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***Florida: A Short History* by Michael Gannon**

Vernon Peeples

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BOOK REVIEWS

Florida: A Short History. By Michael Gannon. Gainesville, Florida, 1993. University Press of Florida. 170 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. Cloth—\$24.95. Paper—\$9.95.

Short histories are extremely difficult to write. There must be decisions on what to cut and how to maintain the flow and continuity while avoiding minute fractures of facts in squashing the story to fit the allocated space. Despite these difficulties, Michael Gannon has achieved remarkable success in writing *Florida: A Short History*. The first third of the book describes Florida's history before 1900, and the remaining two-thirds covers the most recent hundred years. This is a wise choice for the general reader, but it does not emphasize the author's strength—the colonial period.

In the Florida Legislature, one should never introduce a short bill because it will be read thoroughly. Likewise, it is dangerous to undertake a short history because people are likely to read it and point out every real and imagined flaw. This is a well written book that everyone should enjoy, even the reviewer looking for the miscue that creeps into every historical effort.

First, a comment on a well crafted salvo! Florida is consistently short-changed in general works on American history because the state was not one of the original colonies, and to most U.S. historians if it did not happen in the Thirteen Colonies, it is not part of American history. Dr. Gannon uses a Spanish cannon to blow the *Mayflower* out of Plymouth Harbor with the statement, "By the time the Pilgrims came ashore at Plymouth, St. Augustine was up for urban renewal" (p. 4).

There are some fractures of facts and a few arguable opinions that do not mar the book, but do deserve comment. Florida obtained millions of acres of land from the federal government under the Swamp and Overflow Lands Act of 1850, but physically, it was not all swamp and overflow lands. When Florida then sold four million acres of these lands to Hamilton Disston, the sale included uplands and swamp land, not exclusively swamp land as implied by the author.

Members of the Florida House of Representatives would like to believe that the House is the Legislature. The picture on page 56 is identified as members of the 1887 Legislature and they were. However, the photograph shows the members of the House and does not include the Senate. In a spirit of fairness a more accurate identification would have been "House of Representatives."

Claude Pepper was elected to the state House of Representatives in 1928, and in 1934 ran unsuccessfully in a highly disputed race for the U.S. Senate. Two years later he was elected to the United States Senate. Thus, when he arrived on the national scene in 1936, he was already on the state scene. Women were first elected to state offices in 1928 when Mamie Eaton Greene was elected to the Railroad Commission and Ruth Bryan Owens was also elected to Congress. The same year Edna Fuller of Orange County was elected to the state House of Representatives, but she is omitted from the author's list.



Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, Florida's governor from 1905-1909, shown with his family on the mansion steps in Tallahassee.

Photograph from *Florida: A Short History*.

Florida politics has always been difficult to control. Geographically it has been too big, politically too diverse, and in this century, political parties largely paper shells. While Ed Ball was a major player in Florida politics, his influence was mostly in north and west Florida. In Dade County he was a major annoyance, and in the rest of the state he was either mildly controversial or unknown. Ed Ball did not “control” politics, nor has anyone else (p. 88).

The Tamiami Trail, a great engineering feat, began in 1915 and was completed in 1931 with the construction of the concrete bridges across the Peace and Caloosahatchie rivers. Most people considered the road complete in 1928 because it was then passible. Today the Department of Transportation's official map of Florida indicates the distance between Tampa and Miami is 245 miles, not 143 miles as indicated on page 85. When the trail was completed in 1928, it was officially considered 283.9 miles.

In 1949, Florida's education system was at a crossroads. The minimum foundation program had been adopted, and its implementation required significant additional funding, money the state did not have. Governor Fuller Warren proposed seventeen specific taxes, a proposal that galvanized the legislative lobbying fraternity and doomed the bill. The only politically possible tax was a sales tax that was “limited” and not a “general” sales tax as the author writes (p. 110). Then as now there were numerous exemptions such as food and medicine. The 1949 act also

exempted automobiles from the tax. The fact that the meeting between Governor Warren and legislative leaders to decide which commodities to exempt was held at a cabin in an orange grove near Kissimmee owned by the lobbyist for automobile dealers may have contributed to this exemption.

There are two concerns on page 93. Governor Fred Cone could not have vetoed 154 appropriations bills. He vetoed a number of bills, but not appropriation bills. Normally there is one appropriation bill for each regular legislative session. During Governor Cone's tenure there were only two regular legislative sessions. The line-item veto is available to the governor for individual items in appropriation bills. On another issue, Governor Cone's secretary, Ella Neill, performed a number of gubernatorial functions during the governor's illness. His brother, Branch Cone, also performed many duties, such as patronage and legislative affairs. Thus, it would not be accurate to claim that "Miss Ella" for all practical purposes was the first woman governor of Florida.

Daniel McCarty of Fort Pierce was elected governor of Florida in 1952. All indications were that if death had not intervened, he would have been an outstanding chief executive. He was the first governor from south Florida in a number of years, but not the first governor from the southern counties (p. 126). Albert Gilchrist of Punta Gorda was elected governor in 1908, and there were others with strong south Florida identities.

Dr. Gannon makes a surprising statement regarding Reconstruction: "The state constitution of 1868 was an enlightened document, the best that Florida would have in the century" (p. 51). The first part of this statement could probably be accepted with slight comment. However, the last half is more difficult because it plows new ground. Perhaps it would have been better to write a separate article comparing Florida's constitutions of the last century in order to develop the basis for this opinion. The Reconstruction constitution of 1868 was born of partisan discord in a supercharged emotional period in which the life of Florida (economically, socially, and politically) was turned upside down. A bitter division among the constitutional convention delegates resulted in one group meeting in Tallahassee and the other in Monticello.

Politics rather than reason prevailed in 1868. The resulting constitution was a pragmatic document that treated white southerners far more gently than the Radical Republicans in Congress would have preferred. However, the new constitution met federal criteria and was approved by the commander of the Third Military District and by Congress, and Florida was re-admitted to the Union in time for Florida's electoral votes to be recorded in the Republican column in the presidential election later that year. The 1868 constitution granted suffrage to blacks, which was a condition for re-admittance to the Union, and then the state effectively nullified the black vote by making virtually all local public offices appointed by the governor. Was this enlightenment or political pragmatism?

Michael Gannon is a distinguished historian. *Florida: A Short History* adds to his contributions to the state's history. The book is attractive to the eye; the photographic selection is superior and the printing unusually sharp. More importantly, it relates the history of this state in a thoroughly readable style; this is a book to be read and shared with anyone remotely interested in Florida and its historical development.

Vernon Peeples

The Seminoles of Florida. By James W. Covington. Gainesville, Florida. 1993 University Press of Florida. 389 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth—\$49.95. Paper—\$18.95.

“By concluding a negotiated peace with the federal government [in 1842], the Seminole Indians had accomplished something that many other larger tribes had not: they had fought a war with the whites during the nineteenth century in the eastern United States and under the peace terms had been allowed to remain on their own land” (p. 109). So writes James W. Covington, emeritus Dana Professor of History at the University of Tampa, in his recent work on the history of the Seminoles from their origins as a distinct people to the present. In fourteen chapters, seven up through the three Seminole wars and seven more to the present, Covington’s work represents the culmination of over forty years of research and writing on the Seminoles.

The work begins with the familiar story of the migration of the Lower Creeks into the Florida peninsula in the eighteenth century. Through a combination of raids alongside whites, diseases and other calamities, the Creeks eventually displaced Florida’s original Indian tribes. Whether Lower Creeks or Upper Creeks, who came in the next century, Covington reminds us that “the first Seminoles were really Creeks who migrated to Florida” (p. 5). As he chronicles the movement of the Muskogean and Mikasuki bands, the author discusses various features of Creek society transplanted to Florida, such as the rituals of war and peace, traditional “square ground” towns, marital practices, slave holding patterns, and the Green Corn Dance.

The War of 1812 was a watershed for the Seminoles. Allied with the British, a few Seminoles even accompanied General Pakenham on his ill-fated expedition against New Orleans in 1814. At war’s end, the plight of the Seminoles seemed hopeless. The issue of runaway slaves’ encroachment over the nebulous boundary separating American from Spanish territory proved disastrous for the Seminoles and their black allies. Added to this volatile mix was the British, who understood that any hope they had of maintaining a presence in the Gulf hinged on Seminole support. The British seemed to give the Seminoles just enough support to encourage them against the Americans, but then withdrew at the time the Seminoles needed them most.

The First Seminole War was the beginning of the end for the tribe because its end marked the beginning of the tribe’s relationship with the Americans. Covington skillfully guides the reader through the complicated leadership factions, intermittent bouts of fighting and negotiating with whites, and the various migrations leading up to the wars of removal. His work chronicles the various removals of the Seminoles to the west, but his focus remains with those left behind.

After the Third Seminole War (1855-58) there still were isolated Seminole settlements in the Ten Thousand Islands, the Everglades, and Big Cypress Swamp. The Civil War and Reconstruction diverted attention from the Seminoles, and serious efforts to remove the tribe west abated. As the twentieth century neared and white settlement grew in south Florida, Indian-white contacts became more frequent. The Indians bargained for manufactured goods with deer, mink, and alligator skins at posts in West Palm Beach, Jupiter, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami. By the turn of the century efforts of missionaries and educators were well under way. In