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***The Singing River: A History of the People, Places and Events
Along the Manatee River* by Joe Warner**

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Supreme Power, not necessarily following the teachings of an organized religion. We find this, strength and faith influencing their business decisions. Theirs was not just a Sunday religion.

Another fascinating facet of this book is the view of national and international politics and problems as seen by these uncommon friends. They not only saw the problems, but they also put their expertise to work to find solutions. Sometimes they were misunderstood or their motives were they questioned, but never did they compromise their consciences.

Entwined in the lives of these famous men was James Newton. He downplays his role, but the thread of his strong philosophy, upon which his life was anchored, runs through the book as a steady undercurrent. When he had to make difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions, he stood firmly on the side of his principles and let the chips fall where they would.

His steadfastness was a major contribution to these friendships. They could ask him questions and know they would not receive yes-man answers. Also, from time to time he was able to ask the key questions that could help them unscramble knotty problems. Newton was a friend with whom they could relax and be themselves. That was no small gift for men who were frequently in the glare of the publicity spotlight. He was there to give moral support when stress and burdens became too heavy to bear. Equally important, he was there on some memorable fun-filled vacations.

He was indeed an uncommon friend of these five men on whom the spotlight fell, just as they were his uncommon friends. Friendship, after all, is a two-way street. In this case it resulted in a book well worth reading.

Albert Rawchuck

The Singing River: A History of the People, Places and Events Along the Manatee River. By Joe Warner. n.p. 1986. Pp. 181. Illustrations. Maps. Bibliography. Index. Paper. \$14.00. (Available from author: 980 Upper Manatee River Road, Bradenton, Florida 34202.)

In 1982, Joe and Libby Warner set out to write a history of the Manatee River and the towns and the cities around it. Five years later, the Warners realized their goal and published *The Singing River*. This book not only fulfills the Warners' original intent, but goes one step further. Using original newspapers, letters, maps and diaries, as well as over one hundred interviews of Manatee County's earliest settlers and their descendants, they have painted a picture of the people who settled along the river's banks and their lifestyle, mannerisms and folklore.

Through *The Singing River*, the Warners take readers on a trip not only up the Manatee River, but through time. They detail the history of twenty-nine settlements, many of which no longer exist except in the memories of Manatee County's earliest settlers and a few of their descendants. Beginning at the river's mouth in western Manatee County, Florida, the authors recapture life in such communities as Snead Island, Manatee, Rye and Bethany. Following their guide, the reader travels a total of fifty-five miles inland to the community of Four Corners at the intersection of Manatee, Hillsborough, Hardee and Polk counties.

The tale that Joe and Libby Warner weave is one of Indians, Spanish explorers and fishermen, boat builders, steamboat captains, shopkeepers, sugar planters, soldiers, school teachers and cattlemen. While their characters came to Manatee County from all over the United States, one common thread, their dependence on the Manatee River, bound them together. In *The Singing River*, the authors return again and again to the theme of the river's importance to the area. It has served as a line of communication and transportation and as a source of energy and water. The river has affected the county's population and economic growth and recreational activities. Although they point out that the reasons for each settlement varied, the importance of the Manatee River to each of its inhabitants remains foremost.

Stories of these inhabitants are laced throughout the book. Drawing on an extensive oral history collection, the Warners recreate many of Manatee County's most exciting moments. The day the first automobile arrived in Bradenton is described with great hilarity, as is a scene during Prohibition when the Sheriff's Department flushed such large quantities of bootleg liquor down the sewers that a massive fish kill occurred in the river. The authors also recount the Indian legend that gave the Manatee River its nickname, "the singing river," and recite some modern day explanations for this eerie musical sound that once could be heard at Rocky Bluff along the river's edge. To illustrate these stories, they richly embellish the text with hundreds of historical photographs.

For those interested not only in the history of Manatee County, but the history of pioneer Florida, *The Singing River* is a worthwhile investment. Scholars, history buffs and the general public will all enjoy reading this history of the Manatee River area.

Cathy Bayless Slusser