Palm View, Florida, 1901-1991: The Recollections of William Harrison Snow

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol14/iss1/7
In 1991, William Harrison (Harry) Snow decided to record his memories of life in the Palm View area. Born in 1901 and a descendant of some of that section's earliest settlers, Harry Snow feared that the history of this small community in the northwest corner of Manatee County would be lost. Today, with only a few churches, a cemetery and one elementary school to mark Palm View's location, the once thriving settlement is no longer distinguishable from neighboring communities and is usually referred to as North Palmetto. In an attempt to preserve Palm View's history, Snow began painstakingly to write his recollections of ninety years of life in Palm View. When he showed his work to family members and friends, they offered to type his handwritten notes and urged him to continue writing. As a result of his efforts, interest has been generated among other Palm View residents to save their community's history. The memoir published here is the first in a series produced by Harry Snow. He continues to record his memoirs and hopes that his work will preserve Palm View's past for future generations.
I am Harry Snow. I was born in 1901 and raised in the part of Manatee County known as the Palm View area and have lived here ninety years.

The Palm View area is bordered on the west by Terra Ceia Bay and on the east where Interstate Highway 75 comes through on the north by Frog Creek and on the south by the Mendoza Road. The southwest corner is about three miles north of Palmetto and is about three-and-a-half or four miles square. I don't know who gave it its name or why, but it has been Palm View for a long, long time.

My grandfather Jackson [William Decatur Jackson, Jr.] moved his family here from Mississippi in 1885 and bought twenty-two acres of land and built a house on it. There were a few widely scattered families living in this area at that time. There was a little Palm View school house about two hundred yards southwest of where the Palm View School is today. There were eight to ten kids going to school. When he moved here, he added three more there for a little while. There was an old-time family named Newman living on a small family farm near the mouth of McMullen Creek. They had the Palm View post office in their house. The mail was delivered and picked up once a week. There was a man named Harllee. I think he was from South Carolina. He had bought a small piece of land on the south side of McMullen Creek and built a house on it, but had moved to Palmetto.¹ There was the Berryhill family from Georgia and the Gibbs family from Tennessee.
My father [William Hardee Snow] was born and raised in Fort Meade and come to this area in 1897 and went to work for a man named Bankston that had a small farm and needed some help. My father met and married my mother [Jennie Bell Jackson] and they made arrangements with Mr. Harllee to live in his house and farm his land. In the meantime my grandfather gave my mother forty acres of hammock land and all the spare time that my father could get he was over on our place digging ditches to drain some ponds so that he could get some farming land of his own as soon as possible. He lived on Mr. Harllee’s place about two years, and then they moved on our place in a house that he had built.

At the turn of the century there were only about ten families living in the area. Our place is located about the center of the Palm View area, and at the turn of the century there, were only four families living in a radius of a mile away. Everyone that lived in the area were farmers on very small family farms - just what the family could take care of. Everybody wanted hammock land. They didn’t think that the prairie land was good for anything but to help hold the world together. I can remember when you could buy all the prairie land that you would want for one dollar to a dollar twenty-five per acre, but hammock land was five dollars and six dollars per acre. When a settler would move into the area and acquire a piece of land, most of them would get ten, fifteen, or twenty acres. That would be all that they needed.
The next thing would be to build a house. The only lumber in that day and time was from a little coffee-pot saw mill, out in the piney woods east of the Gillette area, owned by a good old man, named Dan Robertson. If anyone went to him for some lumber, if you had the money to buy it or not, he would let anyone have it, for he knew that they would pay him for it, for everybody was honest back then. He cut green pine trees that hadn't ever been turpentined and sawed them up in 4x6s for sills on pine blocks and 2x6s for floor joints and pine boards from three to sixteen inches wide for walls. These were one inch thick, and weighed like lead. A person couldn't haul many on a one-horse wagon. They would cut the boards the length that they would want the walls to be, and nail one end of the board to the sill and the other end to the rafter plate. Wherever they wanted a window or door, they would box in a place for them. They would floor the houses with the same kind of lumber and build a partition in the house. Some would have two. They would build window shutters and doors out of the same kind of lumber.

All the houses were pretty much the same. Only a little different design sometimes. They would close the shutters when it was cold or raining. There was no such thing as screen wire in them days. People had to sleep under mosquito bars and they were terrible in the summer time. The heating system was to sit by the old wood burning stove when it was cold and the water system was a four-foot-square hole dug out in the back yard about fourteen or fifteen feet deep, so that there would be water in it in the daytime of the year. They would have a curb around them about four-feet high and a person would draw the water up with a bucket tied on the end of a rope.
Times have changed, as much with the weather as it has with the way of life back in the old days. We had what they called the rainy season. About the first week in June it would start and about the middle of the afternoon, most everywhere would get a flood, and when the ground would get full of water, with very little drainage, one of those downpours would come and water would be standing all over the place an inch or more deep and the water in the well would be the same height. That is what we drank and cooked with. It was about like dipping it up out of the yard and drinking it. Until pitcher pumps became available, the people all had chills and fever a lot. The medicine that we had was quinine and castor oil.

The area was a farming area. That was all everybody did. Just trying to scratch a living out of the ground. The crops that the people raised were tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, cucumbers, beans and squash. The winter crops were cauliflower and cabbage. People raised tomatoes in the spring, because the fall season wasn't long enough. We would have summer rains until about the middle of September, and there would be the danger of a hurricane or an early freeze. Pepper and eggplants are more hardy, but tomatoes couldn't take very rough weather. Tomatoes were then, and are now, Manatee County's main money crop. Although pepper and eggplants were good money crops, they did not compare with tomatoes, but they were easier to grow.

The plow tools that we used were modern at that time. But the people that farm up to 1,000 acres or more now, and do it all with machinery, would laugh at what we farmed with. We had a
turning plow, to turn the ground upside down and a cutaway harrow, to cut the ground up after it was turned, a Planet Jr. Harrow, a cultivator and a scooter stock, which was like a turning plow, but much smaller. They were made somewhere in Georgia. Some people called them Georgia stocks. Some called them grasshopper stocks. We always knew them as scooter stocks. They had an adjustable foot on them that they would bolt a scooter plow points on. The plow points came in two-inch widths, which was called a bull tongue scooter then three, four, five, and six-inch plow points. Everything that people planted was in rows of four feet apart. They used a ton of fertilizer per acre on the money crops at three applications of 600 to 700 pounds each time.

The variety of tomatoes that people planted at that time was Livingston’s Globe and Duke of York and World Beater pepper, and High Bush eggplants. People would plant their seed beds about Christmas time and the plants would be ready to transplant in the field about the first of February. Most of the danger of cold weather would be over by then. People would plow four furrows together, then plow a deep furrow between those beds and set the tomato plants deep. We would plow the soil to them as they grew until they were on a bed. We grew them on the ground. No one thought about tying them to stakes until the early 1920s. But the pepper and eggplants they would set them more on the level of the land. A man and his wife couldn’t take care of over two acres of tomatoes, and would have to have help at picking time. After the money crops were planted people would plant an acre or less in corn. They would plow a furrow with a scooter on level ground and plant two corn seeds about two feet apart and four or five blackeye pea seeds between the corn seeds and about every fifteen or twenty feet they would plant four or five watermelon seeds and a few hills of pumpkins. They could be fixed several ways to eat and were feed for the livestock.

The corn, peas, and a few rows of beans were for canning, but there were no cans at that time. People put their stuff in glass fruit jars. Everybody would can blackberries, which grew on ditch banks and in old abandoned fields, where a family would get disgusted and leave. The population stayed about the same, for when a family would leave, another one would move in. The people would try to can as many huckleberries as they could. They would work the tomatoes until the bushes would get top heavy and begin to fall over, then they would lay them by for ten days to two weeks, until the tomatoes matured enough to pick. They would can corn as long as it was tender and all the peas and beans that they could. When they were through picking the
tomatoes they would leave the ones on the vines until they got ripe and canned every one that they could, for they could use them in so many different ways.

A good garden was a must. Everyone had a big sweet potato patch. They would keep a long time. They would plant some Irish potatoes, but they wouldn’t keep very long. Through the fall, winter, and spring, with turnips, mustard, collards, rutabagors, beets, carrots, onions, beans and okra, after the spring crop was off, they would gather what corn was left when it matured. They had to use it up pretty quick or the weevils would ruin it. They would put it in the corn bin to feed the horses and cows.

Everybody had a milk cow, and from one to a half dozen cows in the woods, they called it free range. People had to fence their farms to keep them out. Everyone had a few hogs and a world of chickens and eggs. Everybody had to have one or two dogs to keep the wild cat and coons and opossums scared off.

Most every family had a guava thicket in their backyard. They canned guavas and made guava jelly, and also made wild grape jelly. The people of this area used to make preserves out of watermelon rinds and several other things, and made pickles out of cucumbers, beets and swamp cabbage. Most of the families had a few short rows of sugar cane just enough to grind out a sixty-gallon barrel of juice, which would make about eight gallons of syrup, which would be
more than enough for most families for a year. There was plenty to eat. No one went hungry in those days.

People could have lived off the land at that time for there was plenty of wild game. Rabbits were so plentiful that people would often go around their fields just before dark and kill what they could and leave most of them where they shot them to try to thin them out. There was covey after covey of quails. People trapped them to eat. When a man’s seed bed was ready to come up they would set several traps around them and bait them with chicken feed to catch any quails that might come around. A covey of quails would get on a seed bed at the time the seed was coming up and they would ruin you in fifteen minutes. There was lots of ponds in the area that held water all the year around and a lot of big fresh-water ducks. That would be all that you would want. People didn’t kill game just to be killing, except rabbits, that were a pest in the fields. The hammocks were full of squirrels. There was no hunting season, nor permits back in those days. There was thousands of mullet fish, plenty of clams and oysters in the winter months and swamp cabbage everywhere.

There was a man named Frank Armstrong, that owned a general store on Terra Ceia Island. He sold everything that was available at that time. Around the shore line at places there was a drop off about four or five feet from the land level to the bay. His store was built on pilings over the water and he had a warehouse larger than his store beside his store and a wharf (between them) that was wide enough for wagons to meet. The wharf went out to his dock which was far enough that steamboats could dock on low tide. He carried cloth, men and women’s clothes, shoes, household goods and groceries in his store. And in his warehouse he had fertilizer, grubbing hoes, crosscut saws, axes and plow tools of all kinds. He had wagons, harnesses, crate material knocked down. A person would have to nail them together at home. He lived across the road from his store and had a pasture in the back of his house and always three or four horses and mules to sell. At that time there was no railroad south of Tampa, and everything that came in or out had to be by steamboat. If a new settler came into the area and needed help, Mr. Armstrong would outfit him with everything he wanted on credit, even to a horse and wagon. For he knew that everything that was raised had to go out over his dock. And they would ship it in a way that the check would come to him until his debt was paid. He would credit anybody. People had a lot of food items at home, but there were things that they would have to get at the store, such as white bacon, lard, flour, sugar, rice, meal, grits, lima beans, peas, salt, and coffee. All those items came by bulk and had to be weighed out.
Everybody had a packing shed in their fields, made out of what they could find to make it out of just frame covered with Palmetto fans, and a packing bin with four compartments in it, one for each size of graded tomatoes. There was 120, 144, 162, and 180 - whatever bin they would be packing out of. There would be that many tomatoes in the crate when it was full; 144’s were the most popular and more than any other were sold and they brought the best price. When the tomatoes got ready to pick a man and his wife would pick until they filled two or three crates. They would drag them to the packing shed with a horse and sled, and grade them out according to size. The man would go back to picking and his wife would start packing. They packed them crates called six basket carriers, and wrapped each tomato in a sheet of wrapping paper.

A little before night the man would nail the crate and stamp them to who they were to go and who they were from, and load them on the wagon and head for Mr. Armstrong’s dock, which was four or five miles away. Then the woman would go to the house and feed the livestock, milk the cow, gather the eggs, and cook supper. It would be late when the man would get home for there were about the same number in both the Gillette and Terra Ceia areas and all of them doing the same thing. There would be about thirty-five or forty wagons there to unload.

They would get up about 4:00 in the morning. The man would do the chores, while his wife cooked breakfast of grits, bacon, eggs, biscuits and coffee. Then they would go back at it again. They would eat a snack from what was left over at supper. That went on everyday except Sunday. All through the month of May.
The steamboat company owned four boats. The Favorite, the Manatee, the Pokonoket and the Jennette Scott. In normal times they used only two of the boats. One would spend the night in Bradenton and the other one in Tampa and each one would make a round trip each day; in the peak of the crop season they would run all four of them. They would carry the produce to Tampa and transfer it to the railroad and they would carry it to the northern markets.

As soon as the people found out that the Seaboard Airline was going to build a railroad down to this part of the country, everybody wanted a little orange or grapefruit grove as fast as they could get one. A family that owned only ten acres could set out a five-acre grove and still have five acres to farm. When those little home groves started to bearing, they were little gold mines. The railroad got to Palmetto in 1905 and that was the end of the line for a year, until they could build a railroad bridge across the mile-wide Manatee River to Bradenton, and in 1907 they built a spurline from the main line across the Palm View area to Terra Ceia. They built a depot in Palm View. I don't know why they didn't name it Palm View, like they named the depot in all other communities but they named it Rubonia. When the railroad came here a few more families began to move in. The railroad was a big help. We would not have to haul our produce nearly so far. We would ship it by express and it would get to market a day or two earlier and we wouldn't have the boat fare to pay. I have seen the passenger train pulling four or five express cars at a time during the pack season.
Then someone got the idea to build a packing house. Then the people didn’t have to pack their tomatoes at home. Pick them and haul them to the packing house and there was always a tomato buyer or two there that would look at your tomatoes and offer you a price for them. And if you wanted to sell them to him, you would set them on the platform and he would pay you for them, but if you didn’t think that he offered enough and decided to let them go through the packing house you would have several things to consider. There would be the crate to pay for, and your share of the expense of packing, and ten percent to the man that owned the packing house and then the freight. So, if the buyer offered anywhere near the right price, it was most always the best to take his offer. Some people wouldn’t patronize the packing house, but still shipped them by express. There got to be more and more packing houses scattered along the railroad. And somebody made a law that all tomatoes had to be inspected before they could be shipped. Then everybody had to carry them to the packing house. They shipped them in refrigerator car-load lots. The farmers began to make more and more money, so they could buy more things that they needed and wanted.

As soon as those little home groves came into production, people really made money. They put up several citrus packing houses around and an orange buyer would come around about two months before they were ready to pick and offer you a price for them on the tree. He would have them picked and hauled and pay you at the gate. He would give you anywhere from one dollar to
Artesian well at Hendrix Grove, Palmetto, early 1900s.

Photograph courtesy of the Manatee County Historical Society.
two dollars per box. People soon got able to have an artesian well dug. With those wells people could water their crops and make more yield and that meant more money.

When the railroad came, a man named Weatherall put a lumber yard in Palmetto, selling finished lumber and when anyone got able, he built a decent house. Most new houses were built from 1911 or 1912, a few years before the First World War, and after people really made good. Cars came into this part of the country about 1914 and most everybody bought one. Soon everybody was living in a new house and had a car and truck and tractor and tools.

Things got better and better until the depression came in the early 1930s. Then the banks went broke and most everyone was penniless; the produce houses in the north closed, because the people there was without money the same as down here. There was no buyers to buy our produce and the packing houses all went out of business and were torn down. If people could have raised anything, they couldn’t sell it and citrus went the same way. The last year that we sold our fruit, we got fifteen cents a box for it. And the next year we couldn’t sell it. Everybody took the best of care of their groves. They fertilized them twice a year with a ton of fertilizer each time. Kept them pruned, hoed and the middle plowed. You take a grove that has been taken care of and drop it in two or three years, you have a dead grove. And that is what happened to everyone of those little home groves and the little family farmers could never come back. Some of the larger
farmers around Palmetto and Ellenton got together after the depression and built some packing houses for their own use, but they wouldn't buy or pack a small farmer's tomatoes. They would say you don't have enough.

There are only two groves in the Palm View area. They have been set out in recent years. There has been no farming activity in the area since the depression, except two or three small strawberry fields. After the depression the railroad company tore the Terra Ceia depot down and took the track up. There was three tomato packing houses and two citrus houses on Terra Ceia. They tore all of them down. There were six tomato houses in the Palm View area. There is no trace where any of them were. It is all grown up with bushes and trees except where people live. There is one man over there that has a garden and home groves are all grown up and gone back to nature except the ones that there is buildings on. The family farms and home groves are all gone. And so is the wild game and fish. I don't know how long it has been since I saw a wild rabbit.

Back at the turn of the century there were about fifteen families living in the Palm View area. When the depression came, there were sixty or seventy families. But now they are here by the hundreds. There is six big trailer parks in the area and I think that every one of them are over where there was family farms and home groves. There is part of an eighteen-hole golf course over our place. I still live on a very small part of our old homestead.

The first church in the Palm View area was the Seventh Day Adventist Church, built a little before 1900, or soon after, down by the Palm View Cemetery. About half of the people of this area were of that faith at that time.

We people who were Baptists and Methodists went to church at the Gillette Baptist Church. We didn't go often for it was a long way with a horse and wagon. The Advent Church burned down in the late 1920s, and the area was without a church again. About the mid-1930s some of the people built a little church across the road from the cemetery and called it the Palm View Bible Church. In the early 1950s, they built the Palm View Baptist Church on the Experimental Farm road, a little west of Highway 41, and in the last four or five years, they built a Methodist Church, on the corner of Canal Road and Highway 41. The community now has three churches.

There were two Indian burial grounds in this area. One was across the road from the cemetery, and the other one was two or three hundred yards east of Ellenton-Gillette Road, and about
half-way between Erie Road and Frog Creek. They have been leveled down for a long, long
time. I think that there are houses over both of them. Back in the days before 1900, and a good
while after the people made most of their furniture; I have seen people buried in home-made
coffins.

There were three bears killed in this area in the period of a year or a little more. I was too little to
remember about them. There was just a few panthers around. Once in a while you would see
someone that would say that he had seen one or two a few days earlier; that went on until I was
grown. The only ones that I ever saw was in the Everglades, back in the early days. The old
wagon roads went out through the woods in every direction to get to where you was going the
nearest way. When people began to get a few cars the county began to make some roads on land
lines but they weren’t much better.

We used old fashion kerosene lamps for light and when we were out of kerosene, we used
candles. And on wash day the women would boil the clothes in a big cast iron wash pot and rub
them out by hand on a rub board. We took baths in a wash tub. That went on until the power
company put an electric line out our way in the 1930s. I have seen the trains put the boats out of
business. I think that they stopped running in 1927. And the semi-trailer trucks haul all the
produce and most all other freight.

You may think that those olden days were pretty primitive. It might have been but everybody
was happy. Everybody knew one another, everybody was the best of friends and neighbors and
loved each other, never no hard feelings and everyone would help anyone that they could
anyway. I thank God that I was born then instead of now.

Harry Snow
June 20, 1991

NOTES

1 Peter S. Harllee came to Manatee County from Haygood, South Carolina at the urging of his brother, John W.
Harllee, who had settled in the Village of Manatee in 1868. Peter S. Harllee married Alice N. Bullock on January
22, 1879. In 1892, after the birth of their son, Pope, the Peter S. Harllee family moved to the Palm View area but
only remained there for three years before moving to Palmetto.

2 On May 18, 1899, William D. Jackson, Jr., deeded land in the Palm View area to his daughter, Jennie Bell Jackson.
The 1899 deed records that this was only five acres. A later quick claim deed for the property dated October 21,
1901, states that Jennie Bell Jackson purchased forty acres in the same area from Daniel McLaurin for $250.00. In
1917, Harry Snow would purchase an additional forty acres adjacent to this property. Jennie Bell Jackson and
William H. Snow, Harry Snow’s parents, were married on April 15, 1900.

3 Planet Jr. was the brand name of a harrow, a piece of farm equipment used to cultivate the soil. The Planet Jr. was
patented in 1919.
Frank Armstrong owned the largest mercantile establishment in the north end of Manatee County. The dock on which his store was located extended over some of the deepest water of Terra Ceia Bay. Armstrong was a director of the Independent Line of Steamships which operated out of Tampa. Steamboats and paddlewheelers used to stop at his store and dock when traveling between Tampa and the Manatee River. Armstrong charged a drayage fee for everything loaded from his dock to the boats. He also minted his own coins which were redeemable only in his mercantile. His field and grove hands were paid in this coinage. Armstrong also owned the first packing house on Terra Ceia and served as a director of the Seaboard Airline Railroad.