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*Florida: A Bicentennial History* by Gloria Jahoda

Frank Laumer

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This is one in a series of fifty-one volumes that attempt to sum up, state by state, the nation's history. The editor of the series, James Norton Smith "asked authors not for comprehensive chronicles, nor for research monographs or new data for scholars. Bibliographies and footnotes are minimal. We have asked each author for a summing up - interpretive, sensitive, thoughtful, individual, even personal - of what seems significant about his or her state's history ... What has it come to now?"

A big order. An author so asked might decide to turn in a hack job, a patch-up of quotations from a travel guide and a fourth grade history glued together with Sunday supplement prose. Mrs. Jahoda did not take the easy way out. The book is comprehensive without being a chronology. Subjects peculiar to this state are treated chapter by chapter; the weather ("It's Snowing in Akron, Ohio!"), the Second Seminole War ("On the Banks of the We-wa-thlock-O"), the citrus industry ("The a Almighty Orange") to the present problems and pleasures of Florida ("When You Wish Upon a Mouse"). Each chapter is such a compendium of facts that only the skill and taste of the author saves this work from reading like an encyclopedia. From page to page the reader is led up and down the time scale of history, back and forth from event to event, entertained, amused, bewildered by the unfolding story and occasionally irritated by the seeming aimlessness at times. But this is not the sort of book one gives up on and, having finished it, one is surprised to find not only a good feeling about the book and the state, but more important, a good feeling about oneself. The truth is that this is not a book simply about a geopolitical location known as Florida but a book about the ways of man. The ways of man are of course mostly deplorable, in Florida as elsewhere. As Jahoda says, "Florida, like the rest of the earth, suffers from human tenancy . . ." Yet through her deeply humanistic viewpoint she conveys the feeling that just often enough one of us, black, red or white, reaches a moment of decency and selflessness that can give us all hope that there are human goals (and the effort to reach them) that perhaps justify our survival. This is not a hope easily found.

Since this book is presented as a "Bicentennial History" it would be unfair to ignore a few errors of fact presented. The author implies that Osceola killed Wiley Thompson prior to the 23rd of December, 1835 and then decapitated the body. All sources known to this reviewer indicate that the head was scalped, not removed. These same sources do not equivocate concerning the date, December 28th. This is the same date as the defeat of Francis Dade's command about which the author says, "Only one man survived." There are many ways to count "survivors" of this battle (all but a very few Seminole Indians, for instance; the Negro interpreter Louis Pacheco, etc.). But assuming she refers only to white survivors one must consider Edwin
De Courcy (killed the day after the battle); and Joseph Sprague (who also made it back to Fort Brooke), in addition to the one survivor presumably referred to, Ransom Clarke.

But these are nits being picked. This is a fine book written by a fine historian and a compassionate person. Mr. Smith (and the reader) get more than their money's worth.

_Frank Laumer_


Readers familiar with Mr. Newell's *If Nothing Don't Happen* (Knopf, 1975) will be pleased to know that Mr. Billy Driggers of the Withlacoochee Driggerses is back with more tales of Cracker life in backwoods Gulf Hammock, Florida. Readers, old and new, are in for what narrator Billy would call "a real stomped down good time." The sound and feel of regional rural life are captured in these stories with an exactness and sympathy reminiscent of Zora Neale Hurston's classic writings of Florida earlier in the century. Fictionalized ethnography, folklore, ethnic history - whatever the proper category of such writing, it is based on an accurate ear for local usage and an understanding of the grass roots culture. Unstereotyped, humorous and often moving, the real people are here.

Thirty-seven chapters give some scope to Billy's "heap of memories." We are told the history of the Driggers family who had been "Florida Crackers since before the gator bellered" (Jim Driggers who married an Epps from the Carolina Mountains, son Billy and his wife Loofy and their seven children, Aunt Effy and Uncle Wint Epps), and of their homestead on one hundred and sixty acres of virgin land along the River. In narrative which covers the years from the first decade of the century to the present, their life is described in rich detail. What emerges is no parochial, limited community but a set of intricate social networks; teacher, preacher, doctor, sheriff, local recluse, visiting Yankee, kin and stranger, companion and enemy form parts of the pattern.

From among the themes woven into these stories, there are three which emerge consistently clear. First, these are a people with an intimate knowledge and love of the Florida land, its sloughs and creeks, palmettos and cypress and pines, wild animals and birds. There is a respect and passion for the skills of hunting and fishing. Shark, gator, bear, possum, deer, big cat, each has its own habit and character: Ch. 6, *The Hammock-Talkin' Turkey*, is a comment on gobbler shooting as good as any in print. Second, there is a toughness in this culture which expresses itself in a variety of ways: a resiliency in the face of personal tragedy, a strength of religion, and an independence of thought and behavior as an ideal. Fighting, drinking, and loving express this core: Ch. 36, *Blood Will Tell and Does*, observes the outlaw son in these terms. Third, there is a humor expressed in puns, jokes, memorate, local legends, descriptions of the ridiculous and various genres of folk speech which is evident in every episode and which is one of the delights of the book. Many are variants of wide-spread types but represent authentic local forms.

The author has been editor-in-chief of *Field and Stream*, roving editor of *Sports Afield*, special correspondent for the *New York Times*, a published author, and contributor in several capacities (actor, writer, narrator and producer) to films and television programs. He has lived for sixty-

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