

6-1-1979

***The Trouble Of It Is* by David M. Newell**

Patricia Waterman
University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory>

Recommended Citation

Waterman, Patricia (1979) "*The Trouble Of It Is* by David M. Newell," *Tampa Bay History*: Vol. 1 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol1/iss1/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tampa Bay History by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

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

The Trouble Of It Is. By David M. Newell. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978. ix, 272 pp. Illustrations by Mark Livingston, \$8.95.)

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-

seven years fifty miles east of Gulf Hammock. Mr. Newell is a careful observer and has recorded a segment of Florida life with accuracy and respect and humor. We hope there is more to come.

Patricia Waterman

Cracker Messiah: Governor Sidney J. Catts of Florida. By Wayne Flynt. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977. xiv, 359 pp. Illustrations \$20.00.)



Sidney J. Catts

In 1911, Sidney Johnston Catts, a forty-eight-year-old Alabama Baptist preacher, accepted a call to a small Baptist church in DeFuniak Springs, Florida. He resigned three years later and began to sell insurance. Two years later, in 1916, he was elected governor of Florida. How can the meteoric rise of Catts in Florida politics be accounted for? There is so much controversy, so much contradiction, so much rhetoric, and often so little substance that the task is difficult. The records of the Catts' administration were destroyed, and Professor Flynt has had to range far and wide for his evidence, much of it in prejudiced sources. The book was required reading for someone. Students of Florida history are fortunate that he undertook it.

How much of the explanation lies in what Catts brought with him; how much in what he found in Florida? How did the two come together? Catts was no ignorant country bumpkin. He came from a small but successful planter family who survived the rigors of Reconstruction in good financial position. He had all the college education he wished, a year at what is now Auburn University, a year at Howard College, and a law degree from Cumberland University, Lebanon, Tennessee, in 1882. He remained an avid reader throughout his life, particularly the classics, history and languages. He practiced law and assisted in the management of the family estate until 1886 when he was converted and became a Baptist preacher. Though relatively successful he did not rise in the ranks of his calling and became dissatisfied with it. He was without a pastorate in 1911 when he accepted the call in Florida. He had shown a concern for the unfortunate and the young that was sincere. He really feared the power of the Roman Catholic Church as did many other Protestants in the region. He also was an ardent prohibitionist. His short temper and a willingness to champion unpopular causes often got him into difficulty.

In rural and small town Florida he found a neglected and sleeping electorate which he galvanized into action. They were awaiting just such a catalyst. In the fishing villages there was deep resentment of state efforts to regulate the shellfish industry. Farmers and small tradesmen felt hopeless in the face of forces they could not control, railroads that charged too much, banks that were not interested in their needs at any price, and new people moving into Florida who seemed a threat to their way of life. He found also a nativism coupled with deepseated anti-Catholicism that could be used to arouse them and stir them to action.

The Catts platform was mildly progressive and not all that different from the other Democrats. His campaign was a highly emotional attack on Catholicism, ardent support of state prohibition,