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JOHN DARLING, INDIAN REMOVAL, AND INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS IN SOUTH FLORIDA, 1848-1856
by Joe Knetsch

Writing on January 6, 1848, from the Kennedy Store at Charlotte Harbor, Indian trader John Darling stated to Governor William Moseley: “Sir: I have been some time at this station as agent for the Seminole Trader trading with the Indians, and I have seen enough of them to induce me to think that the policy at present pursued by the General Government, if the purpose is removal, ought to be changed.” Darling, like many of his colleagues on the frontier, had little patience with the policy of peaceful removal of the Indians remaining in Florida after the long seven-year war was over. What induced Darling, an Indian trader at the time of the letter, to request the best efforts of the governor to get the Indian population removed and place himself in the ranks of the unemployed? For John Darling, and most other frontiersmen, the quest was for land. Cheap, cultivatable, productive land, was the motivating force of existence, whether for farming or speculation.

Darling’s early life remains somewhat clouded in mystery and myth. Pioneer historian D. B. McKay, in a 1957 article in the Tampa Tribune, noted that Darling was born on August 16, 1808, in Groton, Vermont, the son of Stephen Darling, whose family traced its roots back to long before the American Revolution. McKay wrote that Darling enlisted in the army at an early age and came to Fort Brooke, Tampa, in 1835. However, Heitman’s Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army shows that Darling enlisted as a private in the Fourth Artillery on January 22, 1830. During his eight-year enlistment, Darling rose from private to quartermaster sergeant, an acknowledgement of his ability to lead men. On July 31, 1838, he was enrolled as second lieutenant in Fifth Infantry, a position from which he resigned on August 15, 1839. This rise is significant because few enlisted men ever rose from the ranks into the officer corps. Darling had obviously shown that his skill and courage as a leader deserved such recognition.

John Darling’s intimate involvement in the Indian removal issue from his early days in Florida can be shown by his employment as a clerk in the office of the agent for Indian removal and subsistence at Fort Brooke. Along with the experience gained from his position as quartermaster sergeant, this time spent with the Indian removal agency must have given Darling the tools necessary to launch a career as an Indian trader. In addition, he undoubtedly gained an enhanced knowledge of Florida geography from his scouts and other service in the army.

Darling and his fellow frontiersmen believed that the removal policy being pursued by the federal government was too timid. They demanded action from the U. S. Army to remove the final obstacle from the land so desperately sought by the settlers along the frontier. However, the U. S. Army was not in a rush to coerce the Indian population from the fertile lands of the Everglades region. It had, five years earlier, ended an exhaustive struggle with these same inhabitants and had lost more men and spent more money than any Indian war to that point, or after. The professional officers were not anxious for additional duty in the Florida swamps, where many had resigned or committed suicide in attempting to end their time in the quagmires.
John Darling.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.
The policy preferred by the military can be summed up in the words of Major General David E. Twiggs:

In my instructions I am not restricted as to time. This I hope was no accidental omission. In this affair time is a more important element than money. I may not be able to persuade this people to remove in months; with the whole regular force of the United States I might fail to coerce them in years. Months of persuasion cost neither money nor life. Every man I can induce to go, renders the task of forcible removal more easy. Every sutler's store I can establish in their country for trading in peace, opens a door for entrance in war. ... To remove these people with the least delay, we must take time enough to avert war, whether weeks, or months, or years be required.\(^5\)

As if to reinforce this statement, Secretary of War George W. Crawford advised Twiggs: “You will take no hostile step against the Indians unless hereafter instructed, or the Indians become hostile, and then you will act according to previous instructions.”\(^6\) This was not a policy meant to endear the U. S. Army to the frontier leaders of Florida.

Yet Twiggs’ belief that the sutler's store was an important avenue into the heart of Indian country was given an odd twist by the opportunistic John Darling, who had experience as a sutler and trader in partnership with Thomas Kennedy. Well over a year prior to Twiggs’ penning of this sentiment, Darling had advised Governor W. D. Moseley:

I have suggested to the Agent to make gratuitous distributions of flour, and that only, or add whiskey if he will, although I do not think the latter commodity will aid the cause much, except on occasions. The reason I think that the distribution should be confined to flour, is this _ I learn that some of the Indians are already engaged in planting and raise corn in considerable quantities. This course will of course confirm their attachment to the soil, as they make improvements and find they can subsist without the aid of the United States. A liberal distribution of flour will have a tendency to stop cultivation and give them more leisure to talk and drink. Meat seems to be plenty among them and they say they have plenty of hogs and some cattle, but not many horses. If the old are supplied with flour, they can exchange it with the young for the products of the chase and thus produce a greater equality of condition among them. There is no instance that I recollect in the history of our intercourse with the Indian Tribes, where open dealing, perseverance, and skillful management have been used that has failed [to] purchase the Indian lands, except perhaps the Sacs and Foxes, and if it comes to that, the same course will have to be pursued here.\(^7\)

The idea of creating a dependent Indian nation where cultural and political ranks were blurred was the cynical policy being advocated here. Darling believed that this policy would inculcate dependency to such an extent that the Indians who submitted to it would soon be easily removed by the promise of an annuity and an annual distribution of foodstuffs, in this case flour and meat. Darling would not hesitate to encourage frontier settlers to raid the Indian fields of corn and steal their cattle and hogs. For him, it served the purpose of reminding the Indians of their vulnerability and deprived them of sustenance, which would make their dependence that much greater. It also might have the positive effect of spurring them into an ill-timed attack that would force the U. S. Army into the final action for total removal.\(^8\)

Another strategy suggested by Darling, and personally spearheaded by him, was the calling of public meetings in frontier communities to put pressure on state and federal officials to bring about removal. He reported the outcome of these meetings to Governor Thomas Brown in the following terms:
John Darling’s signed application, dated April 1843, in which he claimed 160 acres (along Old Tampa Bay) under the provisions of the Armed Occupation Act of 1842.
Public meetings have been held at this place, at Old Tampa, at Ichepukassa, and on the Alafia, which were unanimous for the immediate removal of the Indians, the original proceedings of these meetings have been forwarded to you through this Post Office. I learn that a meeting was held at Manatee on the 20th instant, but I have not seen the proceedings, they were probably forwarded direct to you. I have called upon the Counties of Hernando, Monroe and Dade for an expression upon this subject, but I am not informed that an action has been taken upon my request.

Darling did not have to worry about the responses of the other counties. The Dade meeting was chaired by his close correspondent, George W. Ferguson, the postmaster and leading citizen of the Miami settlement, and the Manatee meeting was chaired by Dr. Joseph Braden, one of the mainstays of that community and a close ally of the political elite in Tallahassee. This form of political pressure on the authorities followed a long-standing frontier political tactic, which frequently had favorable results.

Thomas Brown had entered the office of governor in 1851 with a heavy agenda, which featured the removal of the Indians as a part of his regular addresses to the legislature and Congress. In his inaugural address to the legislature he noted that he had been advised that the force of United States troops already on the Florida frontier was deemed sufficient to secure the safety of its inhabitants. However, Brown did not believe this was the case. Noting that “there are other companies of settlers on the frontier, who were forced into service in defence of their families, and rendered hard service and suffered severe privations,” he pointed out these men would not have been needed if the regular force had been sufficient. He urged the General Assembly to pass a bill to emphasize the need to remove the Indians from Florida as soon as possible. As the governor put it, “The removal of the Indians from Florida has been assumed by the General Government as a duty, so repeatedly, and in such various and solemn forms, that it is beyond the power of language to make it clearer, or more binding and emphatic.”

The legislative branch did its duty and passed a bill on January 20, 1851, authorizing the governor to contact the President and the Secretary of War regarding the “speedy and final removal of the remnant of Seminole Indians now remaining in Florida.” Brown, in his second annual address to the General Assembly, reiterated the points made the previous year: “It becomes my duty again to call the serious attention of the General Assembly to the subject of the continuance of a portion of the tribe of Seminole Indians within the limits of this state, to the great annoyance of our people on the frontier, and detriment to the prosperity of the State.” Indeed, from 1848 until 1854, near the beginning of the Third Seminole War, each legislature issued calls to remove the Seminoles, keep them within their boundaries or restrict trade with the Indian population. By his constant letters and notes to the governors of Florida, John Darling
kept his hand in the agitation pie. Additionally, as a member of the Board of Internal Improvements for the Southern District, he had direct access to the most powerful men in the state, including the governor.

When Darling was approached by local citizens about the use of direct force against the Indians, in the tense period from 1849 to 1852, he advised them that “the state cannot possibly sanction the overt preparation of troops to operate against the Indians until it is known that Genl Blake has failed to remove them and the Genl Government has refused to exert force to effect that object, nor for the protection of the frontier until the conduct of the Indians make it necessary.” He pointed out that “either would be construed into an untimely interference, and if so at the expense of the state, a consequence to avoid if possible.”

It was the expense, not the use of force to effect removal, that concerned Darling here. During this period, the state was constantly asking the federal government to reimburse it for the expenses entailed in calling out the troops in 1849. Because the state was financially strapped and, some believed, had called out the state troops without the sanction of the federal government, it may not have been entitled to the funds to replenish the state's thin treasury. This tight financial situation forced Darling and others to advise caution in calling out state troops to fight the Indians.

The arrival of General Luther Blake, the newly appointed Indian Agent in charge of removal, brought Darling’s attention to a peak, and he frequently informed the governor of the general’s movements. When the now famous incident involving Aaron Jernigan’s party occurred in early 1852, Darling was quick to advise: “It is undoubtedly right to make the Indians know they must remain within their lines, and this is the way to show them; the only doubt I have about the matter is, whether or not it is premature, seeing the bad condition the frontier is in, to fend off in case the Indians should retaliate.” However, Darling continued: “The circumstance has happened just at the right time for General Blake arrived here yesterday morning with his retinue to commence his operation of removal. The Indians finding the country up against them in their favorite and most fortunate hunting grounds will be more disposed to listen to the proposals of Gen. Blake.”

Darling noted that Blake’s retinue included the famed “Negro Abraham” and Elizabeth Bowlegs, “notorious some 13 years ago here as the Mistress of Capt. John C. Casey late Indian Agent.” This, he believed, may have been a mistake on the part of Blake, because “the Indians hold in supreme contempt the females who desert their tribes for the embraces of the foes of their race.” Yet, Darling did hold out some optimism that Blake might be able to induce the Seminoles to emigrate, particularly after Blake’s conference with Jernigan.

Viewing Jernigan’s exploits as beneficial to spurring the government into action, Darling wrote: “A telegraphic dispatch was received by the Qr. Master here on last Sunday evening from Genl. Twiggs prohibiting the further dismantling of the post which had been begun under the orders of Col. Winder it seems without authority, from all these movements I gather, I think, that the government is getting convalescent on the subject of Seminole removal and we have a prospect of being rid of them this time.” As late as June 25, 1852, Darling was writing with guarded optimism of Blake’s chances for some success in Indian removal, favoring, along with Blake’s negotiations, an armed occupation of the area north of the Caloosahatchee River which would, he declared, “facilitate the ultimate removal of the Indians.” Darling’s guarded optimism on removal proved to be somewhat prophetic in that only a few chose to be seduced by
A plat from 1845 shows the large area of south Florida, much of it occupied by Indians, that John Darling sought to open for development.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.
the offerings held out by Blake. The final fight for removal, however, was only a short time away.

The main thrust of Darling’s motivations regarding the removal of the Indian population from southern Florida was to make way for the internal improvements which he believed were needed to settle the country and make it prosper. In line with his rising stature as a merchant and man of some political power, he was appointed as a fisheries commissioner for his home area and an officer in the militia. April 1851 saw John Darling placed upon the newly formed Board of Internal Improvements. The following month, he outlined the concerns of his “southern district” in a letter to Governor Thomas Brown of May 6, 1851:

The removal of the Indians... The draining of the Everglades...The construction of a Canal, to connect the inland waters and form an Inland Water Communication from Cape Florida along the Atlantic Coast to St. Augustine... The clearing out of timber obstructions in Pease Creek so as to permit boats and rafts to float down the stream... and the construction of a Railroad from Tampa Bay to connect with the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad... are subjects interesting to the people of this section and as such I recommend them to this consideration of your Excellency and the Board of Internal Improvements. ...The Draining of the Everglades is a subject of too great magnitude to be idly dismissed or permanently abandoned ... the question is, are these waters sufficiently elevated above the level of the sea to permit them to be drawn off? If they are, then the Everglades can be made dry land. I have thought it possible that the waters of the Kissimmee River, which supply Okeechobee, might be diverted from their present course and turned into Pease Creek through a canal. ... Clearing out the obstructions in Pease Creek would open a direct highway for the transportation of timber, tar, turpentine, and other produce, that will soon be prepared for market along its banks. If it were possible to turn the waters of the Kissimmee into Pease Creek, the latter could be made navigable for small steamers near one hundred miles from its mouth.

This fantastic development scheme was just one of many that came to Darling from his correspondents and personal knowledge of the area. The railroad program was already in the planning stages under the auspices of David Levy Yulee and his colleagues and the dream of an intracoastal waterway had a long history in the literature of Florida.

The drainage of the Everglades was the object of the famous Buckingham Smith report of 1848 and was a popular source of speculation at the time. It also found its way into the reports of Lieutenant J. Edmund Blake when he discussed the importance of the construction of the intracoastal canal, which was current in 1843 and 1845, the years of his surveys. In both 1845 and 1847, the legislature passed resolutions calling for drainage of the Everglades. But John Darling, with his seat on the newly created Board of Internal Improvements, was in a position to advocate and possibly fund these projects effectively. He did not let the opportunity slip past him.

The act which had led to the creation of the Board of Internal Improvements was the famed Swamp and Overflowed Land Act of 1850. This act, the most important piece of legislation in Florida history, endowed the state with all lands which were at least fifty percent covered with water, but capable of being drained and made cultivatable. This meant that up to forty-nine percent of the land could be classified as “uplands” and, in theory, perfectly dry. To get this land, the state had to send out surveyors to determine which units of land were covered by the 1850 law so the state could submit lists for final approval by the General Land Office. The first two men chosen for this important task were Arthur M. Randolph and Henry Wells. These surveyors
began the task of identifying the lands available under the Swamp and Overflowed Land Act which, in the end, amounted to over 20,000,000 acres of land to be sold or donated for internal improvements by the state government. This vast amount of land, the largest single land grant to any state in United States history, was in addition to the 500,000 acres acquired by the state under the great Preemption Act of 1841, the School Lands (Section 16s), the lands granted for Seminaries of Learning, and the Armed Occupation Act of 1842. Administration of this enormous wealth in land was one function of the Board of Internal Improvements.

As a board member, John Darling realized that the task of identifying the lands was just the start. To understand exactly what this land was capable of growing and what might be the benefit of specific internal improvements would take more expert advice. Therefore, in 1851 he called on the governor to create the office of State Engineer (Geologist): “As the accomplishment of any of these works depends upon their practicability, I respectfully suggest to your Excellency and the Board of Internal Improvements, at the earliest day practicable, to cause a scientific survey to be made by the State Engineer, of the Everglades with a view to their draining either by cutting off the sources of Okechobee or otherwise _ of the route from Cape Florida to St. Augustine with a view to the construction of a Canal and also to the quantity of overflowed lands that would be drained by such a canal.”

The legislature, under the guidance of Governor Brown, did just this in its next session, creating the Office of State Engineer and Geologist.

John Darling also noted that most of the early surveys of Florida were conducted in the dry season, and these results would naturally have reduced the amount of public land under the 1850 law. He therefore requested that the county surveyors check the plat of lands against the actual conditions of the land during the rainy season, when thousands of acres would be subject to seasonal overflow. These new surveys could be the basis for requesting untold acres of land by the state under the Swamp and Overflowed Land Act.

Based upon his experience as a fisheries commissioner, Darling was also aware that the state would have to protect its new-found wealth from opportunistic depredations by timber cutters, especially those harvesting cedar. The loss of value on state lands would inevitably hurt the chance for the sale of these lands and lessen the amount of money available for internal improvements. The later appointment of “timber agents” by the state proved Darling to be a farsighted and practical man.

To assist in his campaign for internal improvements in the southern district, Darling solicited letters from two prominent citizens, George W. Ferguson and Captain William Cooley. He noted for Governor Brown: “If the premises of Mr. Ferguson be the fact a very large portion of the Everglades may be reclaimed. Capt. Wm. Cooley, an old resident of Cape Florida, who was a guide in Capt. Powell’s expeditions in that region and who is consequently more familiar with that region than any other, person who has not had the same opportunity of observation, is of the same opinion; and besides he says there is a fall of 12 feet in the Sanybel [Caloosahatchee] River near Fort Thompson, he speaks highly of the character of the land south of the Sanybel River particularly that portion known as the Big Cypress. The fact that the Indians have agreed to retire south of that River, if true, is the best proof that the country is good.” Ferguson’s letter, dated May 12, 1851, emphasized the ease with which the Everglades could be drained, particularly since the falls of the Miami River, where he had established a coontie mill fell five feet nine
inches. This observation, in conjunction with similar ones gathered on trips up and down the coast, induced him to conclude that the drainage could be successful. Ferguson also stressed the ease with which the natural waterbodies could be connected to form a smooth, almost natural intracoastal waterway. The construction of many drainage canals along the natural outlets of the Everglades would dry out additional lands bordering them and open the whole area to settlement. In this reporting, he repeated the observations earlier made by Lieutenant J. Edmund Blake and the Buckingham Smith report.

In a ten-page letter, dated August 11, 1851, Tampa’s William Cooley made similar arguments. He claimed that “it will not require more than 15 miles of wraught canal to open a light draft steamboat navigate [sic] inland from Key Biscayne Bay to Indian River Haulover.” He, too, felt that the natural slope of the Everglades could be used to advantage to drain the “River of Grass” and make it cultivatable.27

Backed by Cooley’s letter, Darling made his pitch to Governor Brown. “I am satisfied,” he wrote, “that all that will be required to effectually drain the Everglades, will be to enlarge the natural outlets of this watery region; or create equivalent artificial outlets; or cut off the extra supply of water to Lake Okeechobee, either of which it is believed is practicable.”28 Buttressed by the arguments of these two prominent south Florida pioneers, Darling felt confident in pushing forward with his internal improvement recommendations.

As a resident of Tampa, John Darling also carried the torch for the construction of a railroad from Fernandina or Jacksonville which would terminate in Tampa, not Cedar Keys. Writing on November 18, 1851, he informed Governor Brown:

A charter to construct the Atlantic and Gulf Railroad has been granted by the General Assembly; but up to this time I am not informed that any material progress has been made in the work. I believe that if this should terminate at Cedar Keys, it will prove prejudicial to the interests of the state and the stockholders; because a better Harbor can be obtained at Tampa Bay as will be more certainly known when that point shall be surveyed for such purpose....I consider this an important work which when in operation will give new impulse to the industry of the interior and open a market for our extensive timber forests.29

Darling, as noted earlier, led the drive to get each county to hold meetings to urge Indian removal, and, coincidently, during the Tampa meeting of December 15, 1851, he introduced the motion to send delegates to a railroad convention to be held in New Orleans the next month. At the same meeting, he was appointed to the internal improvements committee which brought forth resolutions concerning the development of railroads in Florida.30 In 1856, when a railroad convention was held at Ocala for the purpose of getting a branch line to Tampa through that section of the state, Darling and Tampa store owner William Cooley were selected as delegates to represent Tampa.31

That Darling was consistent during these years of his life can be seen in his voting pattern during his only term in the General Assembly. While serving in 1855, he introduced a resolution concerning the use of monies earned from the sale and/or lease of Internal Improvement Lands and Swamp and Overflowed Lands which stated that the money should not be invested in state bonds but preserved in the treasury and used to pay only the interest on the bonds. He also introduced two bills to limit the way bond money of the Internal Improvement Fund should be
invested. He voted for the famous “Act to Encourage a Liberal System of Internal Improvements,” which set up the current Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund (composed of the Governor and Cabinet today). Part of this bill specified the construction of the railroad to connect the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. He also voted for an act to prevent the depredation of state lands of all categories, especially timber, which was in keeping with his earlier ideas and concerns.32

John Darling is best remembered in Tampa as a founder of the Masonic Lodge and the cornet band and as an important and successful merchant. He also carved a place for himself in the history of Florida for his activities leading to and during the Civil War. He is known as one of the founders of the “Silver Grays,” a volunteer unit for the home defense of Tampa, in which he was a lieutenant, serving under Captain William Cooley. During most of the war he served as the registrar of lands for southern Florida. He was an active public servant, serving as city clerk and county commissioner, and in the latter office he signed a resolution favoring succession. His contemporaries included Ossian B. Hart, Henry L. Mitchell (both later governors of Florida), James T. Magbee, John Jackson, William B. Hooker, Jesse Carter, H. V. Snell, William and Samuel E. Hope, and the notorious Henry A. Crane. Among this cast of notables, John Darling strode as an equal, cajoling for school consolidation, running the young “Know Nothing” party in Hillsborough County and pushing for internal improvements so people could settle the land and make it productive. His life is a true picture of an active frontiersman, willing to take an advantage when available and willing to lead when needed. He is, and should always be remembered, as one of Tampa’s founding fathers and a leader for causes benefiting his concept of “civilization.”

Darling’s role as a facilitator of Indian removal and internal improvements is well documented, but he also clearly had the ability to persuade others to follow his leadership. Evaluating his role requires greater appreciation for Darling as a reflection of frontier Florida attitudes and actions in the areas of Indian removal and the struggle for internal improvements, including the drainage of the Everglades. Historical context, always an important concept too frequently lost in today’s exposition, is what must be understood before we can “judge” the importance of frontier Florida attitudes as reflected in the study of the life of John Darling. To pioneers like Darling, who put life and fortune on the line in the wilderness of Florida, we owe a great deal, but exactly how much is the true question. The answer will say as much about us as it does John Darling.

1 John Darling to William Moseley, January 6, 1848, Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1824-81: Seminole Agency 1824-76, Record Group 75, National Archives, Microfilm Roll 801, Microcopy 234.

2 Tampa Tribune, February 3, 1957, 14-D.

3 Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903), 353. The author would like to thank Canter Brown, Jr. for the use of his research and enlightening discussions concerning Darling and other figures mentioned in this article.

4 Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs, 1924-81: Seminole Agency Emigration, 1827-1946, Record Group 75, Roll 806. “Quarterly Statement of Agents and Others Employed in the Removal and Subsistence of Seminole Indians for the Quarter Ending the 30th Day of June 1837.” Darling is listed here as a clerk in the Tampa Bay Agency office.

5 House of Representatives Executive Document No. 5, 31st Congress, 1st Session (December 27, 1849), 132.
6 Crawford to Twiggs, November 28, 1849, ibid., 137.

7 Darling to Moseley, January 6, 1848.

8 That Darling and Governor Thomas Brown were of a similar mind set can be seen by Darling’s letters to Brown, dated February 14 and March 4, 1852. Florida Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management, Series 755, Carton 2, Tallahassee, Florida.

9 Darling to Brown, December 28, 1851, “Swamp & Overflow,” rectangular file box, Land Records and Title Section, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Tallahassee, Florida.

10 The letters and petitions to Governor Brown can be found in the Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Service, Series 755, Carton 2.


13 See Acts and Resolutions of the General Assembly of the State of Florida: 1848, Chapter 260, “An Act for the Purpose of keeping the Indians within Their Proper Boundary”; 1850, Chapter 418, “An Act to provide for the final removal of the Indians now Remaining in Florida beyond the limits of the State”; 1852, Three Captures, 536 (Laws of the State apply to the Seminoles and other Indians), 537 (prevent Negroes from within the Indians limits from leaving the State) and 538, “An Act to prevent the trading with the Indians in this state”; and, in 1854, Resolution No. 15 (Requesting the Sect. of War to ask the Indian Agent for delivery of a Negro man belonging to B.M. Dell).

14 Darling to Brown, December 28, 1851.

15 Darling to Brown, February 14, 1852.

16 Ibid.

17 Darling to Brown, March 4, 1852.

18 Darling to Brown, June 25, 1852.

19 For his role as a fisheries commissioner, see his report on page 21, exhibits, for the Journal of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Florida, 1846 (Tallahassee, 1847). His appointment as fisheries commissioner was made by Governor Moseley on December 27, 1845. (See Florida State Archives, Division of Archives and Records Management, Record Group 101, Series 679, Box 1, Folder 4.) His success as a merchant can be documented in the Census for 1850 (page 249, Schedule 1, County of Hillsborough, Fort Brook, Tampa Bay), which lists his holdings at $7,500 in real estate. By the 1860 Census his wealth had ballooned to $68,340 in real estate and $44,405 in personal estate. He was notified of his selection to the Board of Internal Improvement on April 22, 1851. Darling to Brown, May 6, 1851, Florida Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management, Series 755, Carton 2.

20 Darling to Brown, May 6, 1851.

21 Ibid.


23 Darling to Brown, May 11, 1851.
24 Ibid.

25 “Swamp & Overflow,” rectangular file box, Land Records and Title Section, Division of State Lands, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Tallahassee, Florida. This box is unorganized and the letters lay as stored.

26 Paul S. George and Joe Knetsch. “Life on the Miami Frontier,” South Florida History Magazine (Fall 1990), 7-9. This article includes transcribed copies of two letters written by G.W. Ferguson explaining his views on internal improvements in southern Florida.

28 Darling to Brown, August 16, 1851.

29 “Swamp & Overflow,” rectangular file box, Land Records and Title Section, Division of State Lands, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Tallahassee, Florida.

30 Letter/Minutes of December 15, 1851 (Jesse Carter, Chairman; John Darling, Secretary), Florida Department of State, Division of Archives and Records Management, Series 755, Carton 2.

31 The Peninsular (Tampa), August 30, 1956, p. 2.

32 This paragraph is based on a study of Darling’s votes during the session of 1855, where he replaced Jesse Carter, the elected representative from Hillsborough County. He served only from November 29 to December 13, 1855. Yet, he was active in the discussions concerning internal improvements, served on the Indian Affairs and Incorporations Committee, and was often heard on the floor debating the concerns of his constituents regarding the judicial system. Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Florida, 1855 (Tallahassee, 1855), 44-145.