Florida’s Gubernatorial Politics in the Twentieth Century by David R. Colburn and Richard K. Scher

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BOOK REVIEWS


Wish You Were Here by Hampton Dunn is a Florida historical work done county by county. It covers approximately the first half of this century using hundreds of postcards to present this historical era.

Creating this book must have been a labor of love. The research and selection of the hundreds of postcards portraying Florida from the turn of this century through the '40s is a task those interested in the cultural, economic, social and political history of our sixty-seven counties would find a joy.

The author’s knowledge of Florida and its history shows in the comments accompanying each postcard. He has kept the information factual, light and stimulating, and leaves the reader with a desire to explore further.

Some might complain about the scarcity of postcards displayed for some counties. However, it is this scarcity in some areas, that enhances your curiosity. Maybe there are other postcards for these locations lying undiscovered in someone’s attic.

Here is a history book you will enjoy reading, re-reading and sharing with others. It is a fine professional piece of work using an interesting historical primary source of information, the postcard, dated and time stamped by the U.S. Government Post Office. The book adds to our knowledge of our state, its counties and communities. It surely will spark some to look at their old postcards, to see how they, their relatives and friends made history.

This book is certainly pleasant reading, and at the rate buildings are being torn down and scenic views are being black topped over here in Florida it will become more valuable each day.

John Friend

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Florida's Gubernatorial Politics in the Twentieth Century by David Colburn and Richard Scher is a welcome addition to the literature on Florida history and politics. Colburn, a historian at the University of Florida, and Scher, a political scientist at Florida State University, have written a well-documented account of the leadership styles and political positions of Florida’s twentieth century governors. The authors make extensive use of manuscript collections, interviews, government publications, and Florida newspapers in addition to the existing scholarly publications.

A weakness in the book is the three introductory chapters that are used to provide a demographic setting for Florida gubernatorial politics. Unfortunately these introductory chapters too often read like The Book of Lists. The reader learns everything from changes in the number of agricultural workers in Florida to changes in per capita income. We discover those governors who were rich and who were poor; who were Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, etc., and who were businessmen, lawyers or Farmers. Some categorization of this information would have been more useful and certainly more interesting.

Parts II and III of the book are its real strengths. Part II describes the structure and processes of the governor’s office, including chapters on the constitutional setting, the executive office and the relationship between the governor and the legislature. Colburn and Scher describe the powers and limitations on the chief executive in trying to shape public policies. The three chapters on structure and processes provide an excellent introduction for Part III which deals with gubernatorial initiatives in the areas of race relations, education, economic development, and criminal justice. Each of these chapters provides a thorough examination of how Florida’s twentieth century governors have dealt with the state’s most pressing problems. Tampa Bay readers will be especially interested in their account of the Charley Johns legislative committee that investigated communists, homosexuals, and subversive activities throughout the state. The University of South Florida was more thoroughly investigated than any other state educational institution. Colburn and Scher also offer an interesting narrative of Governor Claude Kirk’s 1970 attempt to prevent court-ordered busing in Manatee County. A contempt citation and a $10,000 a day fine caused Kirk to quickly rethink his position.

The book’s final chapter is a weak attempt to rate the performance of Florida’s governors in the area of race relations, economic development and ethics. We find that only one governor was an economic liberal (Fuller Warren), two were racial liberals (LeRoy Collins, Reuben Askew) and five were low in ethics (Sidney Catts, David Sholtz, Charley Johns, Hayden Burns, and

Governor LeRoy Collins. Photograph courtesy of University of South Florida Library, Special Collections.
Kirk). One is not sure how various governors were assigned to their respective categories other than on the basis of the authors’ impressionistic criteria.

If the reader can struggle through the rather tedious introductory chapters to this book he will find seven chapters of Florida history and politics that are a significant contribution to the literature. One only hopes that Florida’s Gubernatorial Politics in the Twentieth Century attracts the attention that it deserves.

Darryl Paulson


Most people, maybe even historians, probably take stores, especially food markets, for granted. In Florida and in the rapidly expanding Tampa Bay area, many people usually purchase their life-sustaining needs in a supermarket, probably of fairly new construction or recently renovated, located in a shopping plaza. The last thing that would normally enter your mind in such a setting would be questions as to the history of the store or the chain with which it is affiliated. Fifty Years of Pleasure is a book about just that: the history of the Publix chain of supermarkets.

Although not an academic study of Publix’s history, the author has prepared a readable and interesting look at the life of the chain’s founder, George W. Jenkins, and how, from the company’s view, the Publix chain developed from one store to the large and successful operation it is today. A most interesting aspect of the book is that Publix’s growth is backgrounded against the development of the food industry in general and supermarkets in particular that occurred during the same period of time (1930-1980). Indeed, as the dust jacket notes, the “history buff” will gain an insight into how supermarkets first developed, and learn of four significant advances in food retailing; the most recent considered to be computerization, perhaps epitomized to us by the check-out scanner and uniform product code lines.

The book follows the development of the chain by following the life of Mr. Jenkins. From this standpoint, the reader can gain a view of the motives and philosophies of the man with regard to the events that took place in the chain’s history. The author also employs reminiscences from other people, many still with Publix, to further his story. Disappointingly, aside from Mr. Jenkin's early life, and of course his public life, only a few pages of the book are devoted to his family life.

One other interesting point is that the architectural style of the 1950’s Publix buildings is noted. Many of these buildings can readily be seen in many area cities even though Publix stores no longer occupy them. Finally, one aspect that could have given the reader a better understanding of the company’s expansion history would have been a map, or series of maps, depicting the pattern of growth and number of stores added over the years.

In summary, the book provides an interesting but not rigorous look into the history of a successful Florida business, well known to the Bay area, and the life and philosophy of its founder backgrounded by the history of the food industry.