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***The History of Zephyrhills, 1821-1921* by Rosemary Trottman**

Joseph Mannard

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The families now there have found a satisfying way of life and endeavored to preserve traditions and landmarks, notable among them a revered, “Little Red School House” at Citrus Park. Author Cleo Bissonnette believes it is the oldest standing school in the county and possibly in the entire state.



The little red schoolhouse

(courtesy of the Tribune Company).

Among the chapters on Indian massacres, railroads, post offices, saw mills, stores, organizations and memories of people is a tender “Black History” by Lille Mae Mix Madison. If life was rugged over a spread of eight decades for the whites, it was rougher for the blacks.

Mrs. Madison closed with an eloquent epilogue for this whole gentle inspection of local history. She wrote:

“One of these days our children’s own children will laugh and say, ‘This is unbelievable, those must have been some hard days.’

“To every person who will read this book, remember: Let brotherly love continue to abide among all mankind; regardless of race, creed or color; whether rich or poor, young or old, it is our responsibility to love one another. Most of all, keep this in mind: ‘There is but one race, and that race is the human race’.”

Judson Bailey

The History of Zephyrhills, 1821-1921. By Rosemary Trotman. (New York: Vantage Press, 1978. 224 pp. \$8.50)

After a lifetime residency and forty years of teaching school in Zephyrhills, Rosemary Trotman possibly knows more about that community’s past than any living individual. Her purpose in this work is to recount the first century of the Zephyrhills area as part of the American nation, from the acquisition of the Florida territory from Spain to the Sunshine State’s land boom of the 1920’s. Presumably, the author has decided to leave the account of the succeeding years to another writer.

The best sections of this book vividly describe the incipient lumber, railroad, and agriculture (principally the orange and sugar) industries. Here, Trotman evokes a sense of those post-bellum years of development chiefly by relying on the testimony of early settlers and their descendants. These narratives breathe life into the seemingly mundane activities of pioneer existence, and thereby the personal anecdote becomes a microcosm of the frontier experience.

As fine as these depictions are, there exist throughout the rest of the work several problems in form and interpretation. The organization of this volume would have benefitted greatly by the

inclusion of a table of contents, chapter headings, and maps. The need for the latter especially derives from the fact that the author occasionally assumes that her readers possess a familiarity with the geography of the region which is equivalent to hers.

Of more serious consequences are the writer's inadequate treatment of certain members of Zephyrhills society, especially Afro-Americans. It would seem nearly impossible to write an accurate history of any Southern town without paying significant attention to the pervasiveness of race relations and their ramifications; yet, Trotman attempts to bypass such a duty. She virtually ignores black participation in the growth of Zephyrhills except to portray happy darkies on the plantation (who she mistakenly believes to have been recent arrivals from Africa), to allude to the corruption of "carpetbag rule" during Reconstruction and to mention Jim Crow legislation only in quoting the observations of an approving northern white visitor.

Trotman also implicitly supports the idea of "separate but equal" schools and fails to give Negroes a sufficient role in her story. "Their story must be told by the historians among them," she fallaciously argues, "it remains the task of the young blacks, now *forced to give up their own schools* (my italics) and enter white schools where they seem to feel a loss of identity, to write the true story."

Perhaps much criticism appears somewhat harsh in light of the modest objectives of this book. True, Trotman makes no pretense that her work is meant for anything but popular consumption. In addition, she toiled long and assiduously in gathering her material (especially the interviews), a task for which students and writers of Florida history alike owe her a debt of appreciation. This book, nevertheless, exhibits a failing common to many local histories. That is, too often it merely chronicles a kind of "who's who" of the town, an approach which wins the plaudits of the F.F.Z. (First Families of Zephyrhills), but ignores or distorts the contributions of the non-elites of the community.

Joseph Mannard