

12-1-1995

***Fort Meade, 1849-1900* by Canter Brown, Jr.**

James M. Denham  
*Florida Southern College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory>

---

**Recommended Citation**

Denham, James M. (1995) "*Fort Meade, 1849-1900* by Canter Brown, Jr.," *Tampa Bay History*. Vol. 17 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol17/iss2/9>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tampa Bay History by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [scholarcommons@usf.edu](mailto:scholarcommons@usf.edu).

*Fort Meade, 1849-1900*. By Canter Brown, Jr. Tuscaloosa, Alabama. 1995. University of Alabama Press. xiv, 214 pp. Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Paper. \$19.95.

What do George G. Meade, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, and Ambrose Powell Hill have in common? Most would identify these men as prominent generals in the American Civil War. Yet as Canter Brown, Jr. reminds us, less than a decade before they saw duty in America’s most tragic conflict, all three were stationed at the isolated frontier military outpost of Fort Meade. Named in 1849 for its founder, George Gordon Meade (the later victor of Gettysburg), Fort Meade became the largest inland settlement in lower peninsular Florida. Located near Talakchopco, a center of Seminole and Tallahassee Creek contact for generations, the fortification was placed strategically on elevated land on the upper Peace River for the purpose of guarding the Indian boundary tenuously established after the Second Seminole War.

Brown places Fort Meade within the context of the rapidly changing South Florida frontier. A place of violence, greed, and warfare, but also of economic development and transitory prosperity, Fort Meade served as a kind of island in a vast frontier. It was a place where farmers, ranchers, soldiers, tradesmen, South Florida pioneers, and later miners, citrus growers, Cuban tobacco growers, and even cultivated English colonists – each in their turn – congregated in lower peninsular Florida. Throughout its tenuous existence, Fort Meade faced more than its fair share of disasters, natural and man-made. Hurricanes, disease, floods, blights, and freezes hit the town. But so did political and personal divisions during the Civil War (which ultimately resulted in the town being burned by Unionists in 1864). Dramatic declines in commodity prices, especially citrus, phosphate, and tobacco, rocked the town, often forcing settlers to alter their ways of life.

The immediate post-Civil War scene witnessed the telegraph which linked Fort Meade to New York and Havana. Instant communication with Cuba created conditions for the cattle boom. The 1880s brought rapid change to South Florida. The Disston Purchase publicized the region in the North and abroad. Henry B. Plant’s railroad linking Tampa to Jacksonville followed close behind. But the line followed an arc thirty miles north of Fort Meade, leading to the advent of Lakeland, Auburndale, Lake Alfred, and Haines City. Soon spur lines linked Bartow and Winter Haven. Finally locomotives arrived in 1885 and with them a new influx of settlers. A number of these new migrants were Englishmen – “remittance men” and others who brought a love of horse racing, but also great wealth and even more importantly their skills as engineers, artisans, and entrepreneurs. Finally, in 1890, Florida and the entire South Florida region experienced a phosphate “gold rush” that altered – both for better and for worse – the economy and the landscape of the town to this day. Throughout the 1890s, capital was raised and small and large concerns dotted the entire region. Phosphate was the activating force for the economy of the whole region, and since the turn of the century, the South Florida economy has ebbed and flowed according to its rhythms.

This book will attract wide readership not only within the Bay area, but also among those who desire information of town and country economic development during Florida’s nineteenth century. Generally free of the graphs, statistics, and unintelligible jargon which clutter many of the “modern, scientific” studies of localities, this is, as one reviewer asserts on the dust jacket, “local history the way it should be written.” Brown’s book is testament to the fact it is possible to write a book scholars will take seriously, even while writing for a larger audience. His study is



**Fort Meade's Main Street before the fire of June 1894.**

Photograph from *Fort Meade*.

well-written, lively, entertaining, and beautifully illustrated. Meticulously drawn maps, town grids, and informative appendixes grace the volume. Brown's research in newspapers and in local, state, and federal documents is exhaustive. This work, taken together with his excellent *Florida's Peace River Frontier* (Orlando, 1992), establishes him as a leading scholar of peninsular Florida, and indeed nineteenth-century Florida.

James M. Denham

*Blockaders, Refugees, and Contraband: Civil War on Florida's Gulf Coast, 1861-1865.* By George E. Buker. Tuscaloosa, Alabama. 1993. University of Alabama Press. ix, 235 pp. Maps. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$29.95.

In the early years of the Civil War the Union determined to neutralize Confederate activities in Florida primarily through a naval blockade. That duty eventually fell to southern squadrons of the U.S. Navy charged with sealing off Florida's 1,400 miles of irregular coastline. The Union Navy's strategy proved effective, with the notable exception of some successful clandestine "runners" in such west coast ports as Charlotte Harbor. In this East Gulf area, as George Buker points out in this useful work, the nature of warfare engendered by deep and persistent divided loyalties turned the west coast of Florida, particularly the southernmost region, into a bloody and complex civil war within a war.

Buker does yeoman duty in tracing the inner dynamics of the East Gulf Blockading Squadron (EGBS) as it grew and adapted to the exigencies of war on Florida's west coast. His work