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***Biscuits and 'Taters. A History of Cattle Ranching in Manatee County* by Joe G. Warner**

Oscar Elder

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Later chapters cover the family's arrival and reactions to their new Florida home, the Reasoner Brothers' introduction of new plant species into Florida, and the search for rare native palm and plant species. The two chapters describing the deaths of Pliny Reasoner in 1881 and the death of Egbert Norman Reasoner's son, also named Pliny, in 1912, are moving accounts.

Like many other Florida families, the Reasoner family faced the twentieth century's depression, world wars, and Florida's postwar boom period. Few other families left such a testament of beauty throughout the state.

*The Plant Pioneers* is a well balanced narrative and a very "good read" for plant fanciers, students and lovers of Florida's history, and the general reading public. The only noticeable thing lacking is an index for plants and one for the people and places. It is to be hoped that in 2001 a later author will continue the history, with indexes.

Pamela N. Gibson

*Biscuits and 'Taters. A History of Cattle Ranching in Manatee County.* By Joe G. Warner. (Bradenton, 1980. Great Outdoors Publishing Company. Photographs. Maps. Bibliography. Index. Pp. vi, 95. Paper.)

*Biscuits and 'Taters* tells you much you'll enjoy knowing – but didn't know whom to ask – about the early Florida cowhunters and cattle ranching in Manatee County from about 1845 to 1940.

In 1845, Manatee County extended southward from Tampa Bay to the Caloosahatchee River, embracing nearly 4,700 square miles of palmetto scrub and piney woods. Seven counties presently lie within this perimeter.

Written by Joe G. Warner, a fifth generation Manatee Countian and retired cattleman, *Biscuits and 'Taters* is an historically accurate anecdotal account of the pioneer families who overcame Indian attacks, wild animals, frequent adverse weather conditions, and livestock diseases such as fever ticks and screwworms, to establish the County's still-flourishing cattle industry. It is the story, too, of the loneliness and back-breaking work endured by a rugged, courageous breed of men and women. In addition to the ranching aspects, the narrative also touches upon many other facets of area history.

Unlike the western cowboy, traditionally romanticized in story and song, the early Florida cowhunter has received scant literary attention. A reason, perhaps, is that he lacked the glamorous appearance of his western brethren. As described by Warner, the cowhunter's work clothes were strictly utilitarian and utterly devoid of style.

The title of Warner's book derives, with some affection, from the fact that before the roundups, or cowhunts as they were called, the womenfolk baked large quantities of biscuits and sweet potatoes. These supplemented the cowhunter's in-the-saddle menu that consisted of a slab of salty bacon, coffee, and sometimes an onion for dessert. The absence of refrigeration or stoves made spartan fare a necessity during the grueling weeks cowhunters rode the rangeland

collecting the cattle herds for branding and shipment to markets. Much of the livestock was exported to Cuba via schooners and, later, steamships sailing from Manatee River landings.

Illustrative of the magnitude of cowhunts is the fact that by 1878 more than 53,000 head of cattle roamed the fenceless County, and 1,036 individual brands were on record.

*Biscuits and 'Taters* is an entertaining amalgam of Warner's personal experiences, his many conversations and reminiscences with veteran ranchers, and information gleaned from oral history recordings and extensive researching of Manatee County's early cattle shipping records. His book also includes rare photographs of early cowhunters in action, plus facsimiles of the cattle brands used in pioneer times.

Oscar Elder

*The Story of St. Martha's Catholic Parish: Sarasota, Florida, 1912-1977.* Compiled by the Parish History Committee. (Sarasota, 1977. St. Martha's Catholic Parish. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. Pp. viii, 325. Paper.)

St. Martha's, Sarasota, became the church the circus built. This book unfolds that story and is dedicated to Monsignor Charles L. Eslander, founding pastor. In the telling, Catholic history is traced there from 1847 through the present pastorate of Father Jerome A. Carosella. Credit is given to early pioneer people and their priests, from circuit-riding Jesuits until the Bishop of St. Augustine, Florida, gave Sarasota County, in Father Eslander, its first resident diocesan priest. He served at St. Martha's from 1927 to 1968, and died in retirement, February 16, 1977.

Martha in the New Testament is the patron saint whose name was given to Sarasota's first Catholic church, honoring Martha Ann Burns, the donor of the lot. Her son, Owen Burns, and John Ringling of the circus business, were developers of modern Sarasota. Since May 31, 1911, the Burns' lot belonged to the Catholic Church. However, Jesuits kept the Sarasota County registers of Catholic births and marriages in Tampa until Father Eslander came to town in Sarasota to serve there and for a short time as pastor of St. Joseph Parish, Bradenton.

This book documents that during the Thirties, the building of St. Martha Church was helped along significantly by management and performers of the Ringling Brothers Circus. (Some night on the late movies on TV, keen-eyed viewers may still see Father Eslander and his altar boys blessing the circus as its train pulls out of winter quarters in "The Greatest Show on Earth." He was really the circus' priest, so it was a bit of real life on film when he and the acolytes, fully vested, joined the famous movie stars in the cast of that 1951 movie.)

I suppose it is difficult to achieve a completely smooth writing of a history compiled by a committee. Readability is flawed by more names in the text than the reader cares to know, but it is evident that the authors of this parish history did their homework. One would hope that other Catholic churches in the St. Petersburg diocese would attempt to document their own "roots" in the Florida communities, and this book is the best I have seen of the genre.