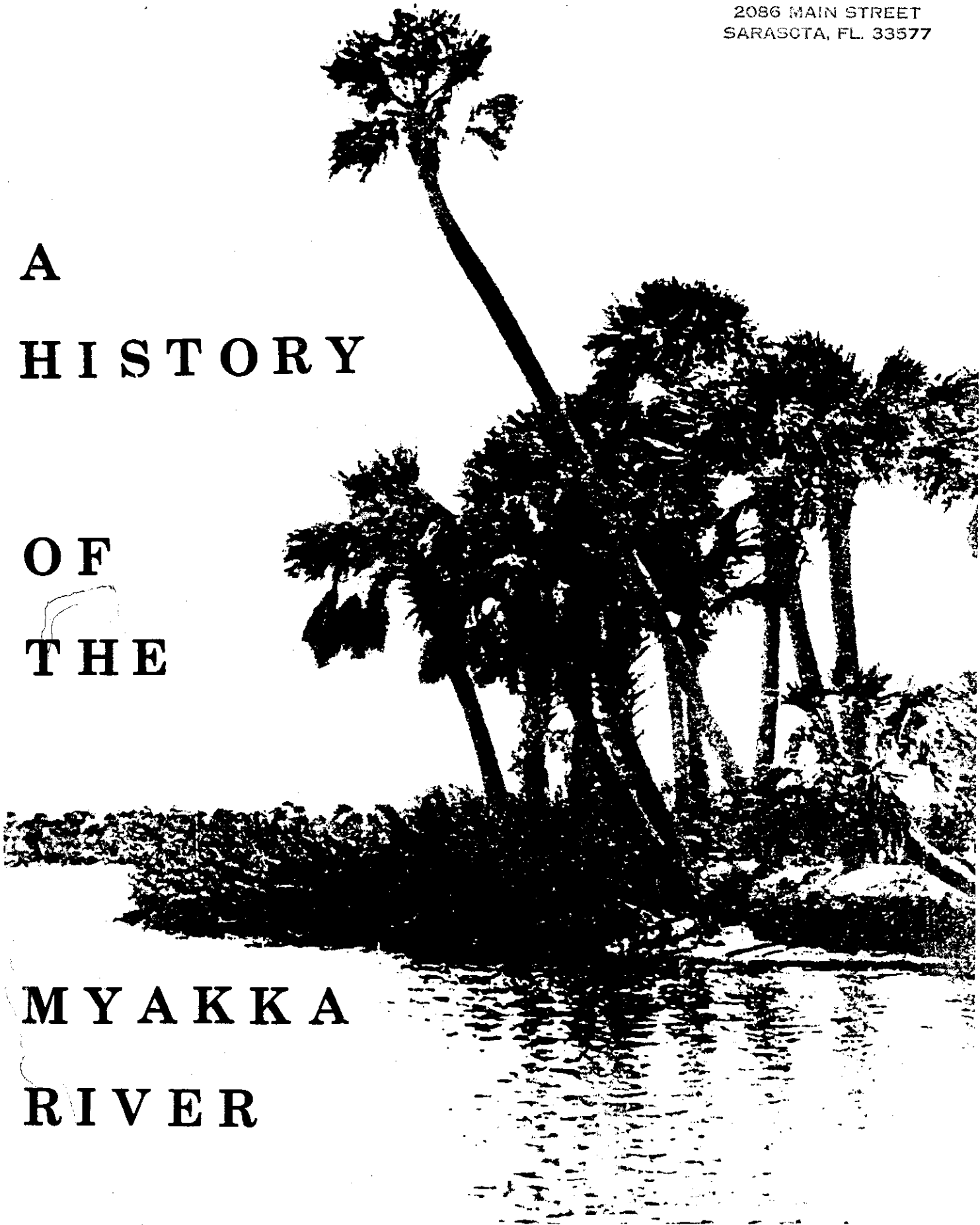


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**A
HISTORY
OF
THE
MYAKKA
RIVER**



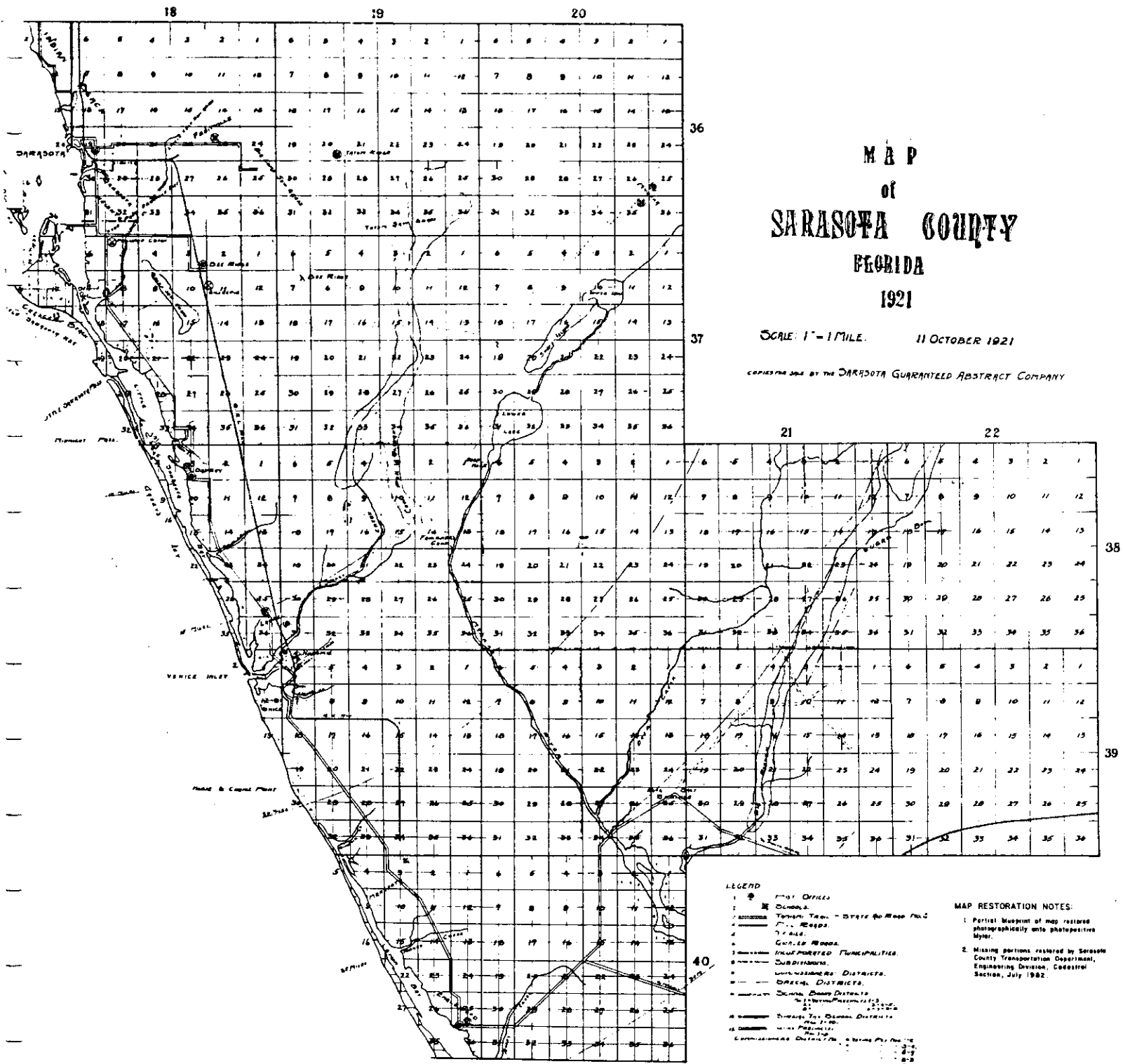
A HISTORY OF THE MYAKKA RIVER
SARASOTA COUNTY, FLORIDA

PREPARED BY SARASOTA COUNTY
HISTORICAL ARCHIVES STAFF

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NOVEMBER 1983

COVER: PHOTOGRAPH APPEARING
ON THE COVER OF "THE VENICE
NEWS" DATED MARCH 1ST, 1928,
ILLUSTRATING THE SOLACE AND
BEAUTY OF THE MYAKKA RIVER.



1921 map of Sarasota County , showing location and prominence of the Myakka River Valley Region

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sarasota County Engineering Department

Charlotte County Engineering Department

United States Geological Survey, Sarasota

United States Geological Survey, Tampa

Venice Area Public Library

University of South Florida Library, Special Collections

Manatee County Historical Records Library

Manatee Central Library, Eaton Room

Archaeological Consultants Incorporated

Florida State Division of Archives, History and Records
Management

THE SPELL OF THE MYAKKA

THERE ARE FISH AND THEY ARE JUMPING AND FLAUNTING
AND LURING ME ON AS THEY WISH;
BUT IT ISN'T THE FISH THAT I'M WANTING
SO MUCH AS JUST CATCHING THE FISH.

IT'S THE GREAT, BROAD MYAKKA OUT YONDER
WITH ITS PALMS WHERE SILENCE HAS LEASE;
IT'S THE BEAUTY THAT THRILLS ME WITH WONDER
IT'S THE STILLNESS THAT FILLS ME WITH PEACE.

-NEAL WYATT CHAPLINE, 1914

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MYAKKA RIVER ORIGINS

The Myakka River, the backbone of Sarasota County, reveals a remarkable history that spans three counties. Originating in the wetlands of Manatee County, the river enters Sarasota County from the east and flows to the southwest. Situated along the river is Upper Lake, and four miles to the southwest, Lower Lake. At a point halfway between where the river enters and leaves the county, it turns and flows to the southeast. At the point where the river turns it is within eight miles of the Gulf of Mexico. Just above this point the ancient river accepted the flow of the Cowpen Slough from the northwest. As the river flows to the southeast, it accepts the flow of Deer Creek Slough and Big Slough. Between the two sloughs is located the Warm Mineral Spring. As the river continues, it completes a huge sideways "v" pattern, pointing towards the Gulf of Mexico

and spanning the interior of Sarasota County. Finally, the Myakka River enters Charlotte County and pours it's waters into Charlotte Harbor.

Geologically, the Myakka River Valley Basin may be several million years old. Evidence in the form of rock samples from the river indicate that the river existed at least one million years. Caloosahatchee Marl samples dating from the Pliocene Period were taken from the Myakka River as early as 1886.

The Caloosahatchee Marl is underlaid by rock of the Hawthorn Formation dating from the Miocene period of seven to twenty million years ago. In south Florida the Hawthorn Formation has revealed various marine bi-valves indicating the changes in sealevel during the Miocene. There is no evidence at this time to support the theory that the Myakka River Valley Basin existed during the Miocene Period, yet it is possible.

Future geological research may reveal much about the origins of the Myakka River Valley Basin. At this time we can assume that the basin has been some type of tributary for the last one million years.

Pleistocene Mammals were the first denizens of this region, having arrived in South Florida over thirty thousand years ago. The Pleistocene Period exhibited an incredibly diverse list of mammals that roamed throughout the Myakka

River Valley Region. Mammoths, mastodons, sabre tooth cats, giant sloths, tapirs, horses, camels and dire wolves are some of the animals that inhabited this region. One publication lists over eighty varieties of mammals, as well as numerous birds, fish and reptiles.

A recent report by Victor A. Carbone speculates the environmental conditions of Florida 20,000 years ago. "A warm temperate forest of oak, hickory and southern pine (existed) across the southeastern coastal plain from the Gulf to the Atlantic ...a hardwood forest is projected along the major river valleys". At this time peninsula Florida was nearly twice as wide as it is at present. Considerable land along the continental shelf was exposed due to the sealevel being several yards lower than it is today.

At this time the Myakka Valley would have been an established river basin, gathering water from a vast acreage into a funnel of rivers and ultimately into the Gulf of Mexico. Pleistocene mammals frequented the river as a source of water and food. The range lands along the river as well as the fringing hammocks provided an abundance of vegetable food. Carnivorous animals may have found the river to be a perfect spot to ambush small game.

Pleistocene mammals roamed throughout the Myakka River Valley Region unmolested for thousands of years. Fossilized bones, especially those of mammoths and mastodons,

have been uncovered at various points within the Myakka River Valley Region. Recent research indicates that man may have been living in the Myakka area early enough to have witnessed the demise of the Pleistocene mammals.

As early as ten thousand years ago man was living in the Myakka River Valley Region based upon evidence recovered from Warm Mineral Springs. Warm Mineral Springs, a sinkhole originating with the collapse of a cavern in the Tampa Limestone, is located two miles to the east of the Myakka River in section 25, township 39 south, range 20 east. In 1959 Dr. Eugenie Clark and Col. William Royal removed from the spring human skeletal material that was radiocarbon dated at 10,000 years before present. Later, archaeologists working for the State of Florida confirmed man's presence at Warm Mineral Springs 10,000 years ago.

All evidence recovered from the Warm Mineral Springs as well as from nearby Little Salt Spring indicates that man was pursuing a hunting and gathering economy on the plains and in the forests and hammocks of the Myakka River Valley Region at least ten thousand years ago.

Descendents of the Paleo Man that lived in the Warm Mineral Springs area would continue to live in the Myakka River Valley Region for thousands of years. These hunting and gathering people would remain in the area

for several reasons.

Game was abundant in the hammocks adjacent to the river as well as in the pineland surrounding it. Waterfowl filled the low marshland. Fish were abundant in the river as well as in Charlotte Harbor. The great diversity of plant life along the river provided a source of vegetable food.

The Myakka River provided a route of transportation in a region that was not easily traversed over land. Dugout canoes were used by the aborigines to move efficiently from the Charlotte Harbor area to the uplands.

There are dozens of recorded archaeological sites, and likely numerous unrecorded sites, adjacent to the Myakka River. These sites consist of seasonal camp sites, shell middens and burial mounds. It is likely that some of the aborigines lived continuously in the area, while others lived there only seasonally.

In addition, the Myakka River also provided a peaceful retreat for the aborigines, much as it did for many of the white men to follow. As these early peoples left no written history, we have no accounts of the many legends that may have revolved around the river that we know today as the Myakka.

PONCE DE LEON DISCOVERS CHARLOTTE HARBOR

A thoroughly documented manuscript, written in 1935 by Mr. T. Frederick Davis, reveals that Juan Ponce De Leon may have been the first European to explore the Charlotte Harbor area. Davis relies heavily on the historical documentation of Juan Ponce's exploration written by Antonio De Herrera in 1601. Herrera had been appointed in 1592 as the Official Historiographer of the Indies by King Phillip II of Spain.

Juan Ponce De Leon had served in the military of Spain and the West Indies until 1508 when he was appointed governor of Hispanola. In 1511, Juan Ponce was relieved of his governorship. With the permission of King Phillip II Juan Ponce set out to explore the mysterious lands north of the Indies.

Herrera, who it is believed, possessed Juan Ponce's log or diary, states that the explorer reached the North American continent in April of 1513. The point of discovery was in the area of the mouth of the St. John's River on the east coast. Herrera records the origin of the name "Florida" using words that may be those of Juan Ponce himself. Herrera writes: "they named it La Florida because it had a 'very beautiful view of many and cool woodlands and it was level and uniform,' and because moreover, they discovered it in the time of the Feast of Flowers (Pascua Florida)". At the same time the Indians of the Bahamas were calling this land "Cautio".

Juan Ponce proceeded south along the east coast of Florida seeking an area on the west coast where gold was rumored to exist in the possession of the Indians. Juan Ponce's expedition was in Biscayne Bay by May 13th of 1513 and by the 23rd of May was in the yet unnamed Charlotte Harbor area. Here, according to Herrera "he found the passage for vessels next to the coast into Carlos Sound and anchored off Pine Island...in this haven he careened the San Christoval, and later sent a boat to examine and sound a harbor nearby". Davis is certain that Juan Ponce "examined the region with a thought of future settlement". With this in mind it can be assumed that one of the exploratory scouting boats may have encountered the two major rivers flowing into the Harbor. These rivers that flow into Charlotte Harbor are the Peace, and the Myakka.

Herrera records that Juan Ponce was not only in search of gold, but also "went seeking that sacred fountain, so renowned among the Indians, and the river, whose waters rejuvenated the aged." This is among the earliest records mentioning the "Fountain of Youth" in Florida. Interestingly, Herrera also mentions the river that shared the fountain's rejuvenating effect. If it is assumed that Warm Mineral Springs is the ancient "Fountain of Youth" then it can also be assumed that the Myakka River, that ultimately accepts the water flowing from the spring, is the legendary river.

Juan Ponce remained in the Charlotte Harbor area until June 15th of 1513. He then returned to the West Indies and prepared for his second journey to "La Florida". Davis speculates that since Juan Ponce had considered the Charlotte Harbor area suitable for a settlement, the region was likely the destination of his second voyage. Davis speculates that "it is reasonable to suppose that Juan Ponce, having a cargo a part of which required prompt landing, would not have spent time unnecessarily to look for another location."

Herrera recorded that the second voyage and the attempt at settlement was foiled by the native Indians who "sallied out to oppose" Juan Ponce. A battle ensued and many of Juan Ponce's crew were killed, many others wounded. Juan Ponce, himself wounded, returned to Cuba where he died as a result of the battle. Had Juan Ponce's

second journey been successful it is possible that the earliest settlement of Europeans on the North American continent would have been in the immediate vicinity of Charlotte Harbor and the Myakka River.

BERNARD ROMANS CHARTS CHARLOTTE HARBOR

The first European to draft an accurate map of the Charlotte Harbor area, including the Peace and Myakka Rivers, was an Englishman named Bernard Romans.

A native of the Netherlands, Romans migrated to England in his youth. While in England he studied civil engineering and was recognized as a skilled draftsman by the British government. Romans may have journeyed to North America as early as 1757 during the French and Indian War. Working as a surveyor and draftsman he had varied assignments, ultimately surveying Amelia Island in Florida in 1766, shortly after Britain had acquired Florida from Spain.

At this time, two Surveyor Generals were appointed to chart North America. John Gerard William De Brahm was appointed Surveyor General of southern North America

which included the newly acquired state of Florida.

De Brahm chose Bernard Romans as his assistant in 1769.

During 1770 and 1771 Romans explored the coasts of Florida recording the topography as well as the vegetation and unique features. In 1775 Romans published the results of his labor in a book entitled "A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida". In his book, Romans accurately describes the Charlotte Harbor area for the first time. Romans recorded that Charlotte Harbor "contains a large river, which empties itself into the new harbour, of which I am the first explorer, we have given it the name of Charlotte Harbour, but neither harbour nor river have been described by the Spaniards in their maps..." The river described by Romans is now known as the Peace River.

Romans' map entitled "Part of the Province of East Florida" was printed with his book in 1775 and illustrates a remarkable similarity to maps drawn over one hundred years later. The map was the most accurate drawn up to this time, a result of the extensive exploration undertaken by Romans.

Charlotte Harbor is plainly identified on the map with two rivers flowing into it from the north. The river that is today the Peace, is labeled as the "Large River discovered by the Author". The second river, clearly today's Myakka River, is labeled "Creek discovered by Author". Depth soundings are shown throughout Charlotte

Harbor. The map indicates that the "Large River" or Peace River was not sounded although the "Creek" or Myakka River was. The Myakka River was sounded at eight points for a distance of at least two or three miles upstream. This may indicate that it was assumed that the "Large River" was deep, and that the "Creek" was sounded to determine it's potential for navigation. Certainly it indicates that Romans thoroughly explored the first few miles of the Myakka River, witnessing it's beauty and resources.

In addition to Romans' revolutionary map making abilities, he was a talented artist. During his time spent in Florida he recorded the many varieties of unique plants and animals that he discovered. While in Florida Romans was particularly interested in the Indians of the area and gives us a brief glimpse of the Indian situation in 1771 in the following passage from his book "These hills, among the dreary mangrove land, have apparently been the last retreat, and skulking places, of the Caloosa Savages, when their more potent neighbors, the Creeks, drove them off the continent." Thus in the late 1700's when Romans toured the area of Charlotte Harbor, the original residents had vanished and been replaced by the Creeks or Seminoles as well as a few cuban fishermen. As no one had recorded the name the original residents, the Caloosa Indians, had given to the river leading north from Charlotte Harbor it would be up left up to the later tribes to name it.

THE MYAKKA RIVER

When Juan Ponce De Leon discovered the Charlotte Harbor area he did not name the rivers that his crew may have discovered, perhaps expecting to learn the names from the native Indians, the Caloosas.

Bernard Romans, believed by himself to be the discoverer of Charlotte Harbor simply labeled the rivers "Discovered by the Author" as described in the preceeding chapter. He too perhaps expected to learn the names of the rivers from the Indians who inhabited the region at the time, the Creeks.

Following the publishing of Romans' book and map in 1775, a few cartographers labeled the river, that would later be called the Myakka, the "New Creek". At least one labeled the "Large River" on Romans' map, the Charlotte River, and this later became known as the Peace River.

Words sounding similar to Myakka appear as early as the 1500's according to early historians. John Lee Williams, in his book The Territory of Florida, published in 1837, records that during Hernando DeSoto's explorations in the Tampa Bay Area "he found an Indian chief named Macaco... and his province bore the same name."

Another recording of a name sounding like Myakka was by Hernando Fontanedo around 1575. Fontanedo, while exploring the east coast of Florida discovered a Timucuan Indian town north of Cape Canaveral bearing a similar name.

Several maps from the early 1800's show what is now lake Okeechobee as Lake Mayaco. This lake was surrounded in mystery as no white man had found it until the mid 1800's.

The Purcell map of 1792 shows what is now the Peace River as the Miaco River. This was based upon the assumption that this river led to the lake of that name, but in reality it did not. The Purcell map may be the first to record the name Miaco River even though it did not apply to the river of the name today.

The Tanner map of 1823 shows what is now the Myakka River as the Asternal River. This name continues to appear on Florida maps as late as the 1840's. The origin of this name is unknown. Asternal is defined as meaning "having no sternum, as in snakes and turtles". It is possible that the river was so named for it's abundant reptilian inhabitants.

The first recorded instance of the name Myakka being applied to the river of that name today was in 1843. At the mouth of the river, Deputy Surveyor Sam Reid encountered a group of Seminoles who told him the river was called the Miarca. The first map that shows the spelling Myakka appears in 1845. A map of Florida compiled by the Bureau of Topographical Engineers, a result of the state-wide township surveys of the early 1840's, shows the river as the Myakka. Sam Reid's recorded Miarca was modified to Myakka. On this map also is recorded the ancient name of the Myakka headwaters "Locha notia" or sleeping turtles.

Writers throughout the 1800's referred to the river as either the Myakka or the Miakka. The community that was established during the Civil War north of Upper Lake took the name Miakka and in 1878 when applying for a post office retained the original name. During the late 1800's what is now called Upper Lake was called either Miakka Lake or Myakka Lake. What is now the Lower Lake was called either Lower Lake or Vanderipe Lake, W.H. Vanderipe being one of the major stockmen of the area. Throughout the early 1900's the river would be called variously Miakka and Myakka. Today, the only evidence of the name Miakka, is the community of that name that was founded during the Civil War.

THE SEMINOLES

As early as 1771 Bernard Romans described Creek Indians living in the Tampa Bay area. Charles Tabeau, in his book A History of Florida states that "in 1767 the first band of Upper Creeks settled northeast of Tampa Bay". Tabeau also states that "the last major movement of Indians into Florida came after the Creek War in Alabama Territory in 1813-1814."

In the 1820's the subject of Indian removal to the west was a nationwide issue. In 1824 the Treaty of Moultrie Creek was signed by 32 chiefs of various tribes of Indians that had migrated to Florida and who were collectively called the Seminoles. The Treaty of Moultrie Creek provided for the establishment of a Reservation of four million acres within central Florida. The reservation stretched south to Charlotte Harbor with no part of it within twenty miles of the gulf or ocean. Also in 1824,

Fort Brooke was established in Tampa to maintain surveillance of the Seminoles. Seminoles were found living in the Peace River area in 1832 by an expedition of three men, W.R. Hackley, Col. Geo. W. Murray and P. B. Prior. James W. Covington, Ph.d., in his book The Story of Southwest Florida, notes that the party "visited Charlotte Harbor and the various nearby rivers and islands, they traveled in a small sloop named the 'Associate' which was commanded by Captain Bunce." John Lee Williams, in his book The Territory of Florida, reprinted excerpts from the log of the journey. One section describes their exploration of the Macaco River. Confusion surrounds which river the party actually explored. Evidence suggests that it was the Peace River.

On the 14th of September of 1832 the party encountered an "Indian settlement of three families" several miles up the "Macaco (Peace River). The Indians "stated that the head springs of the river were distant three days journey". The Indians also said that "around the head springs were some hundreds of Indians." Whether or not there were hundreds of Indians camped upstream is unknown as the party decided to conclude their exploration and within three days they were back at their sloop, the "Associate". It is likely that there were hundreds of Indians in the area, and many of them may have been camped along the nearby Myakka River.

John Lee Williams who was born in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1775 migrated to Florida in 1820 in search of a healthier climate. In 1823 Williams had helped to locate the new seat of government in Tallahassee.

Williams was inspired to write about the territory of Florida because of the lack of printed literature on the subject. In 1828 he visited the Charlotte Harbor area and recorded the topography as well as the animals and Indians that he encountered. Unfortunately Williams erred in his identification of the rivers leading into Charlotte Harbor. Basically, the river Williams describes as The Peace River was in fact the Asternal, later the Myakka. The river he describes as the Macaco was, in fact, the Peace, or Talackchopko as it was called then.

Williams recorded "When I visited Charlotte Bay in 1828, I found several native Indians, about the spanish fisheries" Williams continues "the Indians cultivate excellent lands...But in general, from the bay to the Peace River, (actually Myakka) the country is flat and rather poor, even as far south as Charlotte Bay."

Williams was perhaps the first writer to describe the early spanish cattle in the area. He wrote that "the native cattle are a large breed with broad horns and close, sleek hair. They often become very fat on the wild grass of the country." Williams also described the many wild animals in Florida at the time. Deer were

"numerous in almost every part of the state". Panthers were "numerous, very shy and rarely seen". Bears were "most numerous about the cane breaks, usually very fat". The snapping turtle "grows to a huge size". Williams described the alligator as "undoubtedly the ugliest creature living. Floating on the water he resembles a log". For food, the wild turkey stood "at the head of the festive board". Williams also writes that "the hound is extremely useful to the early settler on the frontier, and pointers and water-dogs are highly valued on the coast, where fowls are abundant".

Williams' map of 1837 shows a trail that led north from the mouth of the Peace River, along the east side of what was then the Asternal River, to the Little Manatee River and then to Fort Alabama, east of Tampa. Undoubtedly, this was a well used Seminole trail. The close proximity to the Asternal (Myakka) River illustrates the presence of the Seminoles in the region.

George E. Buker's book entitled Swamp Sailors, Riverine Warfare in the Everglades 1835-1842 describes Seminole War activities in Charlotte Harbor and the Myakka River. Buker writes that in March of 1836 the Revenue Cutter 'Washington' with Captain Ezekiel Jones in command departed for the Manatee River. Buker states that the goal of the Navy "was to perform a flankery and harassing action upon the Indians who were being driven southward along the west coast of Florida by the Army". Before

reaching the Manatee River, Captain Jones received orders to proceed instead to the Charlotte Harbor area. Buker records that "three days later the 'Washington' returned from it's inspection of Charlotte Harbor, and Captain Jones reported that on March 28th and 29th Lieutenant Smith had sighted an indian encampment at the mouth of the Myacca River. Smith could count 22 Seminoles at this camp and he could see many fires nearby." These were the only Seminoles encountered by the "Washington" in the Charlotte Harbor area.

↳ In 1837 Col. Zachary Taylor was put in charge of monitoring the Seminoles between the Caloosahatchee River north to the Withlacoochee River. Although the Myakka River lay within that region there is no record of Taylor ever patrolling near the river.

↳ Between 1837 and 1842 the U.S. Army continued in it's efforts to capture and expell the Seminole Indians from the State of Florida. The Armed Occupation Act of 1842 gave potential settlers 160 acres of land under the condition that they "bear arms" and thus help to rout the Indians from their holdouts. By January of 1844 the war was nearly over, at this time nearly 4,000 Seminoles had been removed to reservations west of the Mississippi River.

↳ Throughout the Seminole Indian Wars the Myakka River Valley Region remained largely unexplored. As a result a number

of Seminoles remained in the region and lived peacefully along the river's shores and in the neighboring hammocks and forests for a number of years.

SURVEYORS CHART THE WILDERNESS

In March of 1822 the United States Congress established Florida as a United States Territory. The task of surveying the newly created territory began in 1824 when base and meridian lines were established at Tallahassee. These lines would serve as a point of beginning for all of the survey work that would follow.

Surveyors first penetrated the Myakka River Valley Region in early 1843. Deputy Surveyor Henry Washington, with a small crew, extended a meridian line south from the Tallahassee base line, that separated ranges twenty-two and twenty-three. This meridian line, lying 132 miles east of Tallahassee, would serve as a reference point for all of the following surveys in this area. The meridian touched upon the Myakka River near it's headwaters which are now located in Manatee County. It is likely that the Myakka River provided Washington's crew with fish to eat as well as fresh water to drink.

Using Washington's meridian line as a reference, Deputy Surveyor Sam Reid, with a small crew, immediately began laying out the township and range lines of what is now Sarasota, Manatee, DeSoto and Charlotte counties. At that time the entire area was located within Hillsborough County. Reid's crew first encountered the Myakka River near it's headwaters in the same area surveyed by Washington's crew.

In February of 1843 Reid's crew was surveying the area of Lower Lake on the Myakka River. Reid's first range line touching on the Myakka River was the west boundary of township 38 south, range 20 east. Reid began at the southwest corner of the township, and while progressing to the north, encountered level wet pine and prairie land, hammocks and ponds. Reid recorded that the soil in the prairie land was no different than the soil in the pine land. He also recorded that the hammocks consisted of live oak, cabbage palm, maple, and bay trees. Having completed the west boundary Reid and crew had spent two days blazing a trail through six miles of wilderness, as well as making and placing six mile marker posts along the line.

Next Reid's crew surveyed the north boundary of the same township. To do this he began at Washington's meridian east of range twenty-two and worked west a township at a time. By the 14th of February, Reid was back in the Myakka River Valley Region. Here, near the

area now known as the Lower Lake, Reid found level wet prairie land, scattered pines, live oak and cabbage palm hammocks as well as grassland that Reid described as follows: "fine grazing, as the grass is luxuriant". Evidently, Reid was among the earliest white men to recognize the value of the Myakka River Valley Region as an excellent cattle grazing area.

Progressing north along the range line adjacent to the Lower Lake, Reid's crew encountered extensive prairie lands, as well as palmettos described as being "high and thick" and scattered pines. Reid's crew spent a great part of February and March of 1843 in the Myakka River Valley Region.

In their work surveying the region Reid's crew became intimately acquainted with the Myakka River. While they were surveying this area the Myakka River was both an obstacle and an asset to them. The river was an obstacle because it had to be crossed each time it was encountered while establishing lines. Yet the river was an asset to the crew for several reasons. Not only did it provide a rare place to bathe, but it also provided what was in many circumstances the only source of fresh water in the area. Game was plentiful in the hammocks adjacent to the river and the river itself provided an abundance of fish. The river also provided a respite from the monotonous pine and prairie lands that constituted a large part of the land being surveyed. Certainly the solace and beauty of

the river raised the spirits of the surveyors while they camped along it's shore.

Between March and November of 1843, Reid's crew was engaged in surveying land throughout Hillsborough County. During this time they did not enter the Myakka River Valley Region. It wasn't until December of 1843 that they once again encountered the Myakka River. At this time they were surveying township 40 south, range 21 east. This township now lies within Charlotte County. Where the Myakka River enters this township, Reid's crew encountered a group of Indians on the east bank. The Indians, who were Seminoles, told Reid that the river was called the "Miarca" and that it had it's head in a large pond to the northwest. This is the first recorded instance where the name Myakka is applied to the river, although the spelling is somewhat different.

While surveying township 40 south, range 20 east Reid's crew once again came to the bank of the "Miarca" River and noted that pines grew right up to the bank and that in the river was a narrow strip of salt marsh along each shore. At this point, where the river is approximately one half mile wide, Reid records that "the river is more an arm of the bay than a river". While surveying south of the river Reid recorded that while the "whole country is covered in water owing to the wet season, we find it difficult to get water to drink".

After reaching the southernmost point of township 40 south, range 20 east, Reid's crew back tracked north along their line to the northeast corner of the township. It was New Year's Day of 1844 when Reid's crew began progressing to the west along the north boundary of the township. Here Reid's crew crossed a creek that in 1849 would be called the Myakkahatchee and later would be called Big Slough. Less than a mile from their point of beginning the crew encountered the salt marsh of the "Miarca" River. Reid described the river at this point as follows "the river...has no current other than the tide, water of salt, it is but an arm of Charlotte Harbor".

By the 2nd of January of 1844 Reid and his crew were nearing the completion of their survey work in the Myakka River Valley Region. Certainly they had admired the river for it's beauty as well as it's resources. During their work in the region Reid and his crew had crossed the river as many as a dozen times and camped along it's shores frequently.

An 1845 map of Florida compiled by the Bureau of Topographical Engineers, reflects the great advancement in the exploration of South Florida due to the early 1840's township surveys. This map is the first accurate representation of both the inland areas and the coastal areas of the state of Florida. Additionally, on this map appears the name Myakka River for the first time. This was, of course, a result of Sam Reid's 1843 township survey.

It is interesting to note that between 1843 and 1845 the spelling of the river changed from Miarca to Myakka. This was perhaps due to clarification after the original survey in 1843. Two other features recorded on the 1845 map are of interest. The headwaters of the Myakka River are called "Locha-notia" translated to mean "Sleeping Turtle". Also east of the Myakka is located a prominent Indian mound or "bone heap".

Three years after Sam Reid had completed his township survey in 1844, Deputy Surveyor A. H. Jones was engaged in 1847 to survey and establish the section corners within the previously established townships. In April of 1847 A. H. Jones and three assistants went to work with axe, Gunter's chain, Surveying compass to accurately plot the corners and lines of the Sections within township 36 south, range 18 east. Today this township includes the entire downtown Sarasota area. Thomas Zimmer was the axe man who was responsible for clearing sights through the wilderness. The chainmen, Frederick Loring and Frank Reys, were responsible for accurately measuring the miles of lines that were established. The crew was paid \$60.00 per township for running over 60 miles of lines through the wilderness as well as making and placing over 25 corner posts.

While surveying the small portion of township 36 south, range 17 east along the bayfront, Jones' crew encountered the home of William H. Whitaker and labeled it "Snell's

House" after Hamlin Snell who was assisting Whitaker in establishing the homesite.

Prior to the establishment of the government survey, Whitaker had established in 1842 a home on the shore of Sarasota Bay in an area known as Yellow Bluffs. Whitaker soon became engaged in the profitable business of selling salted mullet to cuban traders. Whitaker was perhaps among the first white settlers to visit the Myakka River, and explore the Myakka River Valley Region. Whitaker had probably been told about the river by some of the other settlers who were living in the region of the Manatee River. Whitaker had obviously realized the potential of the Myakka River Valley Region for raising cattle, as he imported one of the first cattle herds into the region in 1847. From a small beginning the herd grew to large proportions and was known throughout south Florida by it's brand, "47". In addition, the Myakka River Valley Region possibly supported several herds at this time, owned by residents of the Manatee River area, as well as wild range cattle.

By May of 1847 Jones' crew had progressed to the east establishing the section corners within township 36 south, range 19 east and township 36 south, range 20 east. The southeast corner of this township was briefly touched by the Myakka River. It is within this township that the

community of Miakka would be established a decade later in the 1850's.

The next township to be surveyed was township 37 south, range 20 east, directly south of the last one surveyed. This township today forms the nucleus of the Myakka River State Park, and includes both Upper and Lower Lakes.

Here Jones and crew encountered the most diverse land so far during their surveying work in this area. North of what is now Upper Lake they encountered many small creeks or tributaries of the Myakka River. While surveying sections 11, 10 and 9 the crew went from open saw palmetto land to low wet marsh land and then came across the lake. Here in the lake they placed their $\frac{1}{2}$ mile posts and section corner posts in two feet of water. To the south of section 11 was open land covered with saw palmettos.

Within section 10 lies the main body of the lake and in the southwest corner of the section the crew found a substantial hammock, and further west, a wet marsh. On the southern boundary of section 10 was placed another $\frac{1}{2}$ mile post, in two feet of water. The majority of section 9 was third rate pine land except for the southeast $\frac{1}{4}$ which was marsh. Ponds were encountered throughout the fringing pine lands.

The east side of the river between Upper and Lower Lakes was lined with approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of marsh. The marsh gave way to open palmetto land and ultimately pine land.

On the western side of the river between Upper and Lower Lakes was located an area of raised pine lands measuring about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ mile wide. On the west side of this pine "island" was $\frac{1}{2}$ mile of marsh and cane grass. This marsh surrounded the pine "island" on the north, west and to the south. Connecting the Upper Lake and the pine "island" was an extensive hammock. The entire marshy area on both the east and west side of the river funneled down to the lower lake.

While surveying the western boundary of section 22, Jones' crew came across 25 alligators "in one gang". The alligators, it appears did not deter the surveyors from their work. Between Upper and Lower Lakes the surveyors crossed the river 8 times. At one point where the river took a rather winding path the river had to be crossed four times in less than $\frac{1}{2}$ mile in running the section line.

The survey of township 37 south, range 20 east was completed by Jones' crew on June 8th, 1847. Jones recorded the river on the plat of township 37 south, range 20 east as the "Miacca". This naming was apparently out of neglect to check the spelling on the previous survey. While surveying the township they had encountered diverse environments, as well as areas of great natural beauty.

They proceeded to the south and began work surveying township 38 south, range 20 east. The Myakka River was encountered briefly while they were surveying the extreme

northwest corner of the township. Here the river bisected sections 6 and 7. On the western side were found hammocks of oak and palm. On the eastern side was found a marshy area that extended from $\frac{1}{2}$ to one mile to the east. The majority of the land surveyed within this township consisted of open pine land and prairie.

The next township surveyed by Jones was township 39 south, range 20 east. The Myakka cut diagonally through this section in a southeasterly direction. Upon entering the township in the northwest corner the river was lined on the eastern bank by hammock for approximately three miles. Along the way small tributaries branched off of the river with hammocks around them. For one mile below the hammocks there was open pine land along the shore. For the last four miles the rivers course through this township, the eastern and western shore was lined with marsh, widening from $\frac{1}{8}$ of a mile to as much as $\frac{1}{2}$ of a mile on each side of the river. Two miles before the river exited the township a major tributary branched off to the northeast. This is today known as Deer Prairie Creek. At this point Jones recorded in his notes that the water in the river was salty. Below this point the marsh widened to a width of nearly a mile, with the Myakka River flowing through the center.

Jones and crew completed surveying this township on June 29th, 1847. From here they proceeded to the west, in order to survey township 38 south, range 19 east as well

as township 39 south, range 19 east. Here, while surveying sections 12, 13, 24, 25 and 36 Jones' crew once again encountered the Myakka River. Here the river was uniformly lined with scrub oak hammock for an average distance of $\frac{1}{4}$ mile on each side. Beyond the scrub hammock the country was described as being third rate pine land. A great deal of the pine land was described as being wet. Within section 14 the crew encountered Cowpen Slough as it entered the Myakka River. This slough was described as "saw grass pond and savanna".

This was the last township surveyed by Jones' crew in the vicinity of the Myakka River. From here they proceeded west and through July and August of 1847 surveyed the coastal areas of Sarasota County. Considering the small number of settlers in the area it is safe to say that at this point Jones and crew were as familiar with the Myakka River Valley Region as any other white men.

The next survey crew to encounter the Myakka River was under the direction of Deputy Surveyor John M. Irwin. Irwin came prepared with a four man crew. His assistants were William E. Goff, Mark B. Goff, Henry Hilliard and Stephen Howard. Irwin's crew began in the northeast corner of township 40 south, range 20 east in April of 1849, nearly two years after Jones' crew had surveyed the area to the north.

When Irwin encountered the river the water level was higher than it was during the Jones' survey. The area described as marsh in 1847, was simply "the Myakka River" in 1849, the marsh being totally submerged. Irwin recorded sand bars or islands in this wide portion of the Myakka River. The river at this point was impassable, and this interfered with the surveyor's goal of laying out 36, 1 square mile sections within each township. Since Irwin could not establish sections within the river, he was required to establish the meanderline along the shoreline of the river. Later, the land adjacent to the meanderline would be subdivided into government lots. These lots measured $\frac{1}{4}$ of a square mile or $\frac{1}{8}$ of a square mile, with some parcels of smaller size. Irwin's evident frustration is illustrated in a brief remark recorded in his notes describing the land as "worthless saltmarsh".

Irwin's summary of the entire township is as follows, "It is only third rate quality and good only for it's fine timber and being a good range for cattle and hogs." Irwin's crew continued working in this area through June and possibly into July.

With the completion of this survey virtually the entire Myakka River Valley Region had been subdivided into townships that measured six miles square, and within these, thirty-six sections measuring one mile square. These lines would serve as reference points for all survey work to be performed in the future. Four crews, led by Washington,

Reid, Jones and Irwin had fought all odds and successfully
platted a major portion of southwest Florida. Never
again would the Myakka River Valley Region be labeled
"Unexplored Land".

MIAKKA

It was obvious to those who knew a good cattle range that the land surrounding the Myakka River was some of the finest in the southeast. It appears that the river may have had the same rising and falling replenishing effect as the Nile River in Egypt. An early description of this phenomenon appears in a publication of 1875. "Back from the (Myakka) lakes stretches a large extent of low country, which, being entirely submerged during the rainy season, gradually appears as the waters shrink, and is quickly covered with grass as the mud dries. This grass extends from the water's edge to the higher prairie and pine-land, and affords excellent pasture to numerous herds of cattle...the cattle become proportionately fat as they feed on the rich grasses of the lowlands."

The Seminole Indians were the first stockmen in the Myakka River Valley Region. They tended the wild range cattle that were descended from cattle brought to Florida by the early European explorers such as Hernando DeSoto and Juan Ponce De Leon. During the early 1800's the Seminoles built up sizeable herds. It is likely that the Myakka River was known by the Seminoles to be an excellent grazing region.

During the 1840's white settlers along the Manatee River would allow their cattle to wander in the Myakka River Valley Region.

William Whitaker is credited as being the first settler to establish cattle in the Myakka Region, although it is certain that there were others before him. Whitaker brought 10 cows from Dade County and ran them on the rangeland adjacent to the river. The year Whitaker brought his cattle to the region has been preserved in his cattle brand, "47". After building up a sizeable herd, Whitaker began selling some of his cattle to Tampa markets. Whitaker would bring in his cattle from the Myakka River and load them onto boats that stopped at a dock on the bayfront near Whitaker's home on Yellow Bluffs.

Another stockman aware of the cattle raising potential of the Myakka River was W. H. Vanderipe. Vanderipe, a native of Kentucky, settled on the Manatee River in the early 1850's. Sometime before or during the Civil War

Vanderipe established a herd of cattle in the Myakka Region. Vanderipe owned over a thousand acres adjacent to the river between Upper and Lower Lake. In the 1870's and perhaps earlier the Lower Lake was also referred to as Vanderipe Lake, undoubtedly because Venderipe's cattle ranged there, as he did not own the lake itself. Vanderipe's obituary, appearing in August of 1901, proclaimed "He was one of the old landmarks having come to the Manatee River in the early fifties...and at the time of his death was perhaps the largest cattle owner in the county." A history of Manatee County written in 1914 reveals the following, "It is said that every year a child was born he gave it every calf that was born that year, and all the increase, so that the child had a good start in life upon arriving at age."

" Another stockman to recognize the value of the Myakka Region as a cattle range was Rev. Jesse Knight. Knight, a native of Georgia and an unordained methodist preacher, migrated to Florida in 1852 in search of available land for cattle ranging. He brought his family and cattle to Hillsborough County where he established a home. The area where Knight settled was later known as Knight's Station, and is now known as Plant City.

During the Civil War Knight moved his herd from Hillsborough County to newly created Manatee County, in order to protect his cattle from maurauding Union Soldiers.

He employed his brother in-law Shadrack "Shade" Hancock to manage his cattle at Miakka, a small settlement along the Myakka River. His herd numbered around three hundred head.

Shade Hancock, a native of Georgia, was a skilled stockman and he managed Knight's cattle well. Along the Myakka River Knight's cattle herd multiplied steadily.

Another major cattle owner during the Civil War was a man named William Addison. Addison together with William Curry, was captured by Union Soldiers in the Charlotte Harbor area on August 8th, 1863. Both Addison and Curry were charged with attempting to escape Confederate conscript officers. A report that was made regarding the incident stated that "Addison lives near the Myacca River, owns a large stock farm and about a thousand head of cattle, and is exempt from the Confederate conscript law." Both Addison and Curry were accused of being "rebels and traitors to the United States Government." Not much else is known about William Addison, yet owning a thousand head of cattle would certainly qualify him as one of the major stockmen in the area at that time.

The Myakka River Valley Region played an important part in the Civil War as a source of beef for both Confederate and Union troops. It appears from the following account that the Confederate troops were being steadily supplied with cattle from the Myakka and Peace River area.

On December 23rd, 1863 Federal General Woodbury reported that "2,000 head of cattle...are being driven out of Florida every week for use of the rebel armies. Probably half of these are driven from middle and lower Florida". General Woodbury's report continues "A military detachment...has been sent to Charlotte Harbor to commence a nucleus of operation in that neighborhood". The detachments objective was to somehow cut off this vitally needed food supply to the Confederacy. The detachment landed on Christmas Day 1863 "six miles from the Myakka River". Two days later Confederate troops fired a shot into the camp of the "Federals". Three days later the Confederate troops struck again this time "advancing through the tall grass towards them. The Confederates opened fire, concentrating their guns to the right as they attempted to cut the Federals off from their boats. The "Rosalie", recently arrived in Charlotte Harbor, turned her guns on the Southerners, enabling the Union soldiers to escape." Federal Admiral Bailey, attempting to restore morale among the Union troops stated that the "little affair on the Myacca River...was unimportant either in numbers or in results."

No amount of action by the Union forces could prevent the production and distribution of cattle grazing in the Myakka Region. During the Civil War the Myakka Region would prove to be an ideal cattle raising district. Shortly after the Civil War several more stockmen would establish their herds along the Myakka River. Those stockmen

that were pioneers in the region would expand their herds considerably. At this time virtually every stockman in Manatee County had a few cattle grazing along the Myakka.

In the 1860's Garrett "Dink" Murphy was attracted to the Myakka Region. Murphy also was attracted by the fine grazing lands adjacent to the river. An early 1900's newspaper article states that "he realized the importance of pastures on his cattle and while lands were cheap, purchased several thousand acres of the choicest grazing lands in the Miakka Valley. These were fenced and for years he has reaped the reward of his wisdom." Murphy purchased land south and east of Upper Lake and had a tract of several thousand acres.

One of the stockmen who sought even greater prospects for the Myakka River was Jesse Knight. Knight, who had moved his cattle to the Myakka Region during the Civil War, decided to move himself and his family, south into Manatee County in 1868. Knight and his cow handler Shade Hancock decided to move Knight's cattle down to an area between the bay and the Myakka River. Starting in Hillsborough County with five wagons, and two buggies, the caravan containing three families, traveled over established routes and trails to Miakka, the home of "Shade" Hancock as well as a few other hardy souls. Here Hancock assisted in preparing for the trip south to an area known as Horse & Chaise.

From Miakka to Horse and Chaise there was no trail. Hancock led the way through the open pine lands, wet prairies and hammocks along the west side of the Myakka River.

Lillie B. McDuffee, in her book The Lures of Manatee describes the ability of Hancock in guiding the caravan successfully to it's destination. "From the Miakka to the gulf there was not a suggestion of a road but the old cowherder, true to form, sensed the direction he wanted to go and guided his followers over the trackless waste of open prairies, scrub palmettos, pines and heavily-wooded stretches, resorting to the pioneer methods of blazing a few trees to make a way for the wagons. "

Knight's caravan proceeded south along the west side of the Myakka River and then turned to the west. The trail they blazed through the wilderness cut through the southeast corner of township 37 south, range 19 east. It then meandered in a southwestern direction toward an uninviting obstacle known today as Cowpen Slough.

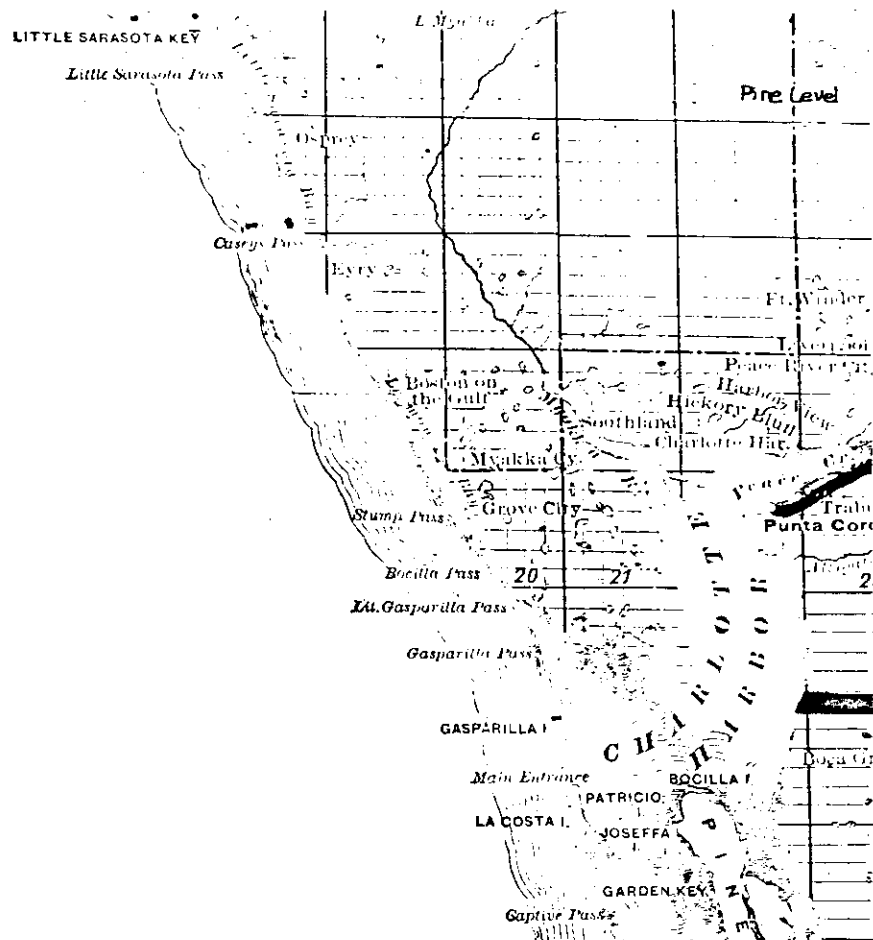
As proven by the Government Surveyors in the 1840's the slough was crossable, yet the trail was unpleasant and slowed the caravan considerably. After crossing the slough the caravan entered open pine land and while traveling toward the west, forded a small creek and blazed a trail through open pines and hammocks.

Knight and party continued along the north bank of a creek that led to the bay. When Knight realized that the creek was widening to join the bay they searched for a shallow spot to cross. As Knight approached the creek the lead mules would not budge and in an effort to coax them across Knight's son Bill took an old deerhide and shook it behind the mules. The crackling given off by the shaking hide caused the mules to bolt across the creek. Other animals followed and in the rush many of the Knight's belongings were thrown into the creek. The event was an unexpected disaster, yet all their belongings were recovered. It was at this time that Shaket Creek received it's name, a name that survives today.

The Knights, along with the Collinses and Fletchers, established their home on the area known today as Nokomis, just south of Shaket Creek. Knight had chosen this particular area for a homesite for several reasons. The greatest of which was that the land was naturally suitable for cattle raising.

Sometime after settling at Horse & Chaise, Hancock and Knight constructed a split rail fence from Shaket Creek east to the Miakka River. The fence was built at a point where the creek and the river come within three miles of each other. This fence was effective in providing Knight with the largest cattle 'pen' on the lower west coast of Florida. The pen was bounded on the west by the Gulf of

Mexico and Lemon Bay, on the south by Charlotte Harbor, on the east by the Myakka River and on the North by the Knight fence. This pen contained over one hundred fifty square miles of land.



The boundaries of the Knight Cattle Pen overlaid in red on a portion of a 1890 map of Manatee County. The approximate location of the Knight fence is illustrated in blue.

In the years that followed, Knight's cattle would flourish on the fenced peninsula. At one time Knight had as many as twenty-two thousand head of cattle on the land. Only a small amount of the rangeland belonged to Knight.

The majority belonged to the State of Florida and small amounts were owned by settlers. Cattle were free to roam the open range. To identify his cattle from any others that might enter the area, Knight had a brand that marked all his cattle.

The trail originally blazed by Hancock and Knight in 1868 would continue to be used for nearly fifty years as the main artery between Horse & Chaise, Miakka, Pine Level and Manatee. Knight, an unordained preacher, made frequent trips throughout the county, particularly Miakka and Manatee. Settlers coming into the area would also use the trail as it provided the only route between the coast and Miakka.

The community of Miakka was established sometime prior to 1868, some sources say as early as 1850. The settlement consisted of at least five families in 1868. There early settlers included Shade Hancock's family, James Vanderipe's, and his son's families, the Chapmans as well as other individuals and several cow handlers.

One of the early residents of Miakka was Capt. John L. "Doc" Hough, a native of Mississippi and a Confederate veteran. A newspaper article from the turn of the century reveals that "Doc" Hough "for thirty-six years has trampled the swamps, glades and prairies of Manatee County, slaying wolves, bear, deer and turkeys. He came for game."

Although worship services had been held at Miakka in earlier years, Miakka did not have a church or a school, until around 1875. According to a history of the United Methodist Church it was a "small one room log structure" that "was used as a school during the week and a church on Sunday". The early church was served by itinerate preachers".

By 1878 many additional settlers had arrived in Miakka. The community had grown to be one of the larger settlements away from the coastline. The name Miakka applied to a rather large area, yet the majority of the settlers owned land within the four sections in the southeast corner of township 36 south, range 20 east.

In July of 1878 Augustus M. Wilson established the area's first postoffice in the community of Miakka. A History of the Miakka Post Office written in 1915 by Mr. Wilson reveals that "at the time there were but three postoffices southeast of Miakka". These were "Pine Level, Fort Ogden, and Fort Meyers. All of the mail for these offices passed through the Miakka office which made a lot of work for the Postmaster". As recorded in 1915 by J. H. Simpson, A. M. Wilson was "an enterprising man, and has been an important factor in the history of Manatee County, not only on account of his long residence but as one of it's prominent citizens".

The spirit of the early pioneers of Miakka is expressed in this Manatee County Newspaper article from the turn of the century. "These early settlers of Manatee County ...laid aside...the luxuries of life to hew out for themselves a new district in the wilderness of Florida. Some came for game, some in search of health, others for wealth. Nearly every one of them succeeded in obtaining all three."

THE SPORTSMAN'S PARADISE

In the 1870's the Myakka River Valley Region came to be known as paradise for hunting and fishing. Not only local citizens, but out of state hunters as well would be attracted to the area by the abundance of game. It is fortunate that many individuals who visited the Myakka River for recreation, were inspired to write about their adventures. A number of books contain the published results of their dedication to preserving their impressions of this sportmans' paradise.

One of these sportsmen turned author was an Englishman, Mr. F. Trench Townshend. Townshend, accompanied by Mr. Edmund A. Mansfield arrived in Florida during January of 1874, having come from Savannah, Georgia. Their route took them by steamer to Jacksonville and Fernandina then by train to Cedar Key and by some type of water craft to Manatee.

The following text includes many quotations from Mr. Townshend's book Wildlife in Florida published in England in 1875.

At Manatee, the gentlemen were told about the Myakka region "a part of the country where we were assured large game was abundant." Immediately they embarked for the Myakka region "having procured, for a consideration of six dollars a day, a wagon and mule team with an intelligent youth to drive and guide us." On the way to the Myakka region: "about two miles an hour was our traveling pace as we had no roads, only a sandy track across the plain where the roots of the saw-palmetto made our advance slow and difficult." While traveling "through the pine-islands the great sand-hill cranes stalked majestically, their deep whoop resounding for miles through the air."

After several hours of traveling the party arrived around midnight at the home of Dr. Huff, a stockman and farmer, who lived near Upper Lake. Dr. Huff's farm "consisted of a few acres planted with Indian corn, tomatoes, melons, and sweet potatoes, all in a flourishing condition, while 'round the house were a few orange-trees, guavas, and bananas." Dr. Huff, living alone in the wilderness, welcomed the company of his three unexpected guests and prepared a small feast for the occasion. Recollecting

the occasion, Townshend wrote "if the fare was scanty, the grace was long".

Rising early the next morning, the Englishmen were quick to explore their new surroundings. One of the unique trees in the area was the cabbage palm. Townshend records his first impression of the stately palm in this description: "Rising in a straight and graceful trunk to a height varying from 60 to 120 feet without a branch, it then bursts into a mass of dark-green fan-shaped leaves".

As the party was admiring the surroundings and remarking about the fine cattle prospects of the region "a curious character arrived at Dr. Huff's ...a Texan horse dealer with a 'bunch' of thirty-five horses...driven all the way from the plains of western Texas." The horse dealer's intent being to feed the horses along the Myakka River and then sell them in a healthier condition.

Still in search of game they arranged with a local hunter they met, "that he should accompany us as guide, in an attempt to descend the Miakka River in their cypress-tree canoe". The destination was "a creek flowing into the main river, by ascending which we could reach a famous salt-spring where he assured us game abounded." In preparation of the long journey "a large stone jar was then filled with fresh water from a small creek which flowed into the Myakka at the base of a high (indian) mound."

The party, Townshend, Mansfield and their guide, Murray, embarked on the river where the water "was tidal, rising and falling some three feet with the tide." As the party paddled "rapidly and smoothly...over the lonely river" they witnessed "hundreds of alligators, water turkey's or snake birds and kingfishers (that) darted hither and thither, apparently bewildered by the strange sight of a canoe full of men." The Englishmen were overwhelmed by the great natural beauty of the area, including the "beautiful ferns and tall lillies (that) fringed the water's edge".

On the second day out the party came "to the mouth of a creek...on the east side of the river, which our guide called Slough Creek...and said we could ascend it to within a couple of miles of the salt-spring". The party found the creek to be "swarming with alligators in incredible numbers". Remarking on the shy nature of these unique reptiles Townshend recorded "and were these animals not as cowardly as they are formidable in appearance, we, the first white men ever known to have ascended Slough Creek in a boat, should not have lived to tell the tale."

After a meal of coffee, biscuits and salt pork the party left the creek and preceeded north in search of "a certain 'bee-tree' which grew on the edge of the prairie." Murray, using the bee tree as a guide, "pointed out a clump of timber about three miles distant...as the spot where we should find the Salt Spring."

Having finally arrived at what is now known as Warm Mineral Springs, the party "found the spring consisted of a circular basin about 60 yards in diameter" Mr. Townshend, out of curiosity, sunk a thermometer into the water and found that the temperature was 90°. The air temperature was 82°. The water which "was clear as a crystal" contained a large alligator.

While exploring the outlets of the spring and the adjacent hammocks, Townshend suddenly found himself "within three paces of a black bear". Townshend recorded "I confess that I was horribly frightened at the sight of the bear, but so, fortunately, was the bear of the sight of me."

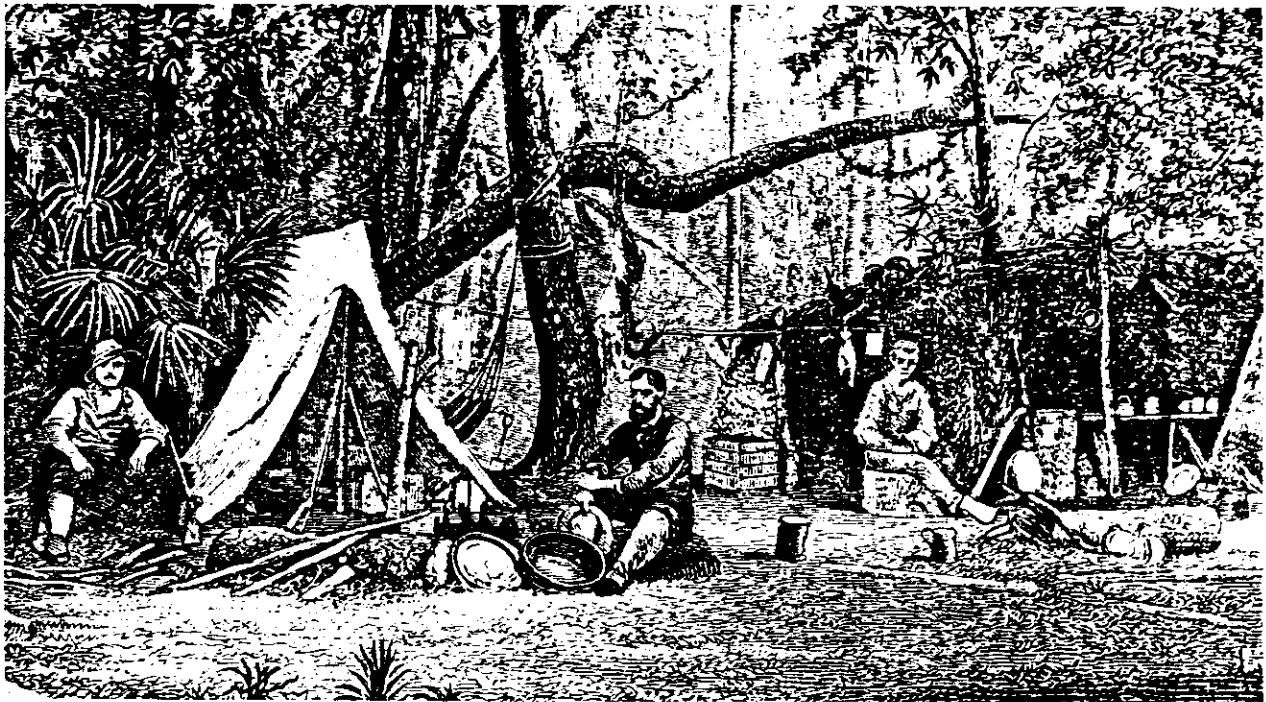
After hunting for deer "tame enough to get within an easy shot" the party "observed a large animal trotting toward us, we perceived from it's tawny grey colour... that it was a puma or Florida panther."

After observing the cattle of the region Townshend noted that the domestic cattle "being collected every year for numbering and branding, showed no sign of fear of the approach of man" whereas, the wild cattle "would observe the greatest caution before venturing from the shelter of the forest."

While canoeing the southern portion of the river, the party observed "hundreds of wild ducks, pelicans, flamingos, great white egrets, roseate spoonbills, ibis,

blue and snowy herons that "filled us with no less wonder than pleasure."

Having ventured throughout the Myakka River Valley Region for well over a month, Townshend and Mansfield proceeded to other areas of Florida. Of all of the locations visited by the Englishmen, the Myakka River was one well represented in Townshends book Wildlife in Florida as five whole chapters were devoted to their adventures in this region.



Engraving from book Wildlife in Florida entitled "Camp in Miakka Swamp".

While the expedition had been undertaken to enjoy the excellent hunting of the region, it is obvious from the following passage that the Englishmen went away from the river with more than what they had expected.

"As the evening sun touched with gold the rich green tops of the palms, and brightened the sombre hues of the live-oaks festooned with grey masses of spanish moss, and relieved by the bright green leaves of the wild vine and crimson and white blossoms of the parasitic air-plant, while it reflected it's own glowing image in the dark water, until we seemed to be floating in a river of fire, I thought my mortal eyes would never look on any more gorgeous display of tropical colouring."

Another author to publish his experiences in book form was Mr. G. E. Shields. Mr. Shields' book Hunting in the Great West or Rustlings in the Rockies was published in 1883 and reflects upon hunting adventures during the 1870's. While the majority of the book is concerned with the area of the Rocky Mountains, one chapter, entitled "Four Days on the Myakka River" is devoted to adventures in this area.

After visiting Jacksonville, Patlaka and St. Augustine, Shields embarked for the Sarasota Bay area. After spending a short time on Snead's Island, Shields proceeded to Osprey in order to lodge at Webb's Winter Resort. It appears that it was the Myakka River that had attracted Shields to Florida as he states in his book "for several years past I have heard the praises of this mystic region sung by sportsmen who have visited it and experienced it's

charms". This statement indicates that perhaps as early as the 1860's the Myakka River Valley Region had attracted nation-wide attention as a superb hunting ground. Many of Shields' recorded impressions of the trip are worth repeating.

"According to previous arrangement Jack (Webb) harnessed the horse and hitched him to the cart. We loaded in our tent, blankets, provisions, ammunition, etc; he took the lines and we were off for a four days' camp hunt on the Myakka River."

It appears from the pace of their traveling that they were following the Venice-Miakka trail that was at this time a well established route.

"We left home (Webb's Winter Resort) at half past ten in the morning. Our route lay through a tract of open pine woods, the monotony of which was relieved by ponds scattered along the entire distance, at each of which we got a shot or two at the large water birds, which always hover around them."

"At a half-past one o'clock we arrived at the scene of one of Billy Bowleg's old camping grounds during his war with the U. S. troops. He gave it the poetical name of Coughpennslough; and it is said that one of his favorite warriors lies buried not far from here..."

Having covered quite a distance the men's minds turned to food, but as their box of provisions was located in the bottom of their cart, they took a lesson from Jack Webb and learned to enjoy "swamp cabbage". "So we took out an ax (sic) and cut down a palmetto-tree, split it open and took out the central portion-the bud-a core three to four inches in diameter and 18 to 20 inches long. This 'Palmeeter Cabbage', as the crackers call it, is really delicious in flavor and highly nutritious."

"When we got within two and a half miles of the river we stopped and cut a liberal supply of light wood to take with us, as no pine grows nearer the stream than this."

"We loaded our 'lightard' into the cart and drove on. After going half a mile we emerged upon a beautiful broad prairie some two miles wide. Upon the further side of this we saw a strip of heavy timber through which runs the river."

"We pushed on across the prairie and at 3:00 entered a grove of tall, stately live-oaks on the bank of the long looked-for and anxiously-sought Myakka River, and pitched our tent. And what a lovely site for a camp! It is on a high bank where the river makes a horse-shoe bend, and we are in the toe of the shoe, so-to-speak. The massive live-oaks stand close together...and the long, grey, Spanish moss hanging to within a few feet of the ground."

Upon surveying the region adjoining the river, Shields, obviously satisfied with the area, proclaimed "this is indeed the happy hunting ground--the sportsman's paradise."

Shields writings indicate that he was so captivated by the beauty of some of the birds in the area that he had no desire to shoot them. Shields witnessed various species including roseate spoonbills, wood ibis, white egrets and grey herons and while recollecting the event recorded "as they hovered over us we stood and contemplated the scene in silent awe and admiration, our guns were at parade rest."

After four days of hunting and exploring the party broke camp. Shields recorded "about one o'clock pm we reluctantly bade adieu to the enchanting Myakka, with all it's charming associations; it's great live-oak forests; it's dense sea-ash thickets; it's everglades; it's flaming hued water birds; it's deer; it's turkey, and the thousand and one other attractions that render it so dear to a sportsman and lover of nature.

In summarizing his four days spent on the Myakka, Shields wrote the following "I can never hope to experience more genuine pleasure in so short a period of time than I did in this four days on the Myakka River. I shall ever cherish it in my memory as one of the brightest, most romantic and exciting episodes of my life."

LAND OWNERSHIP AND GROWTH

The 1840's township surveys had found a large amount of south Florida in need of drainage. An act of Congress dated September 28th, 1850 granted the ownership of the public federal land in this state to the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of Florida. Known as the "Swamp Land Act", this act specified that all of the transferred land must be improved by drainage.

It wasn't until 1883 that a large amount of land in this area came into private ownership. In 1881 Hamilton Disston had rescued the State of Florida from debt by purchasing from the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of Florida four million acres of "swamp land" for one million dollars.

The text of a speech, presented by T. Frederick Davis at the annual meeting of the Florida Historical Society at

St. Petersburg on January 25th, 1938, describes the historic Disston Land Purchase.

"The terms of the contract required a down payment of \$200,000 and the balance at stated intervals, the whole to be paid on or before January 1, 1882. Upon the initial payment two hundred fifty thousand acres were to be deeded at once to Mr. Disston."

"Mr. Disston signed the contract June 14, 1881, and on or before September 1 he had paid five hundred thousand dollars"

"The money was immediately put to work in satisfying the most pressing claims against the Fund. In anticipation of this, and thereby the release of lands for railroad grants, ten or more companies were already making preparation for railroad construction in Florida. Among them, and probably the most extensive, were interests represented by E.J. Reed. Through preliminaries not now definitely known, Reed and Disston arranged an inter-agreement affecting the Disston purchase contract."

"On December 17, 1881 Hamilton Disston and Edward J. Reed of the County of Kent, England entered into an agreement with the consent of the trustees of the I.I. Fund whereby Sir Edward (as he was known in England) was to complete the payments due under the Disston purchase contract, that was \$500,000 not later than July 1, 1882 the trustees having extended the time limit for final payment. Under the arrangement the payments were to be made directly to the Fund, in sums satisfactory to the trustees, and when so made were to be credited to the Disston purchase contract; acceptance of bona fide obligations of the Fund at par as cash still prevailed. When full payment had been made to the Fund, Reed was to receive from Disston two million acres or one-half of the Disston purchase, to be selected as follows: Disston to first select one million five hundred thousand of the four million acres, then Reed to select his two million from the remainder in bodies of ten thousand acres."

A fee simple deed dated the third of February 1883 and signed by the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida conveyed 246,052 acres to Hamilton Disston and his corporation, the Florida Land and Improvement Company. Ltd. This was one of several deeds issued to Hamilton Disston that totalled two million acres.

Hamilton Disston's company, the Florida Land and Improvement Company, was not the only large owner of land in the Myakka River Valley Region. A section of the "Swamp Land Act" specified that railroads would be given 10,000 acres of land for each mile of railway they put into operation.

A legislative act of the State of Florida entitled "an act to grant certain lands to the Tampa, Peace Creek and St. Johns River Railroad Company" was signed into effect on March 4, 1879 and served as an application for the conveyance of 10,000 acres of land for each mile of railway this company planned to build.

By 1883 the "Tampa, Peace Creek and St. Johns River Railroad Company" had changed it's name to "Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad Company". Work on the railway had stalled. On May 4, 1883 Henry B. Plant took over the operations of the "Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad Company" and forged ahead with the construction of the railroad from Tampa to Kissimmee. By December of 1884 the railroad, with port connections at Sanford, was in operation. This was south west Florida's first modern transportation connection with New England and the Island of Cuba.

Ownership of thirty-nine townships in DeSoto, Osceola, Manatee and what would become in 1921, Sarasota County, including three entire townships adjacent to the Myakka River, was conveyed to the "Jacksonville, Tampa and Key

West Railroad Company" on December 13, 1884 by Governor W.D. Bloxham and the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of Florida.

In January of 1886 the "Jacksonville, Tampa and Key West Railroad Company", now owned by Henry B. Plant, conveyed to another branch of the Plant Investment Company, three townships in what was then Manatee County.

Another railroad owned by the Plant Investment Company, the Florida Southern Railroad, followed closely behind in acquiring land in the Myakka River Valley Region. A legislative act of the State of Florida entitled "an act to grant certain lands to the Gainesville, Ocala and Charlotte Harbor Railroad Company was signed into effect on March 4th, 1879 and served as an application for the conveyance of 10,000 acres of land for each mile of railway that this railroad planned to build.

By 1885 the railroad had constructed a line from Gainesville to the west bank of the Withlacoochee River. By December of 1886 the line had been extended to Punta Gorda and the company had taken on a new name, the Florida Southern Railroad. In 1883 the Florida Southern Railroad became the owner of some large parcels of land in the Myakka River Valley Region.

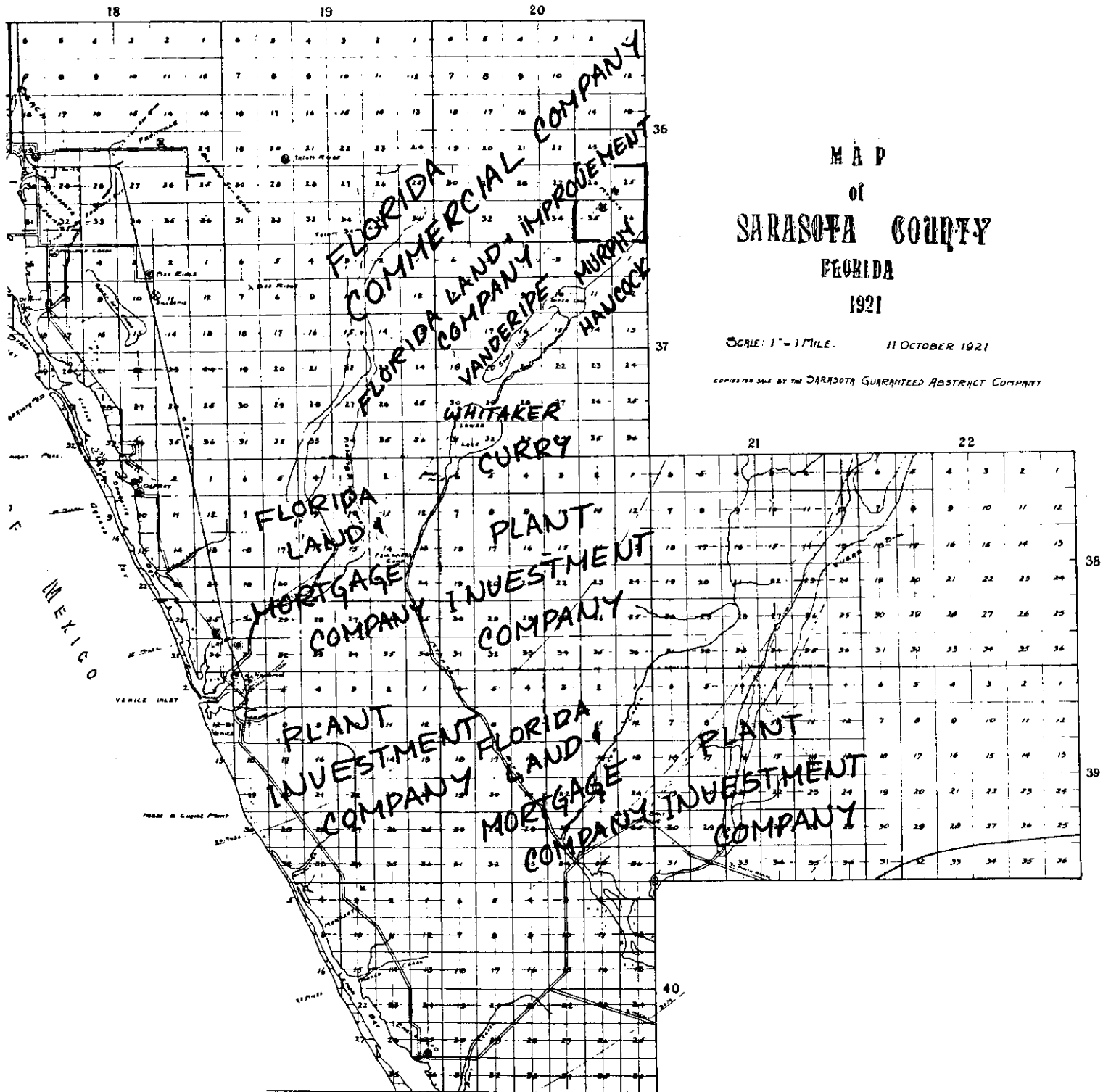
During the middle 1880's there were several British land holding companies investing in land in the Myakka River Valley region. One of these companies was the Florida

Land & Mortgage Company, Ltd. This company purchased the majority of land within township 38 south, range 19 east containing the Cowpen Slough region. In addition, they purchased land further south within township 39 south, range 20 east, lying on both sides of the Myakka River.

Another large investor in the Myakka Region was the Florida Commercial Company. The Florida Commercial Company purchased large tracts of land north and west of the Myakka Lakes. They also owned several smaller parcels adjacent to the settlement of Miakka as well as in the Myakka Lake Region.

At the time that the Myakka River Valley Region was entering private ownership, the Myakka River itself would play a major role in determining the size of the County of Manatee.

In 1867 the county seat of Manatee County was moved to Pine Level, nearly 40 miles southeast of the settlement of Manatee. Joseph Simpson, in his "History of Manatee County" written in 1915, records the dissatisfaction of the residents of Manatee with the new county seat. "The road from the Manatee River settlement was a terrible one during the rainy season. At such times a very large portion of it was under water, the Myakka River being a mile and a quarter wide and covering the grade to an unknown depth." As time went on "the people from the



Major land owners in the Myakka River Valley Region
in 1890 , overlaid on 1921 map of Sarasota County

northwest part of the county had become very tired of having to go that long dreary distance to Pine Level". In 1887 a convention was called to divide the County and return the county seat to Manatee. After much deliberation a dividing line was established and DeSoto County was created from Manatee County. It appears that the Myakka River, as an obstacle, was one of the main causes for the division in 1887.

By 1890, land in the Myakka River Valley Region was owned by four large land holding companies as well as several stockmen. The land companies were, as stated previously, The Plant Investment Company, the Florida Land and Improvement Company, the Florida Land and Mortgage Company as well as the Florida Commercial Company. The stockmen owning substantial amounts of land in the area included Garrett Murphy, Shadrick Hancock, A.P. & J.R. Curry, W.R. Whitaker and W.H. Vanderipe. In addition to these, the following settlers owned land in the Miakka area, ranging from small homesites to larger grazing tracts. The landowners of Miakka included: William Addison, C.C. Banfill, George A. Cason, A.P. & J.R. Curry, M.F. Dean, S.C. Gates, W.F. Hancock, J.S. Hancock, J.W. Harlee, C.S. McCall, C.S. Purvis, J.C. Pearce, W.T. Pelot, W.A.L. Rawls, T.A. Stephens, Thomas Tugby and A.M. Wilson.

It is evident that by 1890 the community of Miakka had grown to considerable size. A book entitled Webb's

Florida published in 1885 by W.S. Webb of New York stated that Miakka had a population of about 100, and an active Methodist Church.

Although Miakka had a church and school building in 1875, sometime during the 1880's a new building was contemplated. W.A.L. "Bill" Rawls and A.M. "Gus" Wilson each donated one acre of land to the cause. A Short History of the Miakka United Methodist Church states that "construction of the church was (probably) started and completed in 1886...the church was built on the Wilson acre, and the Rawls acre was set aside as a cemetery."

Both Bill Durrance and George Tatum are given credit for designing and supervising the construction of the structure. Many other residents of the Miakka community assisted in the construction of the church. The Methodist Church history states "timber was cut from property owned by Dink Murphy and milled in a sawmill owned by Will Stephens. Yellow pine heartwood was used in construction. Nails and other hardware was furnished by Dink Murphy." It has been recorded that "Jordan Boyd celebrated the finishing of the church roof by standing on his head on the ridge of the roof".

The church was served by itinerate preachers including: R.M. Evans, A.A. Robinson, J.R. Taylor, W.R. Wagoner, T.M. Strickland, S.B. Black, W.B. Tresca, E.W.J. Harlee and S.W. Black.

Although Miakka did not have it's own newspaper, it was well represented in the newspapers of the Town of Manatee. As was the practice in the early years, the editor of a centrally based newspaper would enlist residents from the outer lying communities to mail in news from their respective areas. Generally the news items were signed with a pen name and it is unclear who the author was. The following are a few "Miakka" news articles appearing in the Manatee River Journal in 1889. "Our old friend William Pearce of Polk County is again our neighbor. William and Dink (Murphy) took an old time hunt together yesterday, which resulted in a few venison each." "Our school, Professor Callen, principal, is progressing smoothly with a fair attendance." "Not a drop of rain has fallen in these parts...for nearly six weeks...the water courses and ponds and are drying up and the fish-and even gators-are dying all over the woods." "That old rickety bridge across the Myakka has been renovated by George Tatum, Jr., who has just finished the job, and the bridge is in a safe and respectable condition."

It was through these brief articles that the citizens of Manatee County got the news about the activities of Miakka.

The following article of February of 1889 sums up the frenzie of land buying by the large land holding companies during the 1880's. "We have among us a wealthy Frenchman who represents a wealthy syndicate and who is prospecting

with a view of locating a large colony of Frenchmen upon the Myakka River. The geographical location of Miakka, with the many advantages of soil, and stock-raising priviledges, are destined to super-induce a gravitation of men and money to this place."

While there is no evidence to show that the Frenchman ever purchased any land, in 1890 a large amount of land in the Myakka River Valley Region was bought by another British syndicate. The company, which took it's name from the river, was the Myakka River Florida Land Company. This company purchased the holdings of the Florida Land and Mortgage Company, and by doing so became one of the largest landowners in the region.

The purchase of land throughout the region during the 1880's in no way interferred with the grazing of cattle in the Myakka River Valley Region. Cattle continued to roam the open range through the turn of the century as virtually none of the large landowners made any improvements on their property. Ownership of cattle was determined by marks and brands that were filed at the County Clerk's Office.

During the 1890's a great amount of cattle raised on the plains of the Myakka River were sold and shipped to Tampa and Cuba during the Spanish American War. One of the shipping points was Cattle Dock Point in the vicinity of what is now known as El Jobean. Other shipping points

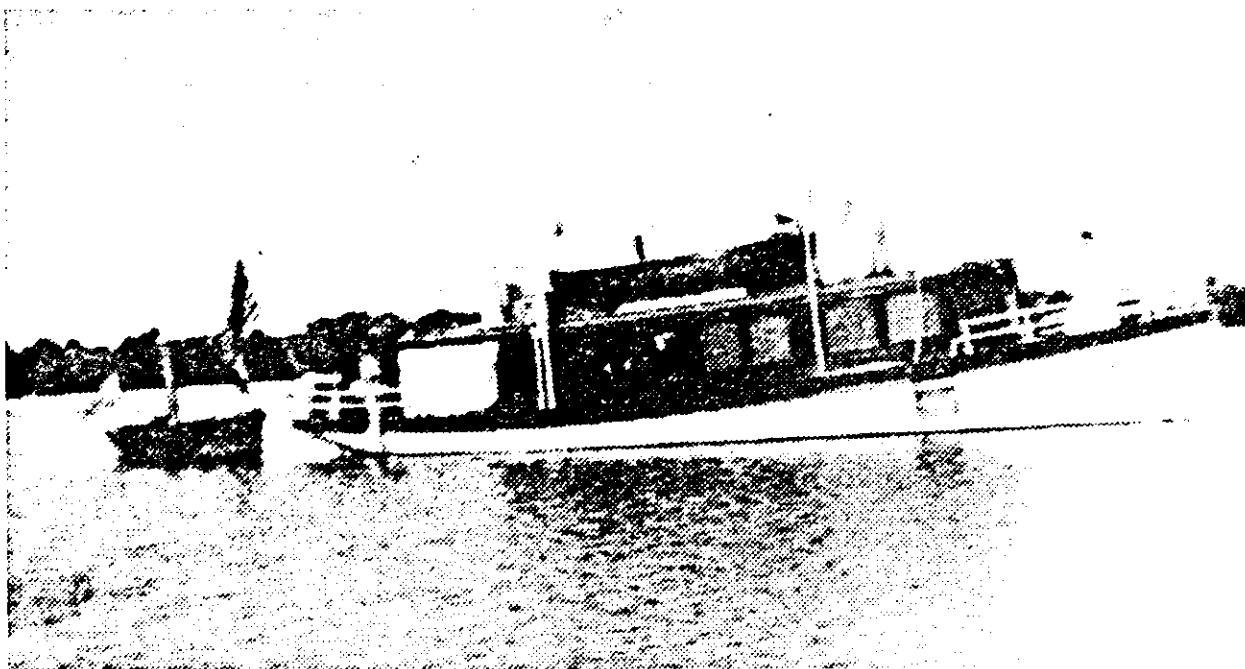
were located at various locations along Charlotte Harbor, and on the Manatee River. During this time the Myakka River Valley Region remained one of the most productive cattle raising regions in the southeast United States. Hardly any publication describing the advantages of Florida, neglects to mention the fine grazing lands available along the Myakka and Peace River.

During the 1880's the Myakka River Valley Region remained the playground for the adventurist sportsman. One of these sportsmen who recorded his activities in the region was Mr. Charles A. Dean, who first visited the Charlotte Harbor area in 1887. Mr. Dean's daughter, Mrs. Eleanor Pearse, published in 1947 a book containing many of her father's diary entries, letters and stories. The book, entitled Florida's Vanishing Era, is one of the best accounts of hunting and fishing in the Myakka River Valley Region in the 1880's and 1890's.

Mr. Dean perhaps visited the Myakka River for the first time in 1887 or 1888. Around this time Mr. Dean purchased a naphtha launch and named it the "Kingfisher". The Dean family, based either on Pine Island or at Punta Gorda would make frequent trips in Charlotte Harbor, as well as to the Peace and Myakka Rivers. Obviously inspired by the river, in 1894 Mr. Dean purchased a 40 foot naphtha cabin boat and christened it the "Myakka".

Many of Mrs. Pearse's recollections concerning trips on the Myakka River are worth reprinting.

"Of course the 'Myakka' was a little close quarters for our family of three for more than a few days at a time, but we could and did cruise up the Myakka River, at that time infested with alligators...and (we) tried for tarpon in the pass between Captiva and LaCosta. Here I learned to swim, although the bird dogs were not allowed in the water for fear of sharks!"

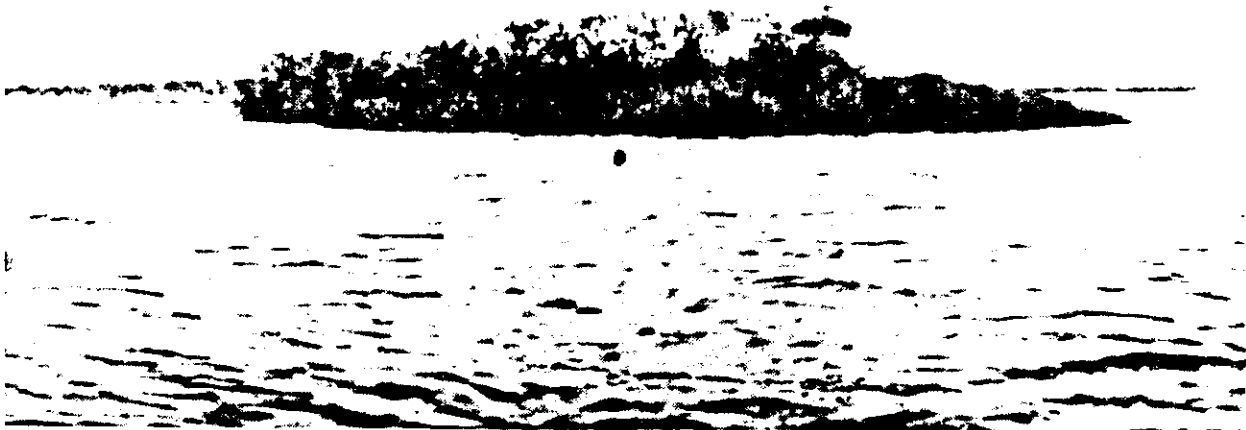


The Dean's cabin boat, Myakka .

The freeze of December of 1894 that had a devastating effect on the citrus groves of central Florida also had an effect on the fish in the Myakka River. Mrs. Pearse recorded "In January of 1895, more than a month after

the freeze, thousands of dead fish lined the banks of the Myakka River. My father wrote in his log "This river seems to have suffered to a greater extent than any other in this immediate region, due possibly because the water is mostly shallow...".

While in the region in 1900 the Dean family visited a small town on the Myakka River named Miakka City, located east of Englewood. At that time the town consisted of two buildings. Mrs. Pearse records the following about the winter season of 1900. "Quail were abundant along the Myakka River. While out shooting my father discovered a Salt Spring. Later he measured it's depth to be 176 feet." The spring discovered by Mr. Dean was likely what is today Warm Mineral Springs, or may have been Little Salt Spring.



Bird Rookery, Myakka river 1893

Photograph taken in lower Myakka River by Mr. Dean

This year the Deans visited some old friends on the Myakka River. "We called on the Chapins up the Myakka River, and learned that Mrs. Chapin had not seen another woman since the preceeding May. Near their home was an Indian Mound in which Ms. McAdow wrote in 1889 'we found eleven skeletons within a few feet of each other, covered, sitting up with arms clasping their knees. Also teeth of a mastodon on top of the ground, of which the largest weighed seven pounds'".

The Dean family continued to visit the Charlotte Harbor area through 1921, when Mr. Dean passed away on his yacht "in his beloved winter cruising ground". Each year Mr. Dean and fellow sportsmen, as well as his family, would visit the Myakka River for it's excellent fishing and the adjoining hammocks and pine forests for the abundant game.

The community of Miakka continued to grow during the 1890's and in 1897 was included in A Complete General Directory of Manatee County, published by Andrew I. Meserve.

Miakka.

Located twenty-five miles southeast of Braidenton. Land, pine, and most suitable for orange culture. The town is surrounded by the finest grazing lands in the State, known as the Miakka bottoms. Mail tri-weekly from Sarasota. Postmaster, A. M. Wilson.

Albritton, A. H., mcht.	Keen, Jas. F., v.
Albritton, B. J., f.	McCall, C. F., f.
Albritton, Geo. W., f.	Peacock, I. S., f.
Albritton, Jas. C., f.	Pelot, W. P., f.
Bryant, Aaron, f.	Rawls, F. D., v. c.
Carlton, M. P., f.	Rawls, W. A. L., f.
Coker, John, f.	Routh, G. W., mail contr.
Cook, A. J., f.	Scott, Jas., f.
Crowley, Capt. J., m'ch'nic.	Stephens, Geo. E., f.
Durrance, W. A., f.	Stephens, S. E., f.
Earnest, D. U., f.	Tatum, Geo., f.
Edwards, W. H., f.	Tollin, Oscar, taxidermist.
Ferguson, E. A., f.	Webb, Dr. A. O., —
Ferguson, J. J., f.	Webb, J. A., f.
Hall, J. N., f.	Webb, O. I., f.
Hancock, J. S., cattle.	Willis, Alvin, f.
Hancock, S., cattle.	Wilson, A. M., f.
Hancock, W. F., cattle.	Wilson, Ben F., f.
Hayes, W. N., f.	Wilson, E. D., f.
High, N. J., mcht.	Wingate, J. H., f.
Howell, Jos., f.	Wingate, D. C., f.
Johnson, W., teacher.	Yeomans, Jno. R., f.

1897 MANATEE COUNTY DIRECTORY

LEGEND OF OCCUPATIONS:

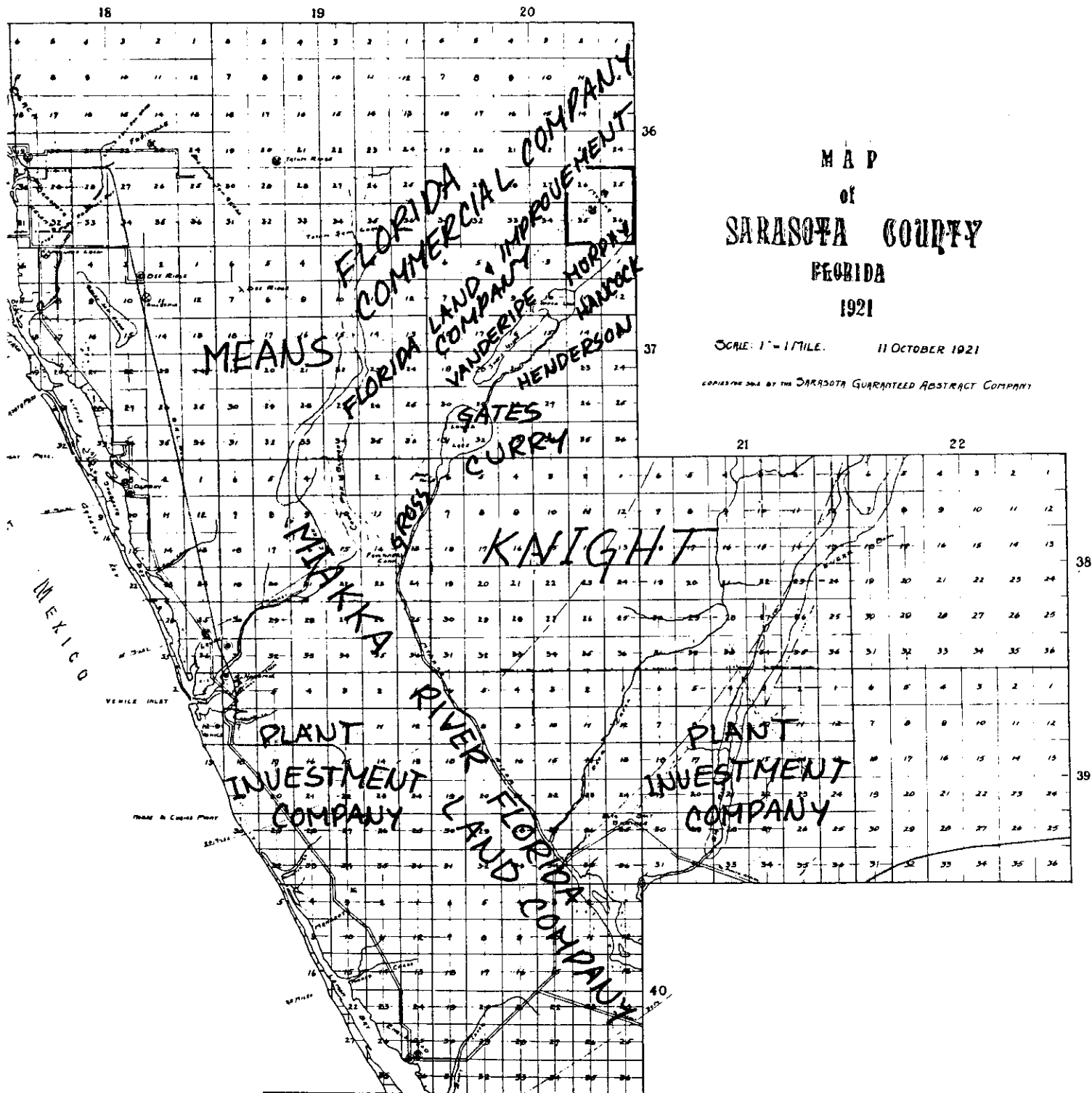
mcht - merchant

f - farmer

mchnic - mechanic

v - vegetable truck farmer

c - citrus farmer



In July of 1900, a major land transaction took place in the Myakka River Valley Region. The Plant Investment Company sold three of their townships in Manatee County to four members of the pioneering Knight family for a consideration of \$12,742. The purchasers were Thomas S. and Sarah, his wife, also Charles L. and Daisy, his wife.

Charles L. and Thomas S. Knight were sons of Joel Knight, brother of Jesse Knight, Sarasota's pioneer cattleman. Jesse's brother Joel had raised cattle for decades on the plains lying east of the Myakka River in the vicinity of today's Ringling-McArthur tract. Joel's sons, Charles and Thomas were engaged with their father for many years in the cattle business east of the Myakka River.

In 1889 Charles L. Knight moved to Tampa and with William Wall formed what was at that time the largest wholesale hardware business in southern Florida. In 1900 he reinvested, with his brother and their wives, in the Myakka River Valley Region. The Knight herd was for decades among the largest cattle herds along the river, and in all of southern Florida.

→ In 1902, and again in 1904, the Florida State Department of Agriculture published a book entitled "Florida, A Pamphlet Descriptive of it's History, Topography, Climate and Soil". In reference to cattle raising the book stated that in Florida there were "30,000,000 acres available

as grazing lands for cattle and sheep. Last year (there were) 600,000 cattle on ranges, (and) room for 3,000,000."

"The truth is, the climate of Florida is an ideal one for stock raising...in southern Florida, south of Hillsborough County, in Manatee, in the great Myakka River prairie region, in southern Polk County...in DeSoto County... (exists) the greatest grazing region east of the Mississippi."

In reference to sheep raising the book states that in Manatee (County) where the great prairies furnish fine pasturage, they are perfectly at home." Of course a great deal of Manatee County's prairie land was in the Myakka River Valley Region.

The general description of Manatee County included the following. "The principal industries are fruit and vegetable growing, and raising of live stock; the immense tracts of open prairie, stretching almost the entire length of the county from north to south down the Myakka River valley, forms perhaps, the finest cattle ranges in one contiguous territory east of the Mississippi River; with unfailing supplies of pasture grasses, and fresh water at all seasons of the year, it becomes, as it is, the ideal section for stock raising on a magnificent scale, by those interested in such industries."

In addition to descriptions of the County, the book provided pertinent statistics relative to agricultural production.

AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS - 1902

MANATEE COUNTY

<u>Produce</u>	<u>Amount Produced</u>	<u>Value</u>
Corn	3,935 bushels	\$ 2,418
Sweet Potatoes	14,675 bushels	7,474
Tomatoes	36,950 crates	47,150
Celery	16,690 crates	41,725
Lettuce	16,959 crates	21,198
Oranges	114,203 boxes	142,474
Grapefruit	3,459 crates	20,766

<u>Livestock</u>	<u>Amount Held</u>	<u>Value</u>
Horses	702	\$ 23,345
Mules	34	3,645
Stock	12,308	60,190
Hogs	2,934	2,934

In line with the community of Miakka's agricultural prominence, it was Mr. A.M. "Gus" Wilson, postmaster of Miakka, who purchased and used the first gasoline powered "traction engine" or tractor in Manatee County. In September of 1905 the Manatee River Journal reported that "A.M. Wilson has lately received his road or traction engine and believes it will solve the problem of hauling oranges from (his) grove to the railroad...this is being watched by others...". The next month it was announced that the tractor had been an instant success. This was several years before the first automobiles entered the area.

Shortly after the turn of the century Mr. Anthony W. Dimock and his wife visited the Myakka River. The Dimocks cruised in a small sailboat throughout the southwest Florida area. They also had a smaller craft for their river explorations. The Dimocks called the Myakka "the river that had been overlooked", as you could travel upon it and not see any evidence of man. Their impressions of this region are similar to those of the sportsmen who visited the region decades earlier.

"We passed through mile wide meadows of partly submerged bulrushes backgrounded by forests of pine, with clumps of cedar to the fore and dotted with tall palmetoes, singly and in groups. As we ascended the river the pines came nearer, the water grew shoal and was

dotted with islands, while tall ferns adorn the banks. As we continued to advance the river narrowed to fifty yards and became a fresh water stream with a strong current, so crooked that we traveled 12 miles to make six and in doing so went in every direction. Sometimes in traveling a mile we nearly completed a circle and once a tiny tunnel beneath a high bank disclosed an effort of Nature to shorten the stream by cutting out a superfluous segment. As we ascended, the river continued to narrow and deepen. On both sides were great white sand banks, six to ten feet in height.

The Dimocks were particularly interested in the fallen oaks and palms whose roots had been undermined by the current and whose trunks had leaned and continued to grow bending gracefully into "long slim python-like bodies".



Photograph taken by the Dimocks and printed in their book

They also recorded that "Herons, from the big blue and great white to the little green 'fly-up-the-creek', flew just before us from every bend in the river..."

Having spent a pleasant day on the river, the Dimocks were nearing Charlotte Harbor when the low tide "seized our craft, and for an hour held it to ransom by the rising tide, we sat upon the cabin top watching the wonderful clouds massed in the west and colored by the declining sun, rejoicing in the rest and peace that had followed a strenuous day on the river that had been overlooked."

Following their trip, the Dimocks published a book entitled "Florida Enchantments" which contains much interesting text as well as several photographs taken along the Myakka River.

Following the turn of the century the Myakka River Valley Region remained both a productive cattle raising area as well as a sportsman's paradise.

THE TEEN YEARS IN THE MYAKKA RIVER VALLEY REGION

Since the time of settlement in the 1850's, general farming and citrus raising had remained important industries at Miakka. By 1910 several Miakka residents were engaged in raising a crop of vegetables, both for their families and for sale. Tomatoes are most frequently mentioned in The Sarasota Times newspaper articles of the teen years. Rice and corn were grown in abundance, the latter for use as cattle feed. Sugar cane was an important crop, and by 1910 both A. M. Wilson and J. J. Crowley were using gasoline engines to power their mills.

Citrus production had increased steadily over the years and was a major livelihood for many settlers. In October of 1909, several Miakka area citrus growers organized and formed the Miakka Citrus Growers' Association. This association was established to work in cooperation with the Florida Citrus Exchange in the picking, packing,

handling, marketing, shipping and selling of both citrus fruits and vegetables. Founders of the association were A. M. Wilson, C. G. L. Crowley and J. J. Crowley. As there was no railroad near Miakka at this time, the produce was transported either to Sarasota or to Arcadia for shipping by rail to distant markets.

In July of 1910 Mrs. Potter Palmer of Chicago began purchasing land in the Myakka River Valley Region. At this time she purchased 15,913 acres from the Southern Investment Company for her son, Potter Palmer, Jr. A large part of this land was adjacent to the Myakka River and in the Cowpen Slough area. An article appearing in the Venice News column of The Sarasota Times on June 2nd, 1910, written by George "Nemo" Higel, describes the pending sale of land including Potter Palmer, Jr.'s tract. "We are in receipt of a letter from Col. J. H. Lord, senior member of the enterprising firm of Lord & Edwards, in which we learn, the company have practically sold to Mrs. Potter Palmer of Chicago, a vast tract of land in the Sarasota vicinity. This purchase embraces the well known Means lands, the famous Cow Pen sloughs and a large acreage of the rich and fertile Miakka pasture lands. This is pronounced as fine a tract of land as we have in the county, being admirably adapted to irrigation or to drainage. The splendid pasture lands set to cultivated grasses will equal, if not rival the famous Blue grass region of Kentucky. The rich hammock and muck lands are adapted to sugar cane, Irish

potatoes, onions, all of which are staple crops and for which home markets are far from being supplied. As a truck and vegetable growing section this tract is second to none, and perhaps in a few years, we shall see packing plants and canning factories in our county. Nemo" This transaction, as well as many to follow, were handled by Joseph H. Lord. It was Lord whose advertisements had first prompted Mrs. Palmer's first visit to the Sarasota area. It has been recorded that Mrs. Palmer first saw the Myakka River region while on a tour provided by A. B. Edwards in February of 1910. Mrs. Palmer, realizing the potential for the region, immediately contemplated purchases.

In December of 1910 Mrs. Palmer purchased several thousand acres of land as well as several thousand head of cattle from Garrett "Dink" Murphy. The land, in the Myakka Lake region, was considered by many to be among the finest grazing land in the state. A local newspaper interviewed Murphy about the sale, to which he replied "Say I have sold my stuff, that's enough...my work of forty years all gone."

Having purchased between five and seven thousand head of cattle from Murphy, Mrs. Palmer instantly ranked among the large stockmen of the area. Murphy was not out of the cattle business because the sale was not his entire herd. Additionally, nearly a year later The Sarasota Times

newspaper reported "We learn that the entire stock of cattle owned by the late Rev. Jesse Knight, has been sold to Dink Murphy, the consideration being \$15,000 spot cash." Thus "Dink" Murphy would remain a major stockman of the Myakka River region.

Mrs. Palmer named her acreage in the Myakka Lakes region Meadowsweet Pastures and at once began applying modern cattle raising techniques on her ranch. Mrs. Palmer was among the early stockmen to fence portions of land to control the feeding of the cattle. Additionally, Mrs. Palmer was the first cattle owner to have constructed a cattle dipping vat. During October of 1915, A. E. Blackburn supervised the construction of the first cattle dipping tank in Manatee County. The Sarasota Times had quite a bit to say about this revolutionary event. "An event that will prove to be far more important in the history of Manatee County than any corner-stone laying or other imposing ceremonial took place last Friday on Bee Island, Myakka River. For the first time in this county cattle were dipped to remove the Texas fever tick, the worst handicap to stock-raising in the south."

By 1916 Mrs. Palmer, as well as other stockmen in the Myakka region, realized that it would be necessary to raise corn for feed in order to support the large herds that were being established. The corn would have to be harvested and stored in silos until needed. A one hundred

ton silo was built at Meadowsweet Pastures in 1916. At this time silos were being built by enterprising stockmen throughout Manatee County. In 1917 Mrs. Palmer had erected several 196 ton silos at Meadowsweet Pastures.

A serious problem that existed was that much of the land available for cultivation was subject to the river's overflow. Mrs. Palmer had much difficulty with the rising waters that would rot the crops before they could be harvested. Mrs. Palmer was advised that until proper drainage was established it would be difficult to raise the necessary crops. However, at this time Mrs. Palmer did not wish to invest in drainage.

By late 1917 Mrs. Palmer's ranch was not developing as she thought it should. The great amount of land susceptible to overflow was preventing the needed production of feed crops. In May of 1918 Mrs. Palmer passed away at her home in Osprey. Her dream of establishing a model cattle ranch had perhaps not been fulfilled, yet Mrs. Palmer's contributions to the cattle industry in the Myakka area, were great.

The sons of W. H. Vanderipe brought their ranch to life in 1917 by building a silo and cultivating feed. An article from the Bradentown Journal describes their methods "Sixty acres of the famous virgin Miakka bottom land was planted to corn and from this planting the silo was filled. In harvesting the crop a corn binder and

mowing machine was used, followed by the wagons to draw the corn to the cutter, which has a capacity, if worked to the limit, of filling a one hundred and ninety-six ton silo in eight hours."

During the late part of 1912, the community of Miakka, as well as the entire county of Manatee, became aroused by a legend stating that there was gold buried north of Miakka. The legend, as it has been passed down through generations, is as follows:

A pirate believed to be Jose Gaspar was being apprehended in Charlotte Harbor. In order to escape, he loaded his treasure chest and a small crew into a longboat, and ascended the Myakka River. When they could go no further Gaspar moored and buried the treasure chest a good distance from the river. Upon filling in the hole, Gaspar murdered his crew on the spot. The whole event was witnessed by a group of Indians who passed the story on from one generation to the next.

In 1912 A. H. Albritton, formerly of Miakka, heard of the old legend while in Tampa and realized that the gold was on his own land. Albritton returned to Miakka and with the assistance of L. E. Taylor and A. E. Blackburn began the search for the treasure. A hole was dug and the edges curbed to keep them from caving in. A dredge was used to dig deeper and at forty feet down they encountered what

they believed to be an iron chest. A pump was secured to remove sand and water and the search continued.

The chest that may have been found proved impossible to remove. Late in 1913 the search was abandoned and the hopes of gaining untold riches were unrealized.

In 1913 the East and West Coast Railway Company was established, by the Seaboard Line, to build a railroad from Manatee to Arcadia. Construction of the railroad began in July of 1913 and was completed early in 1915. The right of way passed within four miles of the village of Miakka, and there was talk that a spur might be extended to Miakka. The promise of the railroad prompted many Miakka residents to plant larger crops as they would have a reliable means of transportation to ship their produce.

In December of 1914 G. S. Ward and J. G. Kimmer platted the town of Myakka City adjacent to the railroad right of way. Myakka City was located about seven miles east of Miakka. Many lots in Myakka City were sold to settlers intending to take advantage of the railroad's transportation potential.

During the teen years the Myakka River Valley Region remained a haven for sportsmen. Although deer and turkey were still found in the area they were becoming less numerous. The sportsmen of the Sarasota area who spent

quite a bit of time in the Myakka area hunting and fishing became increasingly aware of the problem. In September of 1915 the Manatee County Game and Fish Protection Association was organized to enforce the Federal and State Game and Fish Laws, and to promote better legislation for the protection of game and fish.

As game became less plentiful, the sportsmen turned their efforts to fishing. The Sarasota Times newspaper is full of articles describing fishing trips to the Myakka River, where largemouth and black bass were caught in abundance. One article in The Sarasota Times contributed by George W. Blackburn, describes his delight upon hooking several tarpon in the river. The final paragraph of Blackburn's article recorded the dwindling of wildlife in the area. "Not a deer or turkey track was seen, although there are still a few in this section. Two squirrels and a rabbit constituted our bag of game, and with several fish on the string, (we) started for home, arriving just before sunset, having enjoyed every moment of the day and hoping that soon we could get time to pass another on this beautiful stream."

In 1914, Mrs. Neal Wyatt Chapline, the wife of one of Mr. Blackburn's hunting and fishing companions, published a book entitled Florida The Fascinating. Her descriptive text dealing with the Myakka River is worth reprinting. "Going to the Myakka is a pleasant and profitable habit

that grows on one. There are ideal camping places at different points on this river, cleared places with here a gnarled water oak festooned with moss and there tall palmettos, standing like sentinels, with a fringe of smaller palms all around - and the fishing is ideal, - fresh water fish in abundance, in fact I have seen two fish caught on one hook." Mrs. Chapline concludes her chapter on the rivers of Florida with this statement about the Myakka. "Many a haggard face has grown calm and less wretched from a soothing sojourn on the Myakka; and many frivolous, unthinking souls have grown more noble from gazing upon the handiwork of God." Thus the Myakka River remained a source of productivity, a source of game and fish and a source of comfort and rest to those who frequented its shores.

SARASOTA COUNTY

Throughout the teen years there was a general feeling, among the residents of the southern part of Manatee County, that they were not receiving their share of tax dollars in the way of improvements. A movement was established to create a new county that would take the name Sarasota. In April of 1921 a bill of separation was prepared by a county division committee of the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce. This bill included within the new county all that land lying south of the township line dividing townships thirty-five from townships thirty-six. This bill was presented to the Legislature by A. M. Wilson of Miakka.

In May of 1921, two committees were appointed to reach an agreement on several matters relative to the division of the county. One committee was composed of members from the north of the division line and one from the southern

portion. One of the disagreements was over four townships in the northeast corner of the proposed new county. Within these four townships lay considerable Myakka pasture land as well as the headwaters of the river and the growing village of Myakka City. Manatee County did not want to give up this prosperous section and it was agreed that the new county would not include the four townships. It was made clear, however, through the press that the Myakka Lake region was included within the new county.

On June 15th of 1921 the county division bill was ratified by nearly a four to one vote of the citizens of the new county. By July 1st the temporary county seat had been established at Sarasota and the officials of the new county had been appointed. The Myakka area was well represented by Henry Hancock, County Commissioner from the fifth district as well as by A. M. Wilson, Tax Collector of the new County of Sarasota.

The new County of Sarasota embraced the majority of the Myakka River Valley Region. This was a tremendous loss to the County of Manatee and a great gain to the new County of Sarasota.

CONCLUSION

The Myakka River Valley Region has played a prominent role in our local, regional and state history. The river achieved national prominence during the Civil War when a large quantity of cattle from the area was consumed by both Union and Confederate forces.

A major river in the area, the Myakka was the home of numerous Pleistocene mammals many thousands of years before man entered the state of Florida. When man did arrive, he too was attracted by the river and camped along its shores for thousands of years.

Europeans were lured to the area by adventure and the Fountain of Youth. The Charlotte Harbor area came close to being the first European settlement in North America.

Settlers coming to the area in the 1800s instantly realized the river's potential as a productive agricultural region. Additionally, they found game and fish in abundance. The resources of the region would allow the settlers to prosper and the community of Miakka to grow.

Throughout the years, the Myakka River has continuously provided a source of production, transportation and recreation.

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