The Sea Shell Islands: A History of Sanibel and Captiva by Elinore M. Dormer

Griffing Bancroft

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BOOK REVIEWS


This updating of an earlier volume brings the history of Sanibel and Captiva up to the present.

Mrs. Dormer, with a trained eye for colorful detail, traces the story of the islands from their geological beginnings to the classical conflict between resident and developer.

The evidence of early Indian inhabitants is brought up to date with reports of new archeological discoveries. The more exciting stories of Spanish explorations and the ever-intriguing, if apocryphal, tales of legendary pirates are recounted with gusto.

We are told of the first American settlers and the eventual establishment of the islands as an on-going agricultural community that was wiped out by a hurricane. The island population then settled into an isolated residential community with tourism its main industry.

Then, in 1963, over the objections of most residents, came a new causeway that linked, the islands with the rapidly growing mainland. The author’s original volume ends here in these words: “With the islands under siege, the future was uncertain. After 473 years, the conquistadores and traders were back – in search of wealth.”

She now recounts this uncertain future. Time has allowed her to supply more details of the bitter fight over the causeway which was promoted by outside financiers.

When the causeway struggle was lost, residents still expected growth to be kept orderly through their local zoning authority. But to their dismay, the courts declared this illegal. The islands were at the mercy of a county commission which, the author suggests, was dominated by the building and related industries.

This led to the long and ultimately successful struggle to win for Sanibel its own city government. With this, Sanibel residents achieved some measure of control.

Many old timers, however, believe it came too late. The conquistadores and traders got their wealth, but the islanders lost a treasured way of life.

Griffing Bancroft


Norman J. Pinardi, a senior vice-president of Bradenton’s Inter-City National Bank, indulges his love of writing in a splendidly illustrated, up-to-date history of Florida’s “Oldest