

The Historical Quarterly

of the St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc.

Winter 2007-08

Charles R. Crogan, Jr.
Editor

SOUTH WITH THE WARBLERS FLORIDA TRAILS

BY
WINTHROP PACKARD

When I left New York, I thought that I had said goodbye to the smaller migrating birds for three days. My steamer's keel was to furrow nearly a thousand miles of rough sea before it landed me in Florida, where among live-oak and palmetto, bamboo and sugar cane, I might hope to meet tiny friends that I had loved and lost a while. I rather expected flocks of migrating sea birds, and in this I was disappointed. The usual gulls whirled and cackled in our wake, kittiwakes and herring gulls, brown backs and black backs, a horde that thinned with each steamer we met, taking return tickets to port, seemingly loath to leave the fascinating region of Coney Island.

The hundreds had dwindled to almost a lone specimen before, just off Charleston, the pelicans came out to look us over. Not a duck did I see till the pelicans had approved us. Then we began to drive out scattered flocks. Perhaps the northwester that had chased us all the way had something to do with it. For it was almost a blizzard out of New York. Up in Central Park the English sparrow, like Keats's St. Agnes' Eve owl, for all his feathers was a-cold. The little children of the rich, parading the walks with bare knees, and nurse maids, were blue with the chill and might well envy the little children of the poor for whom the charitable provide stockings. Even out at sea the wind and cold seemed to chill the water till it was made of blue shivers and gooseflesh combers.

Yet I had reckoned without my host, so far as the little migrants are concerned, for, waking the next morning some two hundred miles or more farther south and far out of sight of any land, the first sound that I heard was the tchip of a myrtle warbler. Verily, thought I; this is some trick of the vibrating rigging, quivering under the

thrust of the screw. Then I looked up and saw the bird himself, sitting on the rail, whence he flew serenely to a passenger's hat. Then I was quite convinced that it was high time that I had a change, found fresh woods and pastures new. Too steady a pursuit of a subject is apt to end in hallucination, as many a latter day theosophist ought to be able to testify.

However, this specimen of *Dendroica coronata* was not materialized through concentrated thought, but was a real myrtle warbler, and there were a dozen, more or less, hopping about the ship. During the next thirty-six hours the number of bird passengers carried, summed up, would, I am sure, far exceed the paying passenger list. We identified pine warblers, robins, song sparrows, chipping sparrows, fox sparrows, Wilson's warblers, juncos, golden-crowned kinglets, ruby-crowned kinglets, bay-winged buntings and a white-bellied swallow.

With a few exceptions these seemed to be young birds, rather storm-buffed and weary. Whether they lighted on the ship as a convenient resting-place in the regular course of their migration, or whether they had been blown off to sea by the strong westerly wind, it is impossible to say. I think the former. The wind was blustering but by no means a gale, and they could easily fly against it. They seemed most numerous at daybreak, and I think they were attracted by the ship's lights during the night, and stopped on it to feed and rest at morning, as they do on land. Possibly, also, the younger generation of birds is finding that it is a good deal easier to go South by steam power than it is to get there by main strength. Why not? In a century or so chimney swallows have learned to build in chimneys rather than in caves and hollow

trees. Bluebirds, martins and white-bellied swallows have learned the uses of bird boxes. Why shouldn't they adopt steamships? The wireless operator who pulls all sorts of information out of the circumambient atmosphere tells me that they have; that at this season of the year the ships are apt to swarm with tiny songsters, and the young lady from up the State who sits at the piano in the social hall and coquettishly sings about "the saucy little bird on Nellie's hat," is now able to do it with illustrations.

This lighting of the myrtle warbler on the passenger's hat is not persiflage, either. Several times it happened. Along in the afternoon a negro, sitting in a sunny corner of the steerage deck, held nevertheless the very center of the stage for several minutes with a junco perched on the crown of a well-brushed black soft hat that might have been as old as he was. It made a rather pretty picture and the old man's eyes shone with delight long after the junco had flown. "Ya-as," he drawled to his companions after the bird had gone, "dem birds, dey al'ays does laike dat hat. One day down in Souf Ca'lina ah was sitting in de field a long time an' one of dem cuckoo birds des came along and laid an aig in dat hat. Yessir, it done did." This may be true. I tell it as I heard it.

All these free passengers seemed far tamer on shipboard than on shore, and manifested it in other ways than lighting on people's hats. They hopped chirping about the decks almost under foot, to the delight of the ship's cat, which caught one and escaped the wrath to come by dodging to some hole below decks with it. They even invaded the dining-room and picked up crumbs from the carpet, and it was no uncommon thing for one to flutter from under foot as passengers came along the corridors. Now and then one would leave his comfortable perch, flit in a wide circle about the ship, and come back as if loath to leave so firm a foundation and such good fellowship. I missed the white-bellied swallow first. Surely his wings should take him to land without serious effort. One by one the others departed, many remaining until the ship was off the Hatteras Shoals and the land not more than a dozen miles away.

Even then it seemed as if the little warblers and tiny kinglets were taking long chances with the stiff wind and the foam-crested billows. In starting off they flitted down

toward these as if they intended to light on them, swerving upward from the very imminent crest of many a wave and dipping into the long hollows again in flight that matched the undulations of the sea. I hope they all reached land. Probably in migrating time the sea takes toll of all flocks and thus helps nature in her ruthless weeding out of the weaklings. There were no small migrants remaining by the time the pelicans came out to inspect ship.

I have great respect for the pelican, a respect which increases each time I see him, he is such a venerable gaffer of a bird. Even in the confines of his hen-fenced enclosure at the ostrich farm in Jacksonville, he does not lose this aspect of dignity. The group sitting and flitting about their tiny tank always reminds me of the delineations of the Hebrew prophets in the mural decorations of the Boston Public Library. They (the pelicans) have a faintly straw-colored top to the head which reminds one of a bald and massive dome of thought, and they draw their beaks back against their necks till they are for all the world like long beards. Then there is an intellectual solemnity about them that I am sure their character does not belie. Even when they play at leap-frog, clumsily flopping one over another in the pool, they do it in a way that convinces you that they have it all reasoned out and are not entering into it lightly or without due consideration. They are a clean bird in captivity and are so quaintly awkward in their movements that one loves them at sight.

But the pelicans are best seen as they fly in an orderly line from somewhere shoreward, out to the ship inspection. Several flocks of ten or a dozen came alternately flapping and sailing, their wings all beating time with those of the leader as if in a careful drill movement. They sailed over the ship and then settled upon the water, still in an orderly row, and I thought I saw each flock confer after sitting and wag bald heads and long beards as if in approval. As we steamed up the St. Johns we left them there, for the pelican fishes only at sea and disdains the brackish water of the river which flows miles wide from the interior of Florida.

As a first glimpse of Florida bird life they are satisfying and of unusual interest. I recommend them to any who may sail in my wake.

The cormorants came next. The viking bird of which Longfellow jingled,

“Then as with wings aslant,
Sails the fierce cormorant,
Seeking some rocky haunt,
With his prey laden,”

may have been all that the poet’s fancy painted him, but the Florida cormorant certainly does not fill up to the measure of the poem. Fierce he may be to little fishes, but to the eye of the passer up the river his chief characteristic is purely *dolce far niente*. Hardly a river buoy or a sand-bar marker post but has a cormorant, looking as much like a black carving at the top of a totem pole as anything else. Usually he is as motionless. He stretches his slim, snake-like neck as the boat goes by, sometimes even moves it uneasily, but his body keeps up the statuesque pose to perfection. No doubt the cormorant dives and swims, flies and fishes, but so far I have found him only as the topmost carving on the buoys and marker posts. This Florida variety is slightly smaller and otherwise different from the birds of the Northern coast. Chapman describes him as a shy bird. A cursory glance would seem to indicate that the only thing he is shy of is energy.

The first Florida land bird that I saw was the buzzard. If the cormorant is the statue of repose, the buzzard is the poet of motion. I suspect that this bird was the original mental scientist. He moves by thought-power alone. I am always reminded, in watching his progress, of the ancient story of the Chinaman watching his first electric car. The buzzard certainly has no visible “pushee” or any observable “pullee.” But how silently and beautifully he goes. Never a flap of the broad black wings and never a quiver of the widespread primary tips. He just thinks himself along, against the wind or with it, up or down. His broad wings are like the prayer rug of the Arabian tale. He adjusts himself upon them, stretches forth his bald red neck and just wishes himself in some place, near or far, and forthwith he sails swiftly to it. In what as yet unexplained principle of progress he finds his power no present-day aeroplane can say. When he finds out, the flying man of the future may do away with the motor which so frequently fails to mote and the propellers which break in mid-air and spill the passenger. Go to the buzzard, thou Bleriot; consider his ways and be wise.

Florida Trails by Winthrop Packard, 1910

Downtown Ft. Pierce in the 1930s:

2nd Street

Charles R. Croghan, Jr.

In the 1930s, downtown Ft. Pierce spread over four blocks from east to west (Indian River to 4th Street) and five blocks from north to south (Avenue A to Citrus Avenue). The area included private residences, retail businesses, attorney and accountant offices, the City Hall, the county Courthouse and Jail, and the Florida East Coast Railway Depot.

2nd Street was “main street” and provided the residents of Ft. Pierce with most of their needs (groceries excepted). On Saturday night (stores stayed open until 9 O’clock), it was rife with locals walking the street and sitting on benches watching their fellow citizens go by. Far from being the “lonliest night of the week,” it was the most exciting.

The street provided space for two department stores (Rubin’s and Penney’s); several specialty shops, including King’s Ladies’ Fashion Shop and Thomason’s Jewelry; three furniture stores, Jimmy’s, Denmark’s and Kelz’s; one bar (after the repeal of Prohibition, 5 December 1933); two banks, the Fort Pierce Bank and the St. Lucie County Bank; two drugstores, The Silver Palace and Strickland’s; and, McCrory’s Five and Dime store.

Rubin’s served as a worthy successor to P.P. Cobb’s Store, which closed its door in 1931, after fifty plus years of supplying the communities in the area with “everything to eat, wear and use.” Both Mr. and Mrs. Rubin came to “business” six days a week. Cook (always called by her last name) and Hazel Woolard rounded out the store’s personnel.

Cook was the store’s corsetiere, measuring ladies for their custom-made garments and determining where the corset stays were to be placed, making the corset as comfortable to wear as possible. Most ladies had at least two garments, one purchased every six months to allow for weight changes and distribution of flesh. Not too many women were as obsessed as Scarlett O’Hara about waist size, but a small waistline was certainly worthy of pursuit.

Hazel Woolard was the store’s expert on patterns (McCall’s and Simplicity) and dry goods. The Patterns provided the women who sewed with a way to be as fashionable as the beautiful models and movie stars

wearing the latest Paris creations featured in Redbook, Cosmopolitan and Photoplay magazines.

Dry goods came in 50 yard bolts, either 36 or 48 inches wide. Fabrics included cotton muslin and corduroy; velvet and velveteen; worsted and serge wool; Irish linen and dotted Swiss; and silks and satins.

Hazel advised the customer regarding which pattern fit which fabric. If you wanted the Carole Lombard sophisticated look, you chose satin. The Janet Gaynor look called for dotted Swiss, while the Marlene Dietrich look required elegant silks and fabulous furs.

Penney's, a chain store, carried clothing for all members of the family, as well as bed linens, bathroom towels, wash cloths, and bath mats. Draperies and curtains were a specialty of the store, and a home decorator offered advice regarding the use of these accessories and their installation.

While Penney's merchandise proved just right for the burgeoning middle class in Ft. Pierce, King's Ladies' Fashion Shop appealed to the upper class, elite of the town. The three sisters (the shop's owners) made frequent trips to the fashion district of New York City and on occasion, visited the famous salons of Paris to buy for their special clients.

Thomason's Jewelry Store sold engagement and wedding rings to couples taking the big step, as well as Class rings to graduating high school seniors. The resplendant diamond, ruby, and sapphire rings exhibited in the showcases struck covetousness into the hearts of all who saw them.

The furniture stores supplied the town and surrounding area with affordable home furnishings that could be bought on the Installment Plan, a "buy now, pay later" deal that still has not lost its attraction ..

The one bar on 2nd Street its owner called The Idle Hour. The several pool tables in the back room were always engaged, and the bar itself was crowded with thirsty men and a few women. (It was said that the occasional woman at the bar was there to find a man).

Located on the corner of North 2nd Street and Avenue A, the Fort Pierce Bank is scarcely more than a

memory, save for the large clock on the corner of the building that told, and still tells, time in three directions. The St. Lucie County Bank, which survives today as Sun Trust, was two blocks south.

Horton's Book and Stationery store supplied residents of the 4-county area with both the Classics (Homer, Dickens, Tolstoy, Hawthorne, and Whitman) and current popular literature (Faulkner, Hemingway, V. Wolfe, Cather, and Christie). The store not only sold books, but also loaned them. The stationary carried by the owner, Mrs. Horton, was elegant and appropriate to any occasion — birth, birthday, graduation, betrothal, wedding, sympathy, and death. Bookends, calendars, and exquisite figurines completed the inventory.

Stricklands and the Silver Palace Pharmacies supplied their customers with more than drugs. Both were equipped with soda fountains which served soft drinks — Coca Cola, root beer, and ginger ale — as well as icecream — cones, dishes, sodas, and sundaes — sandwiches, soup, and Franco's canned spaghetti with meat sauce could also be had. Moreover, the patron could purchase candies of all kinds, ranging from Tootsie Rolls to Schraff's Chocolates. Greeting cards, composition books, pens, pencils, notebooks, and tablets of paper, lined and unlined, languished in abundance.

McCrorry's Five and Dime store I remember fondly. We called it the "dime store" because so many items could be purchased for ten cents (pre sales tax days). Anything you could carry out of the store could be found there: nails, nuts, bolts, candy, pencils, clothes, towels, brooms, mops, scrub brushes, and much more.

Also, McCrorry's hired high school girls to work on Saturday from 8:45 am to 9:15 pm. Two half-hour breaks for lunch and supper made the day less long. But, you can bet, the girls were glad to see the day end when they collected their \$1.99 wage and left the dimly lighted store.

Unlike any other store in downtown Ft. Pierce during the early thirties, McCrorry's provided public restrooms for the customers. They were marked "Men-White" and "Men-Colored" and "Women-White" and "Women-Colored." The water fountains were also designated "White" and "Colored."

The Ben Franklin Variety store, located just north of Rubin's, was operated by the parents of my high school classmate Courtney Lelly. The merchandise closely resembled that carried by McCrory's; however, its special emphasis was on arts and crafts materials. Here, the housewife found pictures and picture frames, artificial flowers and baskets, decorative plates and vases to enhance the beauty of her home.

The Sunrise and the Ritz, two movie theatres located about a block and a half apart on 2nd street, served the needs of the movie-going public. The Sunrise was the older of the two, having opened in 1923 as a vaudeville venue. By the mid-thirties, vaudeville was dead and had been replaced by moving pictures. Features changed at least three times a week, and Bank Nite, double features, and an occasional stage show were introduced to keep the public coming and happy.

Tom Mix and his horse Tony and Sally Rand and her fan I remember well. Bank Nite was an every week event when the lucky winner could collect up to \$500. The double feature, usually on the weekend, was a B movie plus a cowboy show, starring one of the cowboys of the day: Tom Mix, Ken Maynard, William Boyd (Hop-Along Cassidy), and Gene Autry. On Saturday, an episode of a sixteen-part serial (Dick Tracy, Flash Gordon), was also screened.

At the south end of 2nd Street towered the St. Lucie County Courthouse and Jail. Just beyond it, stood the New Burston Hotel, which functioned primarily as a tourist facility.

The 30s ended with a bang in Europe with the rise of Hitler and with an even bigger bang in the United States on December 7, 1941. Ft. Pierce would never be the same again.

Holiday Greetings

Philosophers of history tell us that history may be viewed as cyclical, progressive, repetitive or stationary. No matter what choice we make in this regard, it is something both tangible and intangible in which we live. The old year is passing away, and the new year is upon us. We have another chance to redeem the time being "from insignificance." We have another chance to have a truly Happy New Year.

Happy New Year Everybody!

PIONEER BALL

The first Pioneer Dinner-Dance held on November 17th was a great success! The Pelican Yacht Club was filled to capacity; the food delicious, and the orchestra quite grand. The Board of Directors is to be congratulated, with special kudos to President Brad Culverhouse and Secretary Cynthia Crankshaw.

The silent auction proved exciting and almost everybody took home what they wanted at the price they wanted to pay. It looks like a winner for an annual event.

Looking Back

Three new groups are working with the St. Lucie Historical Society to help our museum become even better.

Allan King and a group of Rail Road hobbyists are developing an Historically accurate replica of downtown Ft. Pierce in HO scale complete with miniature buildings, circa early 1900-1910.

Ed Swanson has formed a Fire Engine Club to restore our 1919 American La France truck.

The third group will be developing a golden anniversary celebration of the opening of the Fort Pierce Navy Amphibious Base in 1943.

(Historical Quarterly, March 1990).

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS:

- Free admission to the St. Lucie County Historical Museum.
- Free subscription to the Society’s publications. A September – May “Society News” newsletter with details of monthly dinner programs and other community historical events. Fall, winter, spring and summer issues of “The Historical Quarterly” which features in-depth writings on a variety of local historical subjects.
- Invitations to the September – May dinner program meetings.
- Invitations to St. Lucie County Historical Museum exhibition preview receptions.
- 10% discount on all purchases (*except books, maps and photographs*) at the “Pineapple Patch” gift shop of the St. Lucie Historical Society, Inc..

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Yes, I’m interested in volunteer activities.

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RED ALERT

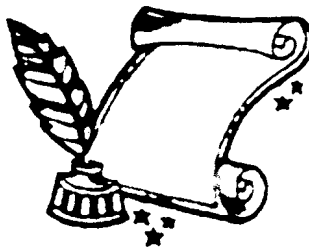
I would like to make the Summer 2008 issue of the Historical Quarterly a collection of articles from readers of the Quarterly, or anyone with a historical tale to tell.

Such contributions may be your memories (even of the recent past), a story or remembrance your parents or grandparents told, or a historical "rumor" (e.g., the infiltration of our shores by German spies during world War II). Old letters, also, make wonderful reading. If editing is required, I'll be glad to help you with the task.

Charles Croghan, Jr.
 Quarterly Editor

Membership Dues: Don't forget to renew annual membership dues! Renewing memberships and giving gift memberships are easy ways to increase membership and expand our mission of preservation. *Any membership not renewed by January 1 will be dropped.*

Desk of the President



The November 17th, 2007 Pioneer Ball held at the Pelican Yacht Club in celebration of the 55th Anniversary of the Society's founding is now history. Over 210 people attended the event wearing their versions of "Pioneer Formal" and dined on gourmet "groceries" and danced to the tunes played by the 18 piece "Swingtime" big band orchestra.

We were honored to have with us O.C. Peterson, a charter member of the Society; former Florida State Representative and retired Chief 19th Circuit Judge Rupert Smith, who served as the second Treasurer of the Society; State Representative Marie Sachs from Boca Raton and her husband, Peter Sachs, Esq., and Ft. Pierce Mayor Bob Benton and his wife, Donna, Ft. Pierce Redevelopment Agency Director Jon Ward and Ft. Pierce City Attorney, Rob Schwerer.

I want to thank all of the members of the Society for their hard work in making the Ball a rousing success and especially, my darling wife, Susan and my son John, and Cynthia Putnam Crankshaw, Sue Favorite, Nancy Bennett, Lorena Bussey, Deborah Billis, Jeannie Carpenter Stark, Maggie Minchew, Marilyn Minnix, Lisa & John Bell, T.A. Wyner, Strawberry, Dorran Ruben Russell, Charles Croghan, Lucille Rieley Rights and Lise Hudson, Esq.

I also wish to thank our Pioneer Ball sponsors. Edgar A. "Al" & "Bege" Brown & Hale Groves, Jimmy Russakis, Joey & Annette Miller & St. Lucie Battery & Tire, Mary Jo Tierney & Mike Wetzel & Sunrise Ford, Sachs & Sax, Hoskins & Turco, Fee, DeRoss & Fee, National City Bank, Dot & Bud Adams, Mike Adams, Peter Harrison, Lee Adams & the Adams Ranch, Inc., Cynthia Angelos, Esq., & Weiss, Handler, Angelos & Cornwell, P.A., Marilyn Minnix & the Road Runner Travel Resort.

Last but not least, I want to thank my fourth cousin, Kyle VanLandingham, Esq., for coming from Denver, Colorado to celebrate the publishing by the Society of the 3rd Edition of his book, "Pictorial History of Saint Lucie County 1565-1910". Cousin Kyle had writer's cramp before the evening was out from autographing all of the books for the folks who bought his book. Thank you one and all.

See you at the 2nd annual Pioneer Champagne Brunch in early 2008 !!!!

Brad Culverhouse, President

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