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Plymouth -- a very small Florida town

By Francis Ferguson

My collecting of postal history is very selective – mostly revolving around very small town Florida. That interest has been fueled by nearly 35 years of statewide travel – often passing through small towns. There are countless small towns in Florida that have vanished completely or been swallowed whole by neighboring towns, but they still leave a rich legacy of postal history for collectors.

Figure 1
Photo from the
Orlando Sentinel
newspaper show-
ing Plymouth in
1983.



My interest in Plymouth actually started in March 1980, when travel to work in Tavares took me along U.S. 441 through the tiny community. Figure 1 is a very poor copy of an *Orlando Sentinel* photo taken sometime in 1983, which shows the stacks at the citrus processing plant. Today, the scene is much different with the citrus packing and processing plant having been almost totally dismantled (Figure 2).



Figure 2
The same scene today.

The building that housed Buzz's Market seen in Figure 1 is still there, but is now a Mexican grocery store. Jack's Truck Stop, which appears

slightly to the north of Buzz's, is no longer there. The building that was Jack's appears to have been repurposed for about 25 years as Jimmy Martin's Machine Shop (closed in 2012) which was located just north of the Mexican grocery. This area, which could have been considered the "business district" of Plymouth, has noticeably declined.

It was not until I called Apopka home in 2004 that I began to use the Plymouth Post Office as my mailing address (Figure 3). The rather poor strike on the cover from Plymouth dated February 1, 1910 (Figure 4) was discovered at a local bourse in 2009. Since



Figure 3
The Plymouth Post Office today.

that discovery, attempts have been made to write a history of Plymouth. Figure 5 shows a clear strike of the Plymouth cancel dated March 28, 1902 from E.S. Bailey, an early settler and a contemporary of John T. Chapman. Figure 6 is dated April 11, 1888, while Figure 7 shows a Plymouth strike on April 28, 1892. (Figures 6 and 7 have been generously provided by Deane R. Briggs.)

Many hours of research has yielded little of substance, mostly because Plymouth never has existed as an in-

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Figure 4

Cover from Plymouth dated Feb. 1, 1910.

incorporated town/city and has never had an established “business district” other than that exceedingly brief stretch of U.S. 441 shown in Figure 1. The history of many of the small communities in Central Florida is



Figure 5

A strike of Plymouth cancel dated March 28, 1902.

difficult to untangle from neighboring communities that often times dominate the area of interest. This is the case with Plymouth. While the community in some form or another has been in existence since August 10, 1880, the “town” of Plymouth has been of a rather amorphous nature. The population was 450 in 1958, and really has not changed much in the last 55 years. Adding to the confusion of the early history of Plymouth is the fact there appears to be two different names for the original settlement.

According to the official records of the Post Office Department, Plymouth was first established as Penryn; with the name Plymouth officially changed on January 18, 1886. The book *History of Apopka and Northwest Orange County, Florida*, published in 1982 by Jerrell H. Shofner for the Apopka Historical Society tells a much different tale on page 50. “About mid-way be-

tween Zellwood and Apopka on the Tavares Orlando and Atlantic Railroad and about two miles from Merrimack, Orange Heights was founded in the mid-1880s. E.C. Swan was one of its original promoters. When it was discovered about 1902 that Florida had another town named Orange Heights (in Alachua County), C.W. Smith, who had just arrived from Connecticut, talked his neighbors into naming the place Plymouth.”



Figure 6

Plymouth datestamp of April 11, 1888.

The conflicting stories are not uncommon when dealing with small town names. It appears from the evidence that the story by Shofner is purely fiction, and can’t be substantiated in any way with facts. Sadly this inaccurate history has worked itself into a number of “official” accounts that just continue the falsehoods.



Figure 7

Plymouth datestamp of April 28, 1892.

Extensive research has turned up no indication that the Plymouth area was ever referred to officially as “Orange Heights,” which leads to the conclusion that the quote from the book is totally erroneous in nature. The

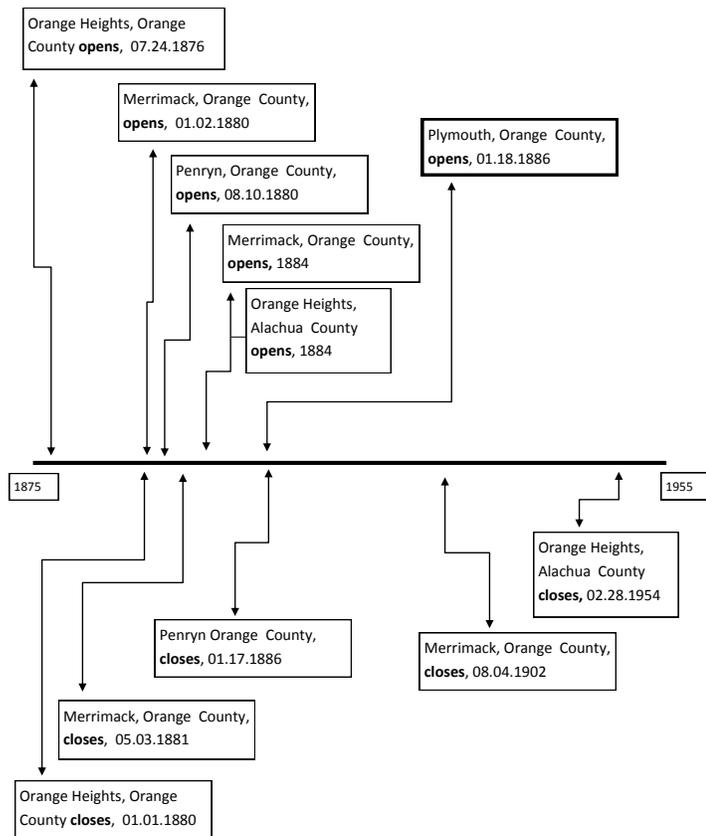
Continued on page 4

original Orange Heights location in Alachua County is very near the intersection of U.S. 301 and State Road 26, to the east of Gainesville, and was in official operation from 1884 until 1954.

Figure 8
“Penryn”
cover dated
June 3,
1885.



From the standpoint of hard evidence, I have never found a cover from Penryn or Orange Heights in numerous years of looking for small-town Florida history. From a purely logical point, there should be covers for both Penryn and Orange Heights in existence somewhere! That said, Figure 8 is a Penryn cover dated June 3, 1885. This cover has been supplied by Dr. Briggs; it is considered very rare. The diagram below is a compilation of the time-lines of all the related towns discussed here.



Postmasters

According to the records (see box below) of the Post Office Department, the first Postmaster of Penryn was Augustine W. Evans. He was appointed on August 10, 1880 and served until Susan A.E. Chapman took over on January 18, 1886 when the name officially changed to Plymouth. Susan A.E. Chapman was the wife of John T. Chapman (Figure 9), who had brought the family to the Plymouth area in 1882. Susan A.E. Chapman served as postmaster until January 23, 1914. Chapman’s 32 years of service, while extraordinary, does not qualify as the longest at the Plymouth Post Office. Mrs. Weeta M. Brown served from November 16, 1924 until December 29, 1966 – a full 42 years.

Postmaster Finder Postmasters by City		
PLYMOUTH POST OFFICE ORANGE COUNTY, FLORIDA		
Name	Title	Date Appointed
(originally established as PENRYN)		
Augustine W. Evans	Postmaster	08/10/1880
changed to PLYMOUTH on January 18, 1886		
Susan A. E. Chapman	Postmaster	01/18/1886
Howard M. Smith	Postmaster	01/23/1914
James C. Stewart	Postmaster	06/11/1919
Bessie Stewart	Acting Postmaster	06/18/1924
Mrs. Weeta M. Brown	Postmaster	11/16/1924
Mrs. Catherine R. Collins	Officer-In-Charge	12/29/1966
Mrs. Catherine R. Collins	Acting Postmaster	05/19/1967
Mrs. Catherine R. Collins	Postmaster	11/07/1967
Mrs. Ileene M. Wilkins	Officer-In-Charge	01/16/1973
Mrs. Ileene M. Wilkins	Postmaster	09/15/1973
James A. Carroll	Officer-In-Charge	08/24/1979
Mrs. Naomi W. Wallace	Postmaster	12/15/1979
Ms. Jo A. Barber	Officer-In-Charge	02/10/1983
Albert L. Brindell	Postmaster	06/06/1983
Virginia W. Phipps	Officer-In-Charge	12/29/1986
Samuel F. Smucker	Officer-In-Charge	04/02/1987
Virginia H. Williams	Postmaster	07/18/1987
Judy C. West	Officer-In-Charge	03/21/2002
David Djerf	Officer-In-Charge	08/19/2002
Jane Carroll	Officer-In-Charge	11/01/2002
Samuel T. Adams	Postmaster	02/08/2003
John D. Newbold	Officer-In-Charge	07/09/2005
John D. Newbold	Postmaster	10/29/2005

Post Office Buildings

The first building to serve as the post office (starting in 1880 as Penryn) was located on the corner of Schopke-Lester Road and Old Dixie Highway (see *Webb’s History of Florida*). The location of this first mail “drop” was the private household of J.C. Stewart. This area is now mostly ramshackle old residential cottages and vacant lots. In 1886, Susan Chapman became the postmistress (served 1886-1914) with the post office being located

Figure 9
John T.
Chapman.



in an enclosed porch area of John T. Chapman's home. The location of the post office from 1914 until 1955 (when the first modern building was erected) appears to have been in a small part of a local business establishment in the general area of the first post office.

Information is ambiguous at best, but it can be assumed that it was a grocery or drygoods store fronting on U.S. 441 or within a block. In 1955, the aforementioned Weeta M. Brown built the first modern solely dedicated post office structure on the corner of Highland Avenue and the Plymouth-Sorrento Road (also known as County Road 437). Figure 10 shows long-time Plymouth resident Vivian Steiner holding her Post Office Box 5 from the 1955 structure. No pictures could be located of this



Figure 10
Long-time
Plymouth
resident Vivian
Steinder with
Post Office
Box 5.

post office building, even after extensive inquiries. The present post office building, completed in 1976 (Figure 3), is located less than .2 of a mile from the 1955 structure (believed to be razed in the early 1980s) on the

Plymouth-Sorrento Road.

Family Names

The family names of Chapman, Bailey, Stewart, Simpson, Pirie, Brown and Carpenter are interwoven into the social and economic fabric of the Penryn-Plymouth area at almost every turn of a page of history.

Transportation

The railroad played an important part in the economy and transportation in the Plymouth area. The Tavares, Orlando and Atlantic Railroad Company (T.O.&A.) was incorporated in the early 1880s. The line was sur-

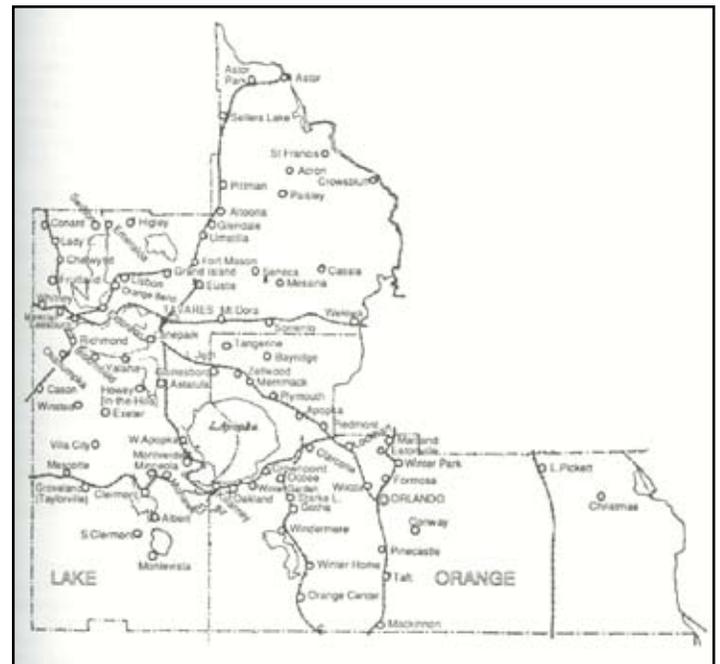


Figure 11
Map showing the rail line that started in Orlando
and ended in Tavares.

veyed by George Wadsworth to start in Tavares, pass through Ellsworth, Victoria, Zellwood, Plymouth, Apopka, Wekiwa, and Fairview before ending in Orlando. The total line was completed; however, it never enjoyed financial stability or solvency and was sold at public auction in 1891. Following a long string of mergers and reorganizations the remaining parts of the T.O.&A. became part of the Seaboard Airline Railroad. Figure 11 shows the rail line that started in Orlando and passed through Wilcox, Lockhart, Piedmont, Apopka, Plymouth, Merrimack, Zellwood, and Lake Jem before ending in Tavares. The present day U.S. 441 closely follows the old railroad for a good portion of its length. This acquisition now allowed the local economy to have

Continued on page 6

access to markets located in points south and up the East Coast to New York. The easy access to rail transportation would serve the area well in later years as the Plymouth Citrus Fruit Growers Association (Figure 12) would be organized near the rail line within sight of the present day U.S. 441.



Figure 12

The Plymouth Citrus Fruit Growers Association.

Rail was not the only means of modern transportation evolving. Automobiles were appearing in the Apopka area by 1909, which led to an effort in 1915 to pave a brick road from Orlando through Apopka to Plymouth. As more and more automobiles arrived in the area, travel times began to fall and distance, at least in the short haul, became less of an issue. Ultimately the brick road would be extended from Orlando through Apopka and Plymouth to the Lake County line.

Commerce – Major and Minor

Plymouth in the 1880s was a very rural outpost of the only slightly larger and more established Apopka. Commerce in Plymouth originally revolved around cattle and naval stores that came from the wide-ranging forests. It was later in the 1890s that citrus and general farming became more prominent.

The first major factory of any measure in the Plymouth area was the organ factory. Also located in Plymouth was a sawmill run by C.W. Smith. How long and to what depth the organ factory and the sawmill affected the local economy has been lost in time, with no records of any nature available. It is known that the old organ factory structure was later re-purposed as a citrus packing house for a brief period of time until a new citrus packing facility was erected on the site using timbers cut at the nearby sawmill.

The devastating freezes of December 1894 and Feb-

ruary 1895 virtually wiped out the citrus production, reducing it to a small fraction of previous production levels. This catastrophe also caused many established families to leave the area to seek a better future elsewhere. It was nearly 10 years before yearly citrus production totals again returned to the pre-freeze levels. This was a major disruption to the local economy.

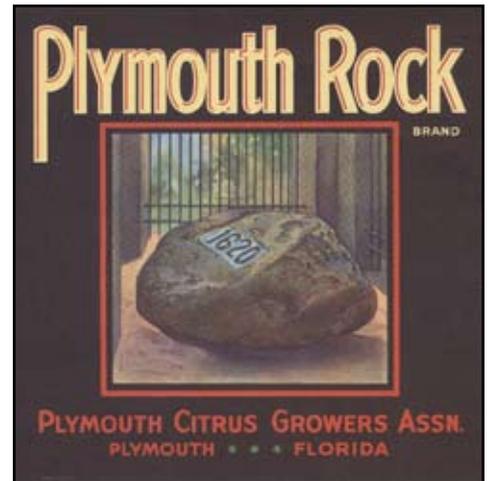
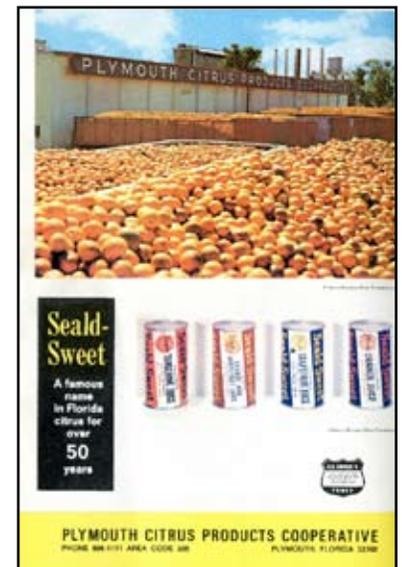


Figure 13
Label of the Plymouth Citrus Growers Association.

From the ashes of the freeze event the starting of the Plymouth Citrus Growers Association (Figures 12 and 13) [1909 to 1987] and the Plymouth Citrus Products Cooperative (Figure 14) [closed 1982] began. The PCPC manufactured a wide range of products from the

Figure 14
Advertisement for the Plymouth Citrus Products Cooperative.



remains of the citrus fruit after juicing. One of those products is citrus oil (Figure 15). Both organizations went through a sequence of name changes as they were purchased by larger corporate entities until finally they ceased to exist in the last part of the 1980s after a series of killer freezes. This event was simply part of the massive push as citrus production moved south into more

citrus tolerant zones. By the middle 1990s, little to no evidence of the once booming citrus industry could be found in the Central Florida area.



Figure 15
An example of “Cold Pressed Orange Oil” from the Plymouth Citrus Products Cooperative in Plymouth, Florida.

Interestingly, in 1911, the first president of the Plymouth Citrus Growers Association was the aforementioned John T. Chapman. Chapman was a veteran of the Confederate Army, serving from 1861-1864, after which he relocated to Plymouth in 1882 with his wife and eight (also reported as six in one source) children. His involvement in the local economy ran deep with Chapman serving in many different roles over the years. Figure 16 is a correspondence from him dated December 10, 1907 from Plymouth. John’s wife, Susan, was the postmistress of Plymouth from 1886 until 1914.



Figure 16
Cover from J.T. Chapman dated December 10, 1907.

As detailed earlier in the article, Figure 1 is a photo of a section of U.S. 441 at the corner of Boy Scout Road, facing north (*Orlando Sentinel*, July 17, 1983) showing the distillation stacks at the citrus plant and Buzz’s Market along with Jack’s Truck Stop, all of which have disappeared. Across the street and not shown in this picture is the location of the once thriving Vomac

Groves roadside stand (Figure 17). Just a short distance north on U.S. 441, past the repurposed citrus processing plant, can be seen the long shuttered (since 1982) General Electric lightbulb factory.



Figure 17
Vomac Groves on U.S. 441 in Plymouth.

Thankfully the Plymouth area had an economic base to augment agriculture. The Lake Standish Lodge (Figure 18) had been in mostly seasonal operations since 1887, each year starting on December 1. The lodge was a focal point of much of the winter residents’ social activities from December until the following April. Many



Figure 18
The Lake Standish Lodge.

of the winter residents who did not own local homes stayed at the lodge the entire season. The lodge was in almost continuous winter operation until it burned in 1940. Today the site of the Lake Standish Lodge seems to be in question, especially since the nearby lake is a tiny shadow of its former size. While the original

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The Magnolia Hotel St. Johns River, Florida

By Deane R. Briggs, M.D.

In the May 2013 issue of the *Florida Postal History Journal*, Christine C. Sanders and I reported two covers with seemingly impossible postmarks of “St. Johns River, Fla.” One was a manuscript postmark and the other a circular datestamp (cds) postmark. Since no post office with this name existed in Florida during the 1870-1883 time frame when those covers were postmarked, several options were offered. One was a steamboat marking and another was a most interesting idea of a mail box attached to a tree for steamer pick up with the marking either applied on ship or at the Jacksonville or Palatka destination. I recently obtained a cover that might possibly answer the question of location of where these postmarks were applied.

The hotel advertising corner card cover in *Figure 1* is from the “Magnolia Hotel, St. Johns River, Fla.,” which was postmarked at Green Cove Springs, Florida on

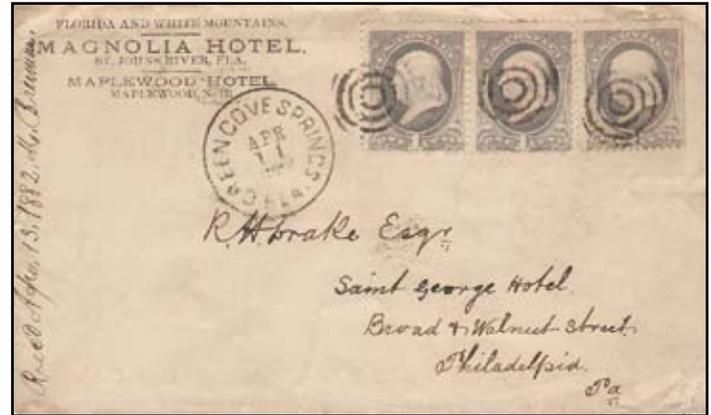


Figure 1
Magnolia Hotel, St. Johns River, Fla. corner card cover with Green Cove Springs, Fla. 1882 postmark.

April 11, 1882. This may well imply that the address of the hotel was actually St. Johns River, Fla. and not that it was just on the St. Johns River in Florida. This could

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Plymouth: not just another small town in Florida — *Continued from page 7*

lakebed outline can still be seen from aerial photos, the lake has contracted into three unconnected small bodies of water.

A second place to stay which was located a very short walk over a plank walkway from the rail depot was the Lake Standish House. A third option was the small Plymouth Hotel. No additional information can be located on these two hotel establishments. Surprisingly for such a small town, Plymouth had three hotel establishments and a couple of boarding houses! (If any reader can supply a cover with a corner card from any of the business entities discussed, the author would very much appreciate the effort.)

Conclusion

The identity of the area is at best amorphous. Plymouth really does exist in the hearts and minds of the residents. While Plymouth has thrived and struggled over the years, it seems to endure against all odds. The once bustling farm community of Zellwood to the north or the ever growing Apopka to the south could have easily

devoured the borderless Plymouth. Instead, Plymouth has managed to survive and maintain an identity despite the passage of time. I personally would like to see Plymouth continue for many more decades but the sad reality is that thought is more than likely no more than a wish. Furthermore the passage of time further dims the connections to the rich history of the area. One can only watch and hope.

The process of gathering information for this article involved two trips to the Smathers Library complex located on the campus of the University of Florida, and a rather unproductive visit to the Orange County Historical Museum. Additional information was gathered courtesy of Angela Nicols and Mary Hense of the Apopka Historical Museum and the wonderful array of resources available there. Interviews with long-time residents Vivian Steiner and Belle Gilliam also provided valuable background information and insight into the history of Plymouth. I would like to extend a hearty thank you to everyone who aided in this process. Your time and help made this all possible!



Figure 2

1877 map noting location of Magnolia Hotel.

mean that the earlier 1870s covers actually represent a “hotel” postmark applied at the hotel by a desk clerk and delivered to the Green Cove Springs Post Office or another nearby post office for entry in the mails. A U.S. Coast Survey map of 1877 (*Figure 2*) clearly shows the Magnolia Hotel was located at a site on the St. Johns River about equal distance from Magnolia and Green Cove Springs which had functioning post offices.

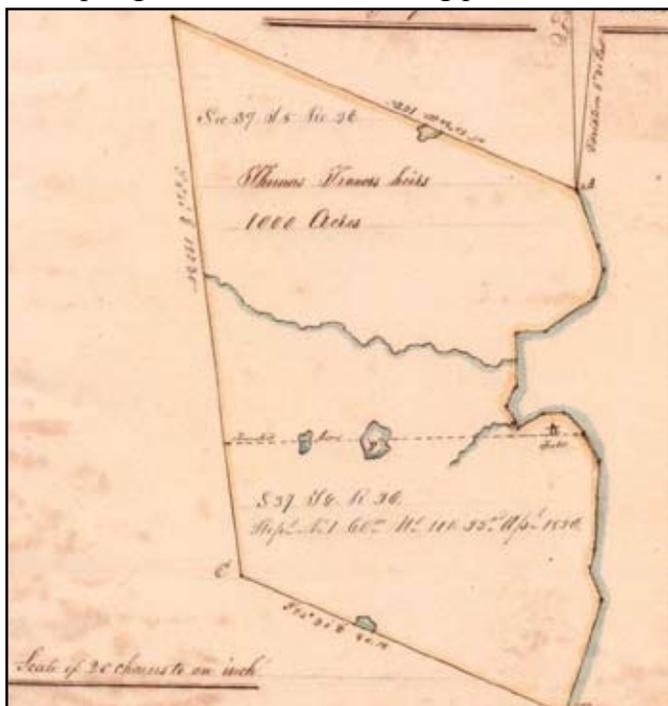


Figure 3

Map from 1783 showing Thomas Travers' 1,000 acre land grant.

The Magnolia Hotel at Magnolia Springs has a long and storied tradition. The original site was known for its mineral waters from the late 1700s and Thomas Travers, who served in the Spanish Court as the Royal Doctor was rewarded with a 1,000 acre land grant. (*Figure 3*). His son, William, ran the sugar plantation and sawmill until it was burned by the Seminole Indians in 1840. His wife, Rebecca (sister of Mary Martha Reid, Florida Governor Reid’s wife), inherited the property upon William’s death and married Joseph Finegan (Civil War General in charge of Florida troops).

He subsequently sold the estate to Joseph Summerlin (a large land owner and Civil War cattle baron who supplied commissary supplies for the Confederacy), who in turn built the first hotel at the site (*Figure 4*). This ho-

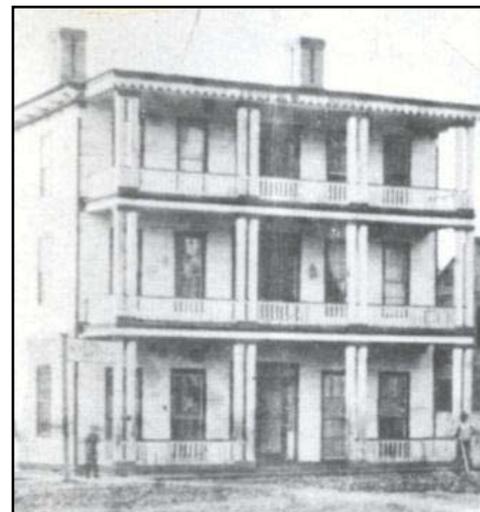


Figure 4
The first Magnolia Hotel.

tel was sold to Nathan Benedict who ran the hotel until the Civil War when it was used intermittently by both Confederate and Union troops as a headquarters. Following the war it was briefly used as an orphanage for black children until purchased by Seth Rogers in 1869. Rogers had been the physician for colored troops and ran the second hotel (*Figure 5*). It was during this time period that the hotel became a highly successful tourist site for Northerners wanting the healing properties of the mineral springs (*Figure 6*). Even a mule-drawn rail line was connected from the hotel to a hotel pier on the St. Johns River to bring guests and supplies from the steamboats plying the river (*Figure 7*).

A post office was officially established at Magnolia on December 1, 1870, but was discontinued on December 23, 1873. It was re-established on April 17, 1882

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Figure 5
Second Magnolia Hotel.

(a week after the cover in Figure 1 was postmarked at nearby Green Cove Springs) and changed to Magnolia Springs on July 9, 1890 (when the hotel became more commonly known as the Magnolia Springs Hotel).

It is recorded that the Magnolia Hotel had its “own post office and the only transportable postal cancelling machine.” The covers mentioned in the May 2013 *Journal* issue were likely from the Magnolia Hotel during the period when the Magnolia Post Office itself was discontinued (1874-1882), although the options mentioned in



Figure 6
Sulfur Springs at Magnolia Hotel.

the previous article certainly are possible.

Joseph S. Fay bought the hotel in 1881, enlarged it as the third hotel, and this began the 30-year heyday of the Magnolia Springs Hotel (*Figure 8*). In 1884, electric lights (only the second building in Florida to have them)

were installed with Thomas Edison personally inspecting them. A nine-hole golf course (bunkers were built from trenches constructed by the Confederate forces), concrete tennis courts, an indoor pool and opera house



Figure 7
Mule drawn rail line from Magnolia Hotel to dock.

were added for the pleasure of guests. The success of the hotel lasted until other easily accessible tourist options became available. The old wooden hotel was difficult to maintain, and Henry Flagler was constructing fabulous resort hotels all along the Florida east coast which were accessible by train and not St. Johns River steamboats. By the beginning of World War I, the hotel



Figure 8
Magnolia Springs Hotel

closed and was run as a military academy for a while until it burned down in 1923.

Endnotes

“Magnolia Springs,” <http://archives.clayclerk.com/Places-Towns-MagnoliaSprings.html>.

“The Shortline from Magnolia Springs to Green Cove,” <http://archives.clayclerk.com/railroads.html>.

State Archives of Florida, <http://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/3731>.

An 1832 St. Augustine letter to the Secretary of War seeking work

By **Todd A. Hirn**

Shown in Figure 1 is an 1832 folded letter sent from St. Augustine to Washington City, written by James Dalliba, an 1811 graduate of West Point, to Secretary of War Lewis Cass regarding reorganization of the Ordnance Department and his desire to obtain the top position.

He was ultimately not successful in his job bid and the position was given to George Bomford, an 1806 West Point graduate and senior officer. Bomford (1780-1848) was promoted to Colonel as Chief of Ordnance Corps in May 1832 and remained there in Washington in that capacity until 1842.

Dalliba was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant of artillery on March 1, 1811, reaching the rank of Major in the Ordnance Corps by 1815. During a reorganization of the Army in 1821, he was retained as a Captain in the 1st Artillery. Discouraged with his demotion in rank, he resigned from the Army on May 1, 1824 and went on to head an iron manufacturing com-

pany at Port Henry, New York near Lake Champlain. James Dalliba died in 1833 at the age of 47, a year after sending this letter. The letter has some interesting historical content and is herein transcribed:

*Sir,
I perceive by the proceedings of Congress that a Bill is about to pass that body to "Organize the Ordnance*

Department." I have not seen the detail of the bill but presume it provides for a Colonel Lt. Colonel &c as in other Corps. Should that bill pass and a district Corps of Ordnance be created I should

like again to enter the service of that Corps, provided I can get the head, or, in case it is determined to place

Col. Bomford at the head, I would accept the second place. I left the Ordnance Department in 1824 in consequence of losing my rank when the Ord.

Department was merged in the Artillery in 1821. I was razeed (Note: "reduced") from a major of ordinance, which I held six years, to a Captain of Artillery. After

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Figure 1
Oval "St Augustine E. Flo." Territorial postmark cover.

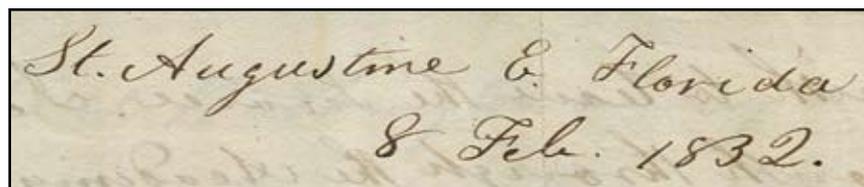


Figure 2
"St. Augustine E. Florida 8 Feb. 1832." dateline.

remonstrating with the government against this step & getting no redress, I resigned at once; but my friends induced me to remain till 1824, when, not being reconciled to my rank, I upon occurrence of a trifling incidence, again sent in my resignation to President Monroe (Note: our fifth President who served 1817-1825) & retired from the service. It was not my desire or wish to leave the service. I entered it in my youth through the Academy at West Point (1808). I made it my profession, and especially the Ordnance Service. You will, perhaps, remember, Sir; that I commenced the (War of 1812) in the duties of that Department at Detroit, but I could not remain under the circumstances. Now, if I can obtain my legitimate rank & standing in the service I would like it. And, as there is a prospect that I may, I make the application to you Sir & through you to the President for one of the places as above specified, and solicit a favorable consideration of my daring.

Since I have been out of the service I have been constantly engaged in the iron manufactory, especially cast iron, which is but a branch of the Ordnance Service.

Very Respectfully, I have the honor to be, Sir, your obt. Servt

(Signed) James Dalliba

Hon Lewis Cass

Secretary of War

P.S. I shall be at Washington on my way home, to the state of New York, in April next, and shall do my self the pleasure to call on you.

J.D.

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Two important FPHS meetings set

The next meeting of the Florida Postal History Society will be held on Saturday, December 7, 2013, in Orlando, beginning at noon in conjunction with FLOREX. The meeting will be held in the north meeting room adjacent to the bourse area at the Central Florida Fairground and Exposition Park, 4603 W. Colonial Dr. (State Road 50) about four-miles north of I-4.

The Annual Meeting of the Florida Postal History Society will be held on Saturday, February 8, 2014, in Sarasota, beginning at noon in the conference room behind the Sarasota Municipal Auditorium, U.S. 41, (Tamiami Trail).

This meeting will be held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the Confederate Stamp Alliance and two special programs are scheduled by Deane R. Briggs, M.D., on "Jacksonville during the Civil War" and "The Stephens-Bryant Correspondence." These programs will be presented at times to be determined on Saturday, February 8, and should be of interest to all FPHS members.

Both these shows have excellent dealer bourses and a number of the dealers are FPHS members and support our society. Please try to attend one or both of these meetings and visit the booths of our dealer members.

Melrose, Florida has a long and colorful history

By Philip Eschbach

The area to the southeast of Lake Santa Fe where Melrose, Florida is located (east of Gainesville), has a long and colorful history, dating to early Native American settlements. In June 1539, Hernando de Soto fought a three-hour battle near Melrose with native chieftain Vitachuco, reportedly killing thousands, with 900 jumping into Two-Mile Pond. The details of this battle are recorded in *The Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. II, No. 1 (April 1909).

In 1822, the Bellamy Road was constructed along portions of an old 16th century Spanish mission trail, connecting Picolata on the St. Johns River with Tallahassee. **Figure 1** shows an early map of the area. This road skirted Lake Santa Fe to the south but settlers did not move into this area until after the 1842 Seminole Indian War. The first settlement was begun in the 1850s at Banana, a mile south of Melrose, at the G.W.A. McRae mill site on Etoniah Creek where many banana trees grew (see **Figure 2** for location in Banana). Dr. George Washington A. McRae was not only a physician but also the general store and mill pro-

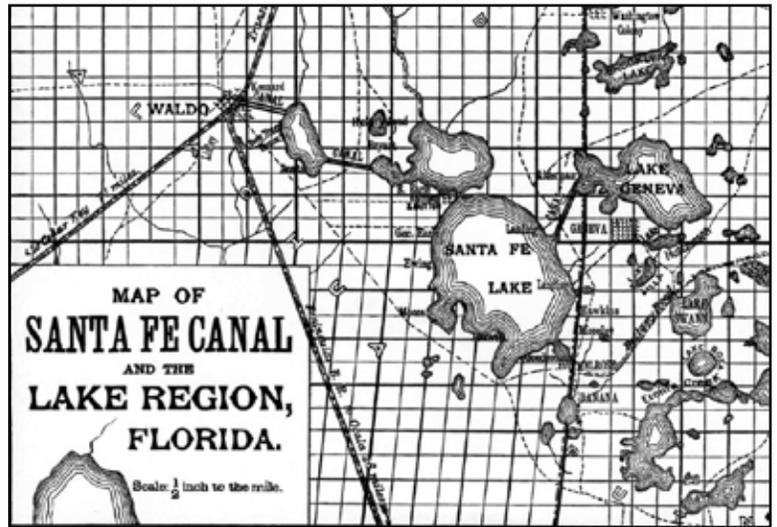


Figure 1
Early map of Santa Fe Canal area.

prietor, the druggist, a farmer, and became Banana's first postmaster when the post office was established on May 20, 1875 (**Figure 3**, below).

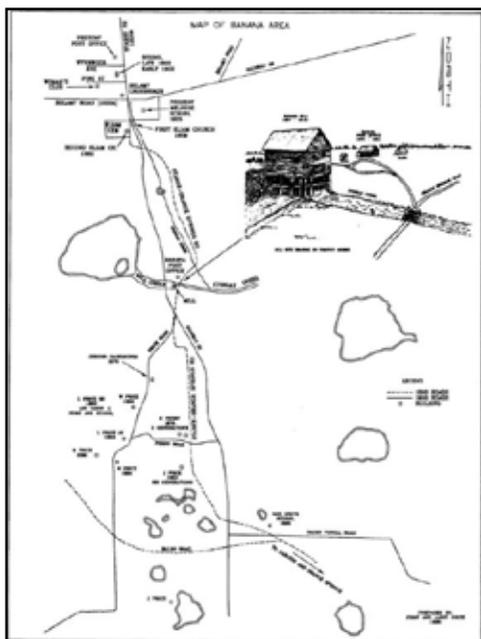


Figure 2
Locations in the Banana area.



Figure 3
Photograph of the old McRae grist mill at Banana, circa 1930s.

A local writer noted that Dr. McRae was “the happiest man in Banana,” and that during 1883, he shipped 100 crates of beans to the North and from one Peento peach tree he received \$56 for the fruit. McRae’s store and

Continued on page 14

mill was the only establishment in Banana, employing three men, a manager who earned \$1.50 for a 10 hour day and two helpers who made 75¢ a day. The grist mill existed until the 1930s.



Figure 4
Bonnie House (built in 1876).

The town of Melrose was first platted and recorded in Alachua County on May 10, 1877, on abandoned cotton fields around Melrose Bay, an inlet off of Lake Santa Fe and a mile north of Banana. At the time of the Civil War, the settlement was called Shake Rag, relating to the rag used to start and end horse races held there. A reference is made of soldiers camping at Shake Rag Corner on the Bellamy Road. The name Melrose is speculated to have been selected by a Miss Bonney as a more dignified name than Shake Rag, presumably for Melrose Abbey in Scotland. It is sometimes referred to as “Bonnie Melrose.” The Bonney house, built in 1876 on Melrose Bay, is the oldest house in Melrose (**Figure 4**).



Figure 6
Green Cove Springs & Melrose R.R.
depot at Melrose.

The Melrose area had become popular for growing citrus after the Civil War and many farms were planted growing not only citrus but other crops such as Sea Island cotton, sugar cane, tobacco, oats, peas, chufas,

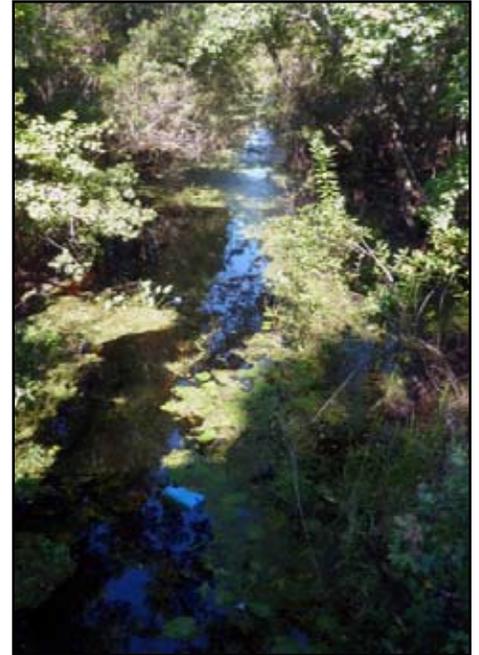


Figure 5
Current view of
the Lake Santa
Fe-Waldo Canal.

and early vegetables as well. When the Florida Railroad bypassed Melrose, going to Waldo and Gainesville instead, getting crops to market became difficult. In 1877, a canal was proposed to connect Lake Santa Fe with the railroad depot at Waldo via Lake Alto. This canal was completed in 1881 (see **Figure 5** above), enabling growers to ship crops by steamer from Melrose Bay to Waldo. It also meant that seasonal Northern visitors could make the trip more easily by rail and steamer. Schools had been started in the early 1870s and by 1882, the town had 200 permanent residents.

In an effort to attract more settlement in the area between Green Cove Springs (a St. Johns River resort town) and Melrose, the narrow gauge Green Cove & Melrose Railroad (later called the Green Cove Springs & Melrose Railroad [**Figure 6**]) was begun in 1882. Major Adolph Vogelbach of Melrose was a principal in the venture. Plans were made to connect with a western division called the Suwannee & Santa Fe Railroad to connect Melrose with Fort Fanning on the Suwannee River, via Gainesville. This was never completed and the railroad ran out of money after only laying 10 miles of track from Green Cove Springs. By July 1885, J.W. McRae and other investors, including lumbermen anxious to cut the virgin yellow pine in the area, extended the rail line in conjunction with the Atlantic & Western

Railroad, and by January 10, 1890, 33 miles were completed to Melrose and service began with twice daily service except Sundays. The trip to Green Cove Springs took two hours and made 11 stops. The Melrose Depot was on the Bonnie Farm near Melrose Bay. In 1892, the



Figure 7

“BANANA/FLA. FEB 24” (1879) cds postmark on postal card.

railroad was reorganized as the Southwestern Railroad Company and consisted of four locomotives, two parlor cars, a baggage car, seven box cars, 57 flat cars, and three service cars.

The railroad to Melrose limped along until the great freeze of 1894-95 which destroyed the citrus industry in North Florida. The nearby town of Rochelle recorded 12 inches of snow. Citrus never recovered and the town dwindled to a quiet lakeside retreat it is today just 20 miles east of Gainesville. The railroad went out of business in 1900. Today Melrose boasts 79 homes and buildings dating from its heyday on the National Historic Register.



Figure 8

“Banana Fla Feby 9/83” manuscript postmark on postal card.

POSTAL HISTORY

Although the post office at Banana was the first to be established in the area, the town of Banana never developed and remained mainly a small settlement. George Washington A. McRae was the main land owner, living in a two-story log cabin. He was known as “Wash” and served in the 7th Florida Infantry during the Civil War. At the time, he ginned cotton until his gin was burned by Yankee troops. He was the postmaster from establishment of the Banana Post Office on May 20, 1875 until April 4, 1888.

He had 19 slaves before the war and afterwards moved to Melrose where he bought a home in 1881, and became trustee of the high school. The Banana Post Office was discontinued on October 13, 1894, with mail handled at Melrose. The postal card in **Figure 7** was postmarked at Banana with a weakly struck cds post-



Figure 9

“Banana Fla Aug 22, 1879” manuscript postmark on postal entire addressed to Madisonville, Fla.

mark (most postmarks from 1879-1883 are manuscript postmarks) dated “24 Feb” (1879) and written by Frank McRae requesting a draw of \$80 for G.W.A. McRae.

The post card in **Figure 8** is postmarked “Banana Fla, Feby 9 / 83” and requests proceeds from sale of oranges to be sent by registered letter to C.C. Ashley at the “P.O. at Melrose, Alachua Co Fla.” C. Columbus Ashley lived in the Putnam Hall area (five miles east of Melrose) and before the Civil War owned three slaves and was one of only a few settlers who owned a “fine” carriage. In 1882, he was a member of the building committee for a new church in Banana. **Figure 9** and **Figure 10** document manuscript postmarks in differing handwriting during the tenure of postmaster G.W.A. McRae,

Continued on page 16

both addressed to Madisonville, Florida (no post office with such name is known to have been established in Florida).

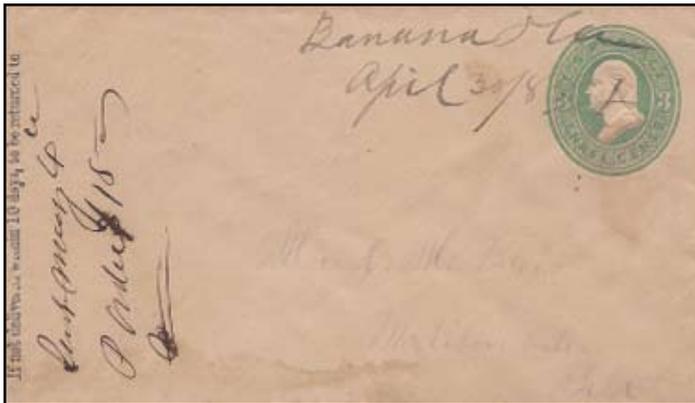


Figure 10

“Banana Fla April 30, 1883” manuscript postmark on postal entire.

The Melrose Post Office was established on January 3, 1878, in Alachua County, later changed to Putnam County on May 1, 1883. The original Melrose plat was one mile square located in sections of four adjoining counties: Alachua, Putnam, Bradford and Clay. The first postmaster was Meridith C. Goodson. Frank M. McRae, nephew of G.W.A. McRae, and also a physi-



Figure 11

“MELROSE / FLA. DEC 17 1879” magenta postmark.

cian, was postmaster from May 7, 1895 until June 19, 1897. Frank McRae lived in a double pen house and in his 1921 obituary is said to have treated more people on charity than any other doctor in the area. He is listed as owning a 10 acre orange grove in the 1880s and was unsuccessful in an 1885 effort to get a new county established with Melrose as the county seat.

The cover in **Figure 11** is the earliest Melrose postmark in the Briggs collection, with a magenta inked cds dated “17 Dec. 1879” and with a cancelled 3¢ banknote stamp. The cover in **Figure 12** was postmarked at Melrose on May 24, 1889, and addressed to Mrs. Frank Darlington in Westtown, Pennsylvania.



Figure 12

“MELROSE / FLA. MAY 24, 1889” cds postmark on cover.

Frank Darlington was an investor in the Green Cove Springs & Melrose Railroad and bought property in Melrose in 1885. He was one of a number of wealthy Northern families who spent the “season” in Melrose. The cover in **Figure 13** is postmarked with cds and cork killer dated March 3, 1892. The post card in **Figure 14** has a “5 Nov 1914” 4-bar B Melrose postmark used during the time period of Postmaster Orville C. Hubbard (July 14, 1909 - January 31, 1931) with the post office in his general store as shown in **Figure 15**



Figure 13

“MELROSE / FLA. MAR 3, 1892” cds postmark on cover.

and **Figure 16**. The original Melrose Post Office, 1880-1909 is shown in **Figure 17**. Remains of the original McRae house is shown in **Figure 18**.



Figure 16
Hubbard general store and post office (1909).

The author appreciates the assistance of Melrose historian Rosemary Daurer and Deane R. Briggs, M.D., in editing this article and for the reproduction of covers from his collection.



Figure 17
Original Melrose Post Office, 1880-1909.



Figure 18
Remains of the original McRae house in Melrose.

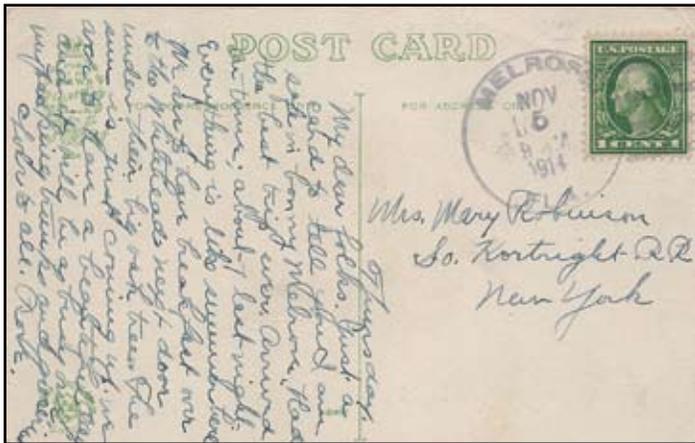


Figure 14
“MELROSE / FLA. NOV 5, 1914” 4-bar B postmark on post card.



Figure 15
Postmaster Orville C. Hubbard with the post office in his general store.

Endnotes

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“Melrose’s History.” <http://melrosefl.com/history/history.html>.

Bonny Melrose. Zonira Tolles, Storter Publishing Co., Gainesville, 1982.

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More On Those Alligator Advertising Covers

By Dr. Vernon N. Kisling, Jr.

As a follow up to articles on alligator advertising covers (Briggs 2009, Hirn 2013), I have one more design to add to the conversation (*see Figure 1*) and two brief points of interest to mention. The first point concerns the census of covers appearing in these articles. Of the eight covers illustrated in these articles, five are from Jacksonville. One each is from Tampa, Interlachen, and Pine Castle. While this is a small sample, it seems alligator images and souvenirs were popular among businesses in the Jacksonville area during this time when advertising covers were popular nationwide (these covers being postmarked during 1890 – 1940).

The second point concerns the University of Florida, which had its beginning in 1853, but was established at its Gainesville campus in 1905-1906. One theory on how U.F. got its nickname and its mascot is that pennants with a gator design were popular in Gainesville and at U.F. football games (Van Ness 2003). These pennants were sold at a local Gainesville store, just as they were at one of the stores featured in the previous article (Hirn 2013) – perhaps the same pennant was sold at both stores, and no doubt at other stores in the area.

The alligator is found throughout the Southeast (including the U.F. campus), but seems to be prominent on these advertising covers from Jacksonville. A more extensive census of alligator advertising covers might show a wider popularity, but for now Jacksonville

seems to have the most. I recently acquired one from a business in Tulsa, Oklahoma – still trying to figure that one out!

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Hirn, Todd A. "More Florida Alligator Advertising," *Florida Postal History Journal*. 20(2): 1, 3-4, 2013.

Van Ness, Carl and Kevin McCarthy. *Honoring the Past, Shaping the Future: The University of Florida, 1853 - 2003*. University of Florida 150th Anniversary Committee: Gainesville, 2003.

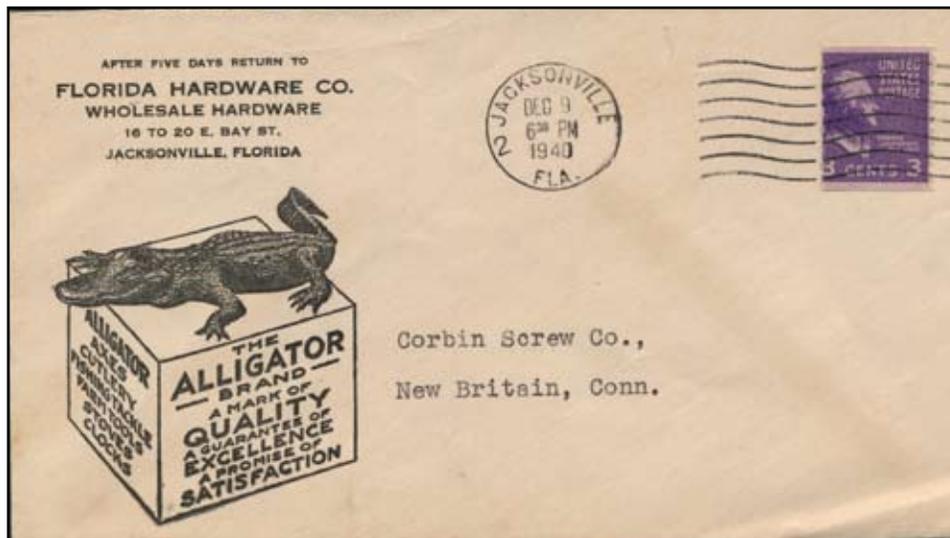


Figure 1
Alligator advertising cover for Florida Hardware Company, Jacksonville, Florida.

Special thanks

to the

Central Florida Stamp Club

for their generous Contributing Membership and website sponsorship.

Several members of the group also belong to the Florida Postal History Society, and we thank them for their continued support and friendship.

We also thank the

Florida Stamp Dealers Association

for their financial help as website sponsors.

-- Deane R. Briggs, M.D.

LETTER

Miami Post Office

To the Editor:

I just finished Dr. Deane Briggs' article on the Miami Post Office (*Journal*, Vol. 20, No.1, pp. 15-17; sidebar to Charles W. Rice, "The Key Biscayne Lighthouse," pp. 13-15) and thought I could possibly clarify a statement he makes in the article. On page 17 he writes of the Miami Post Office being re-established September 22, 1874 under the name "Maama."

I believe rather than a misspelling of "Miami," it was a phonetic spelling. Growing up in Ft. Lauderdale in the early 1950s, the locals pronounced Miami as "Ma-am-ah" or "Ma-ama" with accent on the second syllable in both cases. It was a common pronunciation heard on South Florida television, which often brought comment from newcomers.

Jim Moses

Following basic style format will help your editor!

In preparing a manuscript for publication in our journal, there are a few simple rules to follow to ensure your editor can maintain his sanity.

First and foremost, scanned images should never be embedded in an article. Always send images separately, and PLEASE indicate if they are Figure 1, Figure 2, etc. Cutlines (information under the image) should be included for every figure. Don't assume the editor will write those -- you likely know more about the image than the editor!

It is best to send each figure separately and not grouped on a page. If you group three or four images on one page to save some scanning time, your editor has to manipulate each image, one at a time, rotate it if necessary, resize, etc., etc. One image at a time is the easiest way.

In writing, tell the full story. Don't assume your reader will know anything about your subject. If you are speaking about Outer Podunk, tell us what Florida county it is in, and submit a map, if possible, showing the location.

Writing style is most important. You need not be a polished writer, but following simple accepted style will be a major help. For example, when referring to a figure, it's "Figure" and not "Fig." Every time a writer uses "Fig." four additional keystrokes are necessary: one to eliminate the period, and three more to add "ure." It doesn't sound like a big deal, but those extra keystrokes count up in a hurry! And the same is true with dates. We do NOT use the British style! Dates are not "Day-Month-Year." They are "Month-Day-Year." Hence, you do not see dates written as "24 Dec. 2000." Same situation as with "Figure," this requires eight keystrokes to change every date in a manuscript so written: "24 Dec. 2000" to "December 24, 2000."

Please be certain figures are shown in ascending numerical order. It is confusing to first refer to Figure 1, then Figure 5, then back to Figure 2. Keep them in order. When you use a numeral under 10, it is written out; 10 and above use the numerals; i.e., "one, five, 10, 20, 50."

Always use a period (.) after a title: Mr., Mrs., Dr. when it is followed by the person's name. Same with initials. It is not "AB Smith" but rather "A.B. Smith."

-- Everett Parker

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