

6-1-1980

## ***Angel City* by Patrick D. Smith**

Becky Acuna

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

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Acuna, Becky (1980) "*Angel City* by Patrick D. Smith," *Tampa Bay History*. Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.  
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol2/iss1/12>

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](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

## BOOK REVIEWS

*Sketches From a Younger Florida*. By Howard Hartley. (Clearwater: Citcom Printing, 1978. \$1.95)

The ten stories in Howard Hartley's *Sketches From a Younger Florida* appeared in the magazine, *Beach Life*, and were written when Hartley was in his 80's. An ex-newspaper, radio-news, and public relations man, he came to the Tampa-Clearwater area in the 1920's; in later years he considered himself a native Floridian.

"Newcomers" and "Longtimers" both will enjoy the sketch of Count Odet Phillipe's life before 1834, and the following years, after he settled with his family near Safety Harbor. Now this area is known as Phillipe Park, beautifully situated on the waters of upper Old Tampa Bay.

The third Duke of Sutherland, well known in the United States as well as Europe, came to the Tarpon Springs area in the late 1880's bringing romance and glamour. He built a mansion on the shore of Lake Butler (now Lake Tarpon). Hartley writes of the gay times and excursions enjoyed by the Duke and his friends for the few years he lived in the area and before he returned to his homeland, England.

Hartley writes in an informal, easy style about his stint as an Air Raid Warden for Clearwater in 1942. In this story he tells about the Clearwater War Production Pool that was responsible for turning out ammunition boxes for the War Production Board. When a new contract was not forthcoming, Mayor Seavy suggested that they forget the ammo boxes and manufacture baby playpens, which they did. Remember the wartime baby boom?

There are seven more stories in *Sketches From A Younger Florida* that stir the memories of earlier times in Pinellas and Hillsborough Counties. The reader will find all the sketches informative, and written in a style that will appeal to all ages. The small paperback book is easy to hold; the print bold enough for no eye strain; a book to pick up for just one story if one's time is limited, or for many hours of pleasure. Howard Hartley's journalistic style makes the stories come alive.

*Josephine Dill*

*Angel City*. By Patrick D. Smith. (St. Petersburg: Valkyrie Press, 1978-192 pp. \$8.95)

In 1977, Florida agribusiness produced over 363,150 tons of tomatoes, as well as 192,000 tons of refined sugar, 1½ million tons of ground crops, and more than 10½ million tons of citrus fruit. A contingent of some 150,000 farm workers quite literally shouldered the burden of this near \$900 million dollars-worth of foodstuffs, helping to make Florida agriculture the nation's second-most important producer of perishables and Florida agribusinesses the second-most prosperous farms in the country. During the past twenty years, myriad news media efforts have helped to map the bleak and bewildering twists and turns of the little-known, back-rural route those farm workers have had to follow; roads that have interminably led to the most visible and haunting

symbol of their plight – the migrant labor camp. Now, Patrick D. Smith has added to Florida's accumulation of exposés the novel, *Angel City* – his attempt to dramatize the harsh realities and ironies of migrant farm laborers and their most human implications.

Jared Teeter, the protagonist of *Angel City*, is a man to whom Smith imbues an abundance of rustic simplicity and West Virginian “mountain pride.” Finally forced off his land in the early 1970's by the increasing unprofitability of small farm units, Teeter packs his pregnant wife, his teenage daughter and son into a fourteen-year-old Dodge van and heads for Homestead, Florida. Their entrance into the “migrant stream” is indeed illustrative of the common, if not archetypal, crises constantly faced by farm workers: the dot-to-dot picture of a trip in which every break in the line represents another misfortune – a broken water pump, a flat tire, a ticket for a faulty brake light; the depletion of their limited cash upon “a generator that all the while had been on a shelf in the rear of the garage but that was now priced higher,” upon two weeks-worth of cold meats, crackers, and warm sodas; and finally the inability to secure shelter and work upon arrival in a strange and hostile town. Tired and anxious, his mountain-pride affronted by the dependencies and abasements of migrant poverty, Jared Teeter's hopes soar as he is recruited by a gas station attendant for a “permanent”, picking job with Silas Creedy.

A huge man, “his hair red and short-cropped . . . his face almost as red as his hair,” Creedy ushers the Teeters behind his Mark IV into Angel City where they settle into the degrading conditions of the camp and the daily and hourly routines of the work – the pre-dawn lineups at the outhouse in anticipation of the shadowless terrain of the fields, the monotonous aching of the small of their backs and the backs of their thighs, and the continual fatigue produced by the heat of cheerless evening cook-fires, rotgut wine, and windowless rooms. Despite the lock on the camp gate, the repeated warnings of the Black man, Cy who befriends him, and two encounters with Creedy's ledger of debts and camp henchmen, it takes Teeter nearly a month to realize fully that he and his family are indeed prisoners of Angel City – the row of dingy cinder block barracks isolated by miles of south Florida marsh and crop lands and an eight-foot high, barbed-wire fence.

Though Smith does well in describing the process by which the Teeter family is dehumanized, he falls far short of accurately interpreting the dynamics behind that process. Angel City is isolated not only by location and locks, but also by a system of agricultural production that relies upon the very existence of labor camps or squalid “quarters,” upon poverty amidst plenty, upon the powerlessness of its victims. What Smith depicts in *Angel City* is peonage, a system of exploitation by which an individual is forced to work off debts through unwilling servitude, a system that was prevalent, if not the common practice, in the South for nearly a century. While, in the late 1800's, the Federal government outlawed peonage in an attempt to free the agricultural peasantry of the southwest, the recently-defeated states of the Confederacy passed “Black Codes” that effectively controlled their newly-emancipated farm labor force. The outrageous terms and conditions of forced labor for “vagrancy” or minor offenses and the plantation stores that raised prices (and thus debts) by 110%, recreated slavery. State statutes that outlawed forced servitude and convict labor were passed within the lifetime of the older generation of Florida farm workers. Though progress and the sinew of the farm labor community have mitigated the worst barbarities of the system, it must always be remembered that the origins of Southern agricultural labor relations are in slavery and peonage, that the racism and economic expediency

of that system have yet to be eradicated, and that it is the economic, political, and social superstructure of the system that cloaks both an Angel City and a camp of modern mobile units in the same shroud.

Smith unfortunately lets the buck fall at the feet of the greedy Creedy. He completely ignores the social and political realities that circumvent the laws regulating health conditions in fields and camps, child labor, minimum wage guarantees, and labor contractor practices. (One is reminded of the case of Florida contractor Wardell Williams who, within this decade, was convicted of murder, was allowed by the court upon the favorable testimony of his agricultural employer to serve his sentence in the off-seasons, and who is now facing peonage charges.) But the greatest fault, and perhaps danger, of *Angel City* is Smith's characterization of the farm labor force. The fact that he chose to rely upon the enslavement of a white whose salient characteristic was his "mountain-pride" implies that the non-white workers who have endured the conditions which Angel City seeks to exemplify must have no pride left. Such a view smacks of being a liberal rationalization for a racial and class stereotype. All farm workers are not dehumanized by virtue of the fact they are farm workers; indeed, the dignity of their struggle and perseverance speaks to their strength. Not all labor camps are *slave* labor camps; the real tragedy lies in the fact that the men and women who end up in peonage camps were most usually "killed" before they ever got there and seek the safety of a barbed wire fence as refuge from the cruelties, the constant insecurities and crises of the system outside the gate.

*Becky Acuna*

*Early Medical History of Pinellas Peninsula: A Quadricentennial Epoch.* by Frederick Ebersson, (St. Petersburg: Valkyrie Press, 1978, \$10)

The subtitle of Dr. Ebersson's delightful monograph reflects the breadth of his work. In 190 rather small pages, he meticulously and lovingly examines the medical history of the Pinellas Peninsula from the Precolumbian Timucuan Indians (300 B C) until the present day.

Although written in a sprightly personal style, this narrative has been researched exhaustively, and the numerous references are placed conveniently on each page along with the subject matter. The illustrations alone are more than worth the modest cost of the book.

Even the most avid students of medical Floridana will discover many well-documented gems gathered by Dr. Ebersson. Just to name a few:

\*There was no physician on the Pinellas Peninsula until 1883, and only nine by 1912.

\*Between 1874 and 1885, the lower tip of the peninsula was touted in medical literature by reputable American and English physicians as the ideal site for a "Health City," in spite of the fact that the development of that area, as well as all of Florida, was paralyzed by the deadly triad of yellow fever, typhoid, and malaria.

\*In 1905-1910, Tarpon Springs dominated the peninsula in population.

\*Cedar was once one of the most common trees of the west coast from Cedar Keys to Venice.