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***Edge of Wilderness: A Settlement History of Manatee River and Sarasota Bay* by Janet Snyder Matthews**

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persuasively, “In that region, the city is much closer to the plantation than it is to Chicago and New York” (p. 3). In the “lengthy essay” which follows, the author explores the impact of three features related to the plantation economy that have dominated both the southern countryside and urban life since the founding of Jamestown. According to Goldfield, the worlds of both the cotton field and the skyscraper were shaped by the rural traditions of staple agriculture, race relations and a colonial economy exploited by outsiders. Goldfield’s provocative and readable exploration of these themes draws on an excellent grasp of wide-ranging sources which he discusses in a bibliographic essay.

Anyone curious about what Goldfield’s hypothesis has to do with Florida will be glad to learn that he recognizes the diversity that has existed within the South. He observes, for example, that Florida cities such as Tampa and Jacksonville owed their growth to something other than King Cotton. However, while serving other masters, these cities shared the regional pattern of a dependent economy and a biracial society. The ways in which sunbelt cities may have recently begun diverging from this historic pattern remain to be investigated.

Goldfield’s insightful overview of several centuries of southern urban history should interest both informed scholars and general readers.

Robert P. Ingalls

Edge of Wilderness: A Settlement History of Manatee River and Sarasota Bay. By Janet Snyder Matthews. Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1983. Caprine Press. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. Pp. 464. Cloth. \$21.50.

Janet Matthews has written what is destined to become the definitive, narrative history of the Manatee River-Sarasota Bay region. She ranges in her coverage from the mound people of about 5000 B.C. to the Sarasota “assassins” of the mid-1880s. The author has mined a wealth of primary sources, permitting the individuals who are coping with the forces of change to speak for themselves. Especially effective is the deliberate omission of “[sic]” when quoting such material. This permits the basic datum of recorded history – the individual – to speak without interpretive alteration.

The author is to be commended for her detailed coverage of the establishment of the Spanish ranchos (fish camps) which existed during the British period. This sets the scene for her narrative of the arrival of American William Bunce during the U.S. territorial period. This influential pioneer of Hillsborough County developed an economically profitable rancho at the mouth of the Manatee River. Unfortunately, Bunce's enterprise was subjected to the vicissitudes of the Second Seminole War as were his “mixed blood” workers, who were the victims of both Indian raids and the disgraceful and discriminatory government policy administered by General Thomas Jesup.

Janet Matthews is at her best when evaluating the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 and its relationship to the influx of new settlers into the Manatee River-Sarasota Bay area. Her analysis of the motivations of the middle Florida planters such as the Gamble brothers, the Braden brothers, and William Wyatt, who became the pioneers of the sugar cane and cattle industries on



John Greene Webb, from *Edge of Wilderness*.



Eliza Ophelia Graves Webb, from *Edge of Wilderness*.

Florida's newest frontier, is especially cogent. Furthermore, Matthews' meticulous description of the Gamble brothers' sugar mill operation at present-day Ellenton is technically and statistically definitive.

The Manatee County historian is equally effective when she turns her attention to the post-Civil War arrival of Northerners, such as New Yorkers John and Eliza Webb and sailor Frank Guptill of Maine. They farmed, boarded tourists and became central figures in the coastal trade between Sarasota Bay, Key West, Tampa and Cedar Key. They and their descendants, together with newly arriving Southerners such as Confederate veteran Robert Griffith, helped to develop and expand the economy of then vast Manatee County.

The book concludes with a colorful narrative of the developing enmity between the economically depressed "crackers" of Sarasota Bay and prominent northern resident Charles Abbe, whose landholdings included 120 acres of present day downtown Sarasota. This animosity resulted in the murder of Abbe by Charlie Willard and others who were part of an infamous

organization known as the Sarasota Vigilance Committee. An exciting posse chase, resulting in the capture, trial and conviction of eight of the “thugs”, returned law and order to the Sarasota area in 1885.

Although Janet Matthews’ work represents a fine piece of state history, this reviewer takes strong issue with the statement that: “Grover Cleveland...brought the Reconstruction period officially to an end” (pp. 319-320). C. Vann Woodward and others have clearly demonstrated that it was the election of Hayes as a result of the Compromise of 1877 which brought Reconstruction to an end. Furthermore, Edward Williamson clearly documents, in *Florida Politics in the Gilded Age*, that the election of George “Millionaire” Drew in 1876 ended Republican rule in Florida. Thus, Matthews’ assertion that the election of General Perry in 1884 represented the first defeat at the polls for northern Republicans is clearly erroneous.

Nevertheless, this reviewer looks forward to a sequel covering the Manatee River-Sarasota Bay area from 1885 to the present.

Richard Matthews