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***Pioneer Family: Life on Florida's 20th-Century Frontier* by Michel Oesterreicher**

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Adela and Cesar Gonzmart in 1946.

Photograph from *The Columbia Restaurant Spanish Cookbook*.

which “The Gem of All Spanish Restaurants” indeed has. The only way to improve upon reading the book is to go to the Ybor City location itself and experience it first-hand.

Kenya C. Dworkin y Mendez

Pioneer Family: Life on Florida's 20th-Century Frontier. By Michel Oesterreicher. Foreword by Daniel L. Schafer. Tuscaloosa, Alabama. University of Alabama Press. 1996. xiii, 174 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Paper – \$24.95.

By the end of the 1890s, the existence of an American frontier slowly slipped into the realm of history and myth. However, the southern-most frontier in Florida remained intact well into the new century. Michel Oesterreicher offers a telling glimpse of this era in *Pioneer Family: Life On Florida's Twentieth Century Frontier*. Her account is based mainly on oral interviews with her parents Huger (“Hugie”) and Oleta Brown Oesterreicher, and is an entertaining story of a Florida lifestyle all but gone.

Born in 1898, Hugie grew to manhood in a cypress-hewn cabin on the edge of wilderness between Jacksonville and Saint Augustine. In the isolation of the palmettos and hammocks he became a hardened woodsman, at home in places like Durbin Swamp and able to secure a living from its natural bounty. Life was hard for families like the Oesterreichers with dangers of rattlesnakes, bogs capable of drowning the unwary and death from disease with little proper medical care. The strong and the skilled not only survived but thrived, seemingly far from the modern world.

Hugie's life changed forever in 1925, when he met and later won the hand of Oleta Brown and they began married life in a lonely cabin. Oleta slowly adjusted to an existence far from family, friends and civilization. The Roaring Twenties proved to be both the best and worst of times for the young couple. Catholics like Hugie and Oleta faced prejudice and intimidation in the 1928 Presidential election, as they were pressured not to support Catholic Al Smith over Republican Herbert Hoover. The next year found them financially ruined as banks in Saint Augustine and Jacksonville failed and swept away a lifetime of savings. Hugie and Oleta would literally find themselves with one dime to their names and with a growing family to support by the end of 1929.

The Great Depression was a trying time in northeastern Florida, and *Pioneer Family* poignantly chronicles the day-to-day struggle to endure. When the Durbin Swamp failed to adequately provide, Hugie even resorted to moonshining to earn money. The coming of fence laws and cattle tick eradication at long last brought modern times to the wilds of Duval County by the end of the 1930s, and World War II completed this change. By 1945 the Oesterreichers left the woods they loved and moved to Jacksonville Beach, where for many years they ran a grocery store.

Hugie and Oleta Oesterreicher seem almost like characters who could have sprung from the pages of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings or Patrick Smith. They were stoic "crackers" who faced adversity with hard work and faith, and always found a way to overcome. Professional historians, however, may be troubled by the fact that the episodic story of their life and times reads more like a literary work than a traditional history. The lack of a bibliography and index also detracts from the book's overall value to the study of Florida history. Nevertheless, *Pioneer Family* makes a contribution to state and local history and hopefully will encourage more people to record their own family stories for the sake of future generations.

Robert A. Taylor