of the old building, the Fort Dallas barracks. You've seen pictures of that haven't you? Yes. She had this beautiful pansy bed and it was easy to get to because it wasn't too—I'm getting my cart before the horse. There was a street that ran down into the Fort Dallas property and her home was off to the left and all the rest of it was just palm trees and flowers and shrubs—a beautiful landscaped place. And she had these flower beds all over the place but the pansy bed was my favorite because it was easiest to get to. 'Cause I could come in across the railroad [Florida East Coast Railway]—there was a railroad spur that went down behind our houses and to the Royal Palm. East and West into the Royal Palm—right into the Royal Palm building to unload groceries and supplies and everything for the hotel. So all you had to do was cross that railroad track and go in and there you were in Mrs. Tuttle's property. And she had all these beautiful flower beds everywhere but the pansies were my favorite and I used to steal pansies. Once in a while she'd catch me—she'd just yell at me, "Be careful don't get too many." But she was nice, she was a wonderful person, just as nice, everybody loved her. When she was very sick, in fact when she died, there were no professional nurses in Miami so people volunteered. There may have been one or two that knew a little about nursing but no real professionals. And Aunt Edith was one of the people that volunteered to nurse Mrs. Tuttle during her illness. So in that way we got into the house quite often, going over with Aunt Edith to take her something. The house that Mrs. Tuttle lived in was just a typical, old Bahamian, stone house with a concrete corridor running in front of it. And it was just a plain, big, old comfortable house. 'Course she brought all her beautiful furniture from the home in Cleveland, I believe it was, Cleveland, Ohio.15

Do you recall Dr. [James M.] Jackson? Very, very well. He was one of the most wonderful men that ever lived. And he was so good to everybody. You know there were people that were unable to pay but it didn't make a bit of difference to Dr. Jackson. You got his best care and you never got a bill. He was just one of the most wonderful people that ever lived. He was a nice looking man. He was blond and blue-eyed and I remember exactly his features and his wife, his
lovely wife—he married her, a Gainesville girl [Bronson, FL], her name was Ethel Barco and she and my mother were great friends. Did he have any children? Let’s see, Ethel Jackson and Helen Jackson, two daughters he never had a son. It was Ethel Jackson that the little tub was painted for, you know that I told you about. There was no plumbing in Miami at that time and when Mrs. Jackson’s first child, Helen [Ethel was the first born] Jackson, was getting ready to be born, they couldn’t get a suitable baby bathtub for her. So Frank T. Budge had this big hardware store [on today’s East Flagler Street and North Miami Avenue]—it was really a big business ‘cause everybody was building something. Mrs. Jackson bought a big oval dish-pan and she and my mother enameled it with white enamel. That was that baby’s, Ethel Jackson’s bathtub.¹⁶

Other doctors soon came to Miami—Dr. [R. H.] Huddleston, from Kissimmee, Dr. Peter [Thomas] Skaggs, Dr. [Samuel Mills] Fowler, his wife [Dr. Corrie Harriet Rogers Fowler] also a doctor, and their 3 children,—Frank, Fay [who as Fay Cunningham served many years as Secretary of Miami Pioneers] and Corrie who married Harry Tuttle, son of Mrs. Julia D. Tuttle The 2 doctors Fowler were Julia Tuttle’s doctors during her last illness.¹⁷
Early Miami through the Eyes of Youth

Notes
1 Unsigned manuscript of Ethel Weatherly Sherman, 1.
2 Ibid., 2–3.
5 Manuscript of the Lassman interview, 19-20.
7 Manuscript of the Lassman interview, 6-8.
8 Lassman interview, 21-23. This portion of the narrative contains, somewhat awkwardly, a series of questions and answers, which, however, provide valuable information on the nascent city.
9 Ibid., 8.
11 Ibid., 26
12 Ibid., 26-27. Miami, a town of perhaps 1,200, was host to more than 7,000 troops from June 1898, to early September of the same year. They brought with them a fearful epidemic of typhoid fever with twenty-four deaths among the troops. In addition there was a concomitant measles epidemic that spread to the civilian community and at least two deaths. Because of her youth, Ethel Weatherly Sherman was eleven years old in 1898, and because The Miami Metropolis editor minimized the extent of the sickness, she probably didn’t realize the calamitous effects among the troops and civilians. Ethel Weatherly Sherman also failed to recall the tension and occasional incidents of violence on the part of the troops. William M. Straight, “Camp Miami, 1898,” The Journal of the Florida Medical Association, 74: No. 4, 504-513, July 1987.
13 The first bridge over the Miami River was a wooden bridge that opened for traffic on December 8, 1896. It crossed the river at the foot of Avenue G [today’s SW 2nd Avenue]. It was in use until after 1903 when an iron bridge at Avenue D [today’s Miami Avenue] opened.
14 The Brickell mausoleum was built thirty yards southwest of the family graveyard located near the swimming pool at today’s Sheraton Biscayne Bay Hotel at 495 Brickell Avenue by the Thurman
Monument Company in 1924. Subsequently, the burials in the graveyard were transferred to the mausoleum. Beginning August 8, 1924, Brickell burials were directly into the mausoleum. However, on August 30, 1951, the Brickell mausoleum was emptied and the bodies were transferred to the Woodlawn Park Cemetery, North. Ann McFadden, *Woodlawn Park North*, Vol. I, (Privately printed, Miami, 2000), 113-114.

15 Manuscript of the Lassman interview, 13-14. Mrs. Tuttle’s house was one of two stone buildings standing on the north bank of the Miami River built by William English as his manor house in late 1848. It stood parallel to the north bank of the river and just west of the slave quarters building, the other stone structure, which is now preserved in Lummus Park and known as the William English Slave Plantation House/Fort Dallas.

16 Manuscript of the Lassman interview, 9.

17 Unsigned manuscript of Ethel Weatherly Sherman, 6. Sherman’s account ends abruptly here. The value of this incomplete essay lies, of course, in the plethora of information found in it. Despite its youthfulness, today’s Greater Miami has relatively few pioneer remaining thus making the Weatherly Sherman essay even more important.
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