

MORE ABOUT THE RIVER FOLK

ABOUT 1912, TWO MEN, ONE NAMED ARCHIBALD STEELE, AND THE OTHER NAMED ANTHONY SWEENEY SR., CAME FROM THE WIMAUMA AREA TO THE RIVER. STEELE BOUGHT A FEW ACRES JUST NORTH OF THE GULF CITY CEMETERY ON THE BEND OF THE SOUTH RIVER CHANNEL. STEELE HAD THREE STEPDAUGHTERS. THEY WERE LILLIE, IDA AND MAUD. TOM KICKLIGHTER WAS MARRIED TO ELLA WHO WAS A CLARK AND AN AUNT OF THE GIDDENS GIRLS. SWEENEY WAS MARRIED TO LILLIE AND MR. BOGIE MARRIED PATTY. ELLA AND PATTY WERE SISTERS OF STEELE'S FIRST WIFE WHO WAS A CLARK. LATER IDA MARRIED ALBERT McROBERTS AND MAUDE MARRIED FRED HANSON. SOME SAID SWEENEY HAD COME FROM CHICAGO AND WAS THE SON OF A WELL TO DO MERCHANT THERE. IT IS KNOWN THAT HE HAD A GOOD EDUCATION. HE ENGAGED IN FISHING ALONG WITH HIS FATHER-IN-LAW STEELE, AND HAD QUITE A LOT TO DO WITH THE SCHOOLS IN THE AREA. HE WAS A TRUSTEE FOR MANY YEARS AND DISCHARGED HIS COMMUNITY OBLIGATIONS WELL. HE HAD TWO GIRLS AND A BOY. ONE OF THE GIRLS MARRIED AARON LONG SR AND BECAME THE MOTHER OF AARON LONG JR AND ONE OR TWO MORE CHILDREN. AARON LONG JR HAS BEEN VERY SUCCESSFUL IN THE EXCAVATING BUSINESS AND HAS A NICE HOME IN RUSKIN. HIS MOTHER LIVES NEARBY. THE OTHER DAUGHTER ETHEL MARRIED WESLEY MOBLEY WHO WORKS FOR THE COUNTY. THEY HAVE SOME CHILDREN.

THE BOY ANTHONY JR. MARRIED A McNEIL GIRL IN MANATEE COUNTY AND LIVES AT WIMAUMA AND WORKS FOR J. D. SMITH IN HIS GARAGE. HE HAS TWO OR THREE CHILDREN.

UNCLE TOM KICKLITER HAD THREE BOYS WHO HAVE ALWAYS FISHED ON THE RIVER, AND ALL OF THEM ARE STILL HERE. EDGAR, THE ELDEST, WAS AT ONE TIME MARRIED TO EFFIE McGRIFF, GUS'S SECOND DAUGHTER. SHE HAD THREE BOYS FOR EDGAR AND THE BOYS ARE ALL LIVING IN THE AREA AND DOING WELL. EFFIE LATER MARRIED MABRY HAGAN AND THEY HAD THREE DAUGHTERS. IDA AND ALBERT McROBERTS HAD WILLIAMS, WHO MARRIED ARLENE WILLIS AND IS LIVING AT SUN CITY. EUGENE, WHO IS A PROMINENT FISH DEALER AND LIVES WITH HIS SECOND WIFE AT RUSKIN. HIS FIRST WIFE WAS ESTELLE MOBLEY, AND HE HAD THREE GIRLS BY HER. CATHERINE WAS MARRIED TO OLIVER WILLIAMS AND THEY HAD FOUR BOYS BEFORE CATHERINE DIED EARLY IN LIFE.

DORIS MARRIED CHARLIE BUZBEE. THEY LIVE AT RUSKIN AND CHARLIE, FORMERLY

A FISHERMAN, HAS MADE A LOT OF MONEY, ALONG WITH HIS BROTHER CECIL, FARMING.

MAUDE AND FRED HANSON HAD TWO BOYS AND A GIRL. FRED WAS KILLED IN AN AUTO ACCIDENT WHILE HE WAS YET YOUNG. THE OLDEST BOY FLOYD, WAS A SAILOR IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR, HE HAD A SHIP SHOT OUT FROM UNDER HIM JUST OFF THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA, BY A GERMAN SUB. HE SWAM THROUGH THE FLAMES OF AN OIL FIRE TO A RAFT AND, AFTER AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE OFFICER ON THE SUB, WHICH HAD SURFACED NEARBY, HE WAS RESCUED AND CAME HOME TO TAKE UP HIS LIFE OF FISHING AGAIN. HOWEVER, HE WAS NEVER THE SAME ANYMORE, AND WOULD HAVE BLACKOUT SPELLS, AND SEEMED TO RELIVE HIS HORRIBLE EXPERIENCES WHEN HE COULD BE PERSUADED TO TALK ABOUT THEM. HE DIED A YEAR OR SO LATER.

THE YOUNGER BOY WALTER GREW UP IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD, ALONG WITH HIS YOUNG SISTER MARION. THEY WENT TO SCHOOL AND; I BELIEVE, THE MOTHER WAS ABLE TO GET ALL OF THE CHILDREN THROUGH GRADE AND HIGH SCHOOL WITH THE MONEY SHE MADE FROM DRIVING A SCHOOL BUS, AND SOME HELP FROM THE COUNTY. AS A WIDOW, SHE WAS ENTITLED TO WELFARE FUNDS.

WALTER WAS A QUIET BOY AND NEVER SEEMED TO BE IN ANY TROUBLE. HE SERVED A HITCH IN THE ARMY AFTER HE QUIT SCHOOL. HE WAS WELL LIKED AND WORKED OR FISHED WHENEVER HE COULD. ONE NIGHT HE BORROWED A FRIEND'S CAR AND WRECKED IT AGAINST A TREE NEAR WHERE THE RUSKIN MOTEL IS NOW. HE WAS TAKEN TO BAY PINES HOSPITAL WHEN IT WAS APPARENT THAT HE WOULD BE A LONG TIME RECOVERING FROM THE ACCIDENT. HE WAS ALONE AT THE TIME OF THE WRECK AND NO ONE EVER KNEW WHAT CAUSED IT. HE LAY IN A COMA FOR NEARLY TWO YEARS AT BAY PINES. AS A RESULT OF HIS LONG FIGHT FOR LIFE, HE BECAME SOMEWHAT OF A HERO, AND THE WHOLE COMMUNITY MOURNED HIS DEATH.

MAUDE'S DAUGHTER MARION, MARRIED ONE OF THE SUMNER BOYS WHOSE PARENT WERE PROMINENT RANCHERS LIVING AT BALM. AFTER THE BREAKUP OF THIS MARRIAGE, SHE CAME TO LIVE WITH HER MOTHER WHO IS STILL LIVING ON THE RIVER AT THE PLACE HER FATHER STEELE GAVE HER WHEN SHE WAS MARRIED TO HANSON.

THE STORY OF THE HANSON FAMILY IS INDEED A TRAGIC ONE AND PERHAPS WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER LEFT UNTOLD AS WOULD A LOT OF OTHER UNPLEASANT ONES WHICH OCCURRED DURING THE GROWTH AND PROGRESS OF THE AREA. HOWEVER, THEY ARE A PART OF THE PAST.

BRINGING OUT THE CHARACTER OF THESE EARLY FOREBEARS OF THE PRESENT GENERATION.

AS WE HAVE SAID BEFORE, THERE WAS MUCH POVERTY IN THE COUNTRY IN THOSE DAYS BEFORE AND AFTER WORLD WAR ONE. THERE IS ONE STORY OF THE KICKLITER FAMILY WHICH POINTS UP THE INEGRITY OF THOSE EARLY SETTLERS. IT WAS SAID THE UNCLE TOM KICKLITER GOT INTO DIRE STRAIGHTS, AND HAD TO HAVE SOME HELP FROM THE COUNTY. THIS WAS NOT, AND IS STILL NOT UNUSUAL, IN THE CASE OF SOME FAMILIES WHO HAVE TOO MANY OBLIGATIONS TO HANDLE. THE UNUSUAL PART OF THE KICKLITER INCIDENT IS THAT WHEN UNCLE TOM GOT BACK ON HIS FEET, HE INSISTED ON PAYING BACK EVERY CENT OF THE MONEY HE HAD GOTTEN. HE DIED BEFORE MY TIME, SO I DID NOT KNOW MUCH ABOUT HIM EXCEPT THAT HE RAN A FISH HOUSE FOR THE MIRABELLAS, TAMPA FISH DEALERS, FOR MANY YEARS - JUST ABOUT WHERE THE MAYS LIVE ON THE NORTH SIDE OF THE RIVER. THAT HE WAS A BETTER THAN AVERAGE SKIFFBOAT BUILDER WAS COMMON KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE FISHERMEN WHO BOUGHT MANY OF HIS FINE SKIFFBOATS.

JESSE KICKLITER, THE YOUNGEST BOY LIVES ON THE RIVER, AND LOST AN ARM SOME YEARS AGO IN AN AUTO ACCIDENT. HE COULD STILL HANDLE A BOAT HOWEVER, AND MADE A LIVING FOR HIS FAMILY IN SPITE OF HIS HANDICAP. A FEW YEARS AGO, HE INVENTED AND PATENTED A MACHINE THAT COULD THROW A CAST NET, AND SPREAD IT IN A PERFECT CIRCLE. LEARNING TO CATCH FISH WITH A CAST NET IS NO SMALL FEAT IN ITSELF, AS ANYONE WHO HAS EVER TRIED WILL TESTIFY. JESSE IS STILL USING THIS DEVICE AND MAKES HIS LIVING MOST OF THE TIME WITH IT. THIS INCIDENT IS JUST ONE EXAMPLE OF THE INDEPENDENT SPIRIT AND NATIVE ABILITY OF THE RIVER PEOPLE. IF YOU DIDN'T HAVE A TOOL TO WORK WITH, YOU MADE ONE. NECESSITY WAS THE MOTHER OF INVENTION THEN, JUST AS IT IS NOW.

EDGAR KICKLITER HAS ALWAYS BEEN AROUND THE RIVER AND STILL IS. JOHN, THE SECOND OF THE BOYS WAS MARRIED AT ONE TIME AND LIVED ON THE OLD HOME PLACE, BUT IN RECENT YEARS, HE HAS LIVED IN CAMPS ALONG THE RIVER, A SORT OF HERMIT LIFE, WHICH HE SEEMS TO LIKE. HE CATCHES ENOUGH FISH TO BUY WHAT FEW SUPPLIES HE NEEDS AND HIS WANTS ARE EXTREMELY SIMPLE. SOMETIMES, HE MAY BE SEEN SAILING A SMALL BOAT WITH A MAKESHIFT SAIL, ALONG THE RIVER.

BOGIE WHO MARRIED PATTY CLARK, LIVED ON THE RIVER FOR MANY YEARS AND I PRECISE

MADE HIS LIVING LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, FISHING, ALTHOUGH IT WAS SAID THAT HE WAS A WELL EDUCATED MAN AND CAME FROM A GOOD FAMILY IN THE PHILADELPHIA AREA. HE HAD TWO BOYS, WALTER AND CLARENCE, AND A GIRL. WALTER WAS EMPLOYED BY THE BAY DREDGING COMPANY, OWNED BY RUPERT THOMAS, FOR ALMOST ALL HIS LIFE. HE DIED A FEW YEARS AGO.

CLARENCE IS WORKING FOR THE SAME OUTFIT AT THIS WRITING. HE WAS, FOR MANY YEARS, ONE OF THE BEST FISHERMEN ON THE RIVER. HE STILL LIVES HERE WITH HIS WIFE AVIS. THEY HAVE ONE SON.

ALL OF THESE OLDER MEN HAVE GONE TO THEIR VARIOUS REWARDS - BOGIE, KICKLITER, STEELE, SWEENEY AND McROBERTS. IN SOME WAY THEY EACH CONTRIBUTED TO THE ECONOMY AND CULTURE OF THE COMMUNITY. THEY WERE A PART OF THE ROMANCE, THE TRAGEDY AND THE VERY HISTORY OF THIS PLACE THEY CHOSE TO LIVE OUT THEIR LIVES IN. TO EACH OF THEM IT WAS HOME, PARADISE. THERE ARE OTHERS WE HAVE MENTIONED. WE HOPE EACH ONE HAS BEEN GIVEN DUE CREDIT FOR HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE LIFE OF THE RIVER. IT WAS A GREAT ERA, A ROMANTIC ERA AND ONE WHICH WE SHALL NEVERMORE SEE. PROGRESS MAY BE NECESSARY AND DESIRABLE, BUT I BELIEVE I CAN SAY, WITHOUT FEAR OF CONTRADICTION, THAT NOT ONE OF THESE PEOPLE WHO LIVED HERE WOULD EVER HAVE CHANGED THEIR WAY OF LIFE FOR THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE OF PRESENT DAY LIVING. IT MAY HAVE BEEN HARD, BUT THAT IS THE WAY THEY LIKED IT. SOME OF THEM STILL DO.

WE HAVEN'T SAID MUCH ABOUT THE JAHNS CLAN. THERE ARE THREE OF THE BOYS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD. THE OLD PEOPLE LIVED JUST ACROSS THE ROAD FROM THE LOUIS HALLS, AND WERE AMONG THE FIRST SETTLERS HERE IN THE 80'S. CHARLIE JAHN, THE FATHER OF THE PRESENT ~~XXX~~ THREE BOYS USED TO RUN A FREIGHT BOAT UP AND DOWN THE SHORE, BUT LEFT HOME WHEN THE CHILDREN WERE SMALL AND WAS NEVER HEARD OF AGAIN. FRED, THE OLDEST OF THE JAHNS BOYS LIVES AT THE BALL PLACE ON THE RIVER. ALFRED THE SECOND BOY LIVES AT SUN CITY WITH HIS WIFE WHO WAS KANSAS BUZBEE BEFORE HER MARRIAGE TO SAM CLARK MANY YEAR AGO.. KANSAS HAD FOUR GIRLS AND TWO BOYS BY CLARK WHOM WE HAVE MENTIONED BEFORE, AND OF ~~WH~~ WE SHALL HAVE MORE TO SAY.

CHARLIE JAHN, WHO SPELLS THE NAME JOHNS, MARRIED WILLIE MAE CLARK, YOUNGEST DAUGHTER OF KANSAS CLARK. THIS MADE HE AND HIS BROTHER ALFRED BROTHER-IN-LAWS. IT ALSO MADE HIS BROTHER ALFRED, HIS FATHER-IN-LAW. IT MAKES ALFRED WILLIE MAE'S STEP

YOU IT WAS MIXED UP!

CHARLIE AND WILLIE MAE HAVE TWO BOYS. CHARLIE FISHES AND WILLIE MAE HAS BEEN DRIVING A SCHOOL BUS FOR MANY YEARS.

ALFRED AND KANSAS HAVE NO CHILDREN AND ALFRED WHO WAS ONCE ONE OF THE BEST GILLNETTERS ON THE COAST, HAS BEEN WORKING FOR THE COUNTY ROAD DEPARTMENT FOR YEARS. THEY LIVE AT SUN CITY.

SO YOU SEE MANY OF THE FOLKS WHO SETTLED DOWN ON THE SOUTH BANK OF THE LITTLE MANATEE JUST STAYED HERE, MARRYING INTO EACH OTHERS FAMILIES TILL MOST OF THEM ARE SOME KIN. IN RECENT YEARS, THE YOUNGER ONES HAVE TRAVELED WIDELY AND HAVE COME HOME WITH WIVES FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. THIS YOUNGER GENERATION WENT TO WAR, FOUGHT THE GERMANS, FOUGHT THE JAPS, AND FOR THE MOST PART ACQUITTED THEMSELVES HONORABLY. SOME OF THEM CAME BACK. SOME DIDN'T, BUT THEY ALL HAVE THEIR ROOTS HERE, AND TO THEM, THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE THE RIVER.

FLORENCE, THE ELDEST OF THE CLARK GIRLS MARRIED PAUL WHITE, A NATIVE SON AND THEY LIVE IN RUSKIN. THEY HAVE NO CHILDREN. HELEN, THE SECOND GIRL, MARRIED DONALD CLYATT WHO CAME HERE IN THE THIRTIES FROM ANOTHER AREA AND FOR MANY YEARS WAS A FISHERMAN. HE ALSO WORKED IN THE PACKING HOUSE IN THE WINTER AND SPRING. DONALD WHO FINALLY MADE A PREACHER, AND A GOOD ONE, WOULD BE THE FIRST TO ADMIT THAT HE WAS AS MEAN AS THE NEXT ONE IN THE EARLY DAYS. HE HAD A BROTHER PAT WHO MARRIED LUCILLE MERRILL. BOTH OF THESE FAMILIES HAVE LONG SINCE LEFT THE COUNTRY, AND ARE LIVING IN THE PANAMA CITY AREA. PAT IS ALSO A PREACHER. DONALD AND HELEN HAD NO CHILDREN BUT PAT AND LUCILLE HAD TWO OR THREE GIRLS.

THERE ARE MANY MORE WHO CAME ALONG LATER. WE MAY HAVE MORE TO SAY ABOUT THEM. THESE WE HAVE MENTIONED ARE THE NUCLEUS, THE REAL PIONEERS.

THE JAHNS BOYS HAD ONE SISTER, MARGARET, WHO MARRIED TOM PEACOCK, A MILL WORKER. THEY LIVED AT ROSS FOR A WHILE, BUT WERE SEPARATED LATER, AND MARGARET MARRIED ANOTHER MAN AND MOVED TO THE EAST COAST WHERE SHE HAS LIVED SINCE. THERE WERE NO CHILDREN, AND I NEVER KNEW WHAT BECAME OF PEACOCK.

HENRY PELLUM LIVED AROUND ROSS AND OTHER PARTS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD FOR MOST OF HIS LIFE. HE WAS MARRIED TO LOTTIE TEDDER AND THEY HAD A BIG FAMILY OF BOYS AND GIRLS.

WILBURN IS THE ONLY ONE OF THE FAMILY LIVING AT SUN CITY AT THIS TIME. HE MARRIED BRASKIE BUZBEE'S OLDEST GIRL AND FISHED WITH BRACK UNTIL RECENTLY WHEN HE WENT TO WORK FOR THE SCHOOL SYSTEM AS A JANITOR.

BUD CASTELLO CAME TO THE RIVER ABOUT THE SAME TIME THAT THE STEELES AND THE SWEENEYS DID. BUD WAS MARRIED TO LOTTIE MINGO AND LIVED ABOUT WHERE THE PITTMAN FISH CAMP IS NOW. BUD AND LOTTIE HAD FIVE BOYS AND FIVE GIRLS IF MY MEMORY SERVES ME. HE FISHED WITH SOME OF THE STOPNET CREWS FOR A WHILE, BUT WHEN THE BOYS GOT BIG ENOUGH TO HANDLE A BOAT HE GOT TOGETHER A GEAR OF HIS OWN, AND FISHED HARDER THAN ANY OF HIS NEIGHBORS, TRYING TO FEED TEN HUNGRY MOUTHS. SOMETIMES THIS WAS A LOSING BATTLE, AND I AM SURE THAT THERE WERE MANY MEALS THAT CONSISTED OF MULLET AND COFFEE. MOST OF THE CHILDREN MANAGED TO GET A GRADE SCHOOL EDUCATION, AND GEORGE HAS A NICE GROCERY BUSINESS IN RUSKIN.

THE GIRLS MARRIED LOCAL BOYS AND ONE OF THEM, DAISY, WHO IS MARRIED TO ONE OF THE MOBLEY BOYS, RUNS A BEAUTY PARLOR HERE IN TOWN. HAZEL MARRIED JESSE MOBLEY. JESSE WITH HIS THREE BOYS MAKES A GOOD LIVING FISHING.

HAZEL HAS A JOB SOMEWHERE IN TOWN. MRS. CASTELLO, THE MOTHER, LIVES HERE IN TOWN AND HAS SUPPORTED HERSELF SINCE BUD DIED, WORKING IN THE VARIOUS PACKING HOUSES. SHE HAS WORKED AT THE CLAPROOD FLOWER PACKING HOUSE FOR MANY YEARS.

BUD WAS A QUIET MAN AND AN IMPEDIMENT OF SPEECH MADE HIM SOMEWHAT TACITURN. NO ONE EVER ACCUSED HIM OF LAZINESS, FOR HE WAS CONSTANTLY ON THE BAY OR RIVER TRYING TO CATCH FISH. HE FISHED IN THE DAYTIME AND HIS FAVORITE METHOD WAS TO DROP TWO BOATS OFF, JUST BELOW A PASS AND GO WAY DOWN THE BEACH AND WITH HIS LAUNCH, DRIVE THE FISH TOWARD THE BOATS WAITING AT THE PASS ENTRANCE. THIS MAY SOUND ABSURD TO THE UNINITIATED, BUT IF CONDITIONS, SUCH AS A FALLING TIDE AND AN EASTERLY WIND, PREVAIL, MULLET WILL READILY BUNCH UP AND HEAD FOR THE NEAREST OPENING INTO THE KEYS. THEY CAN BE SEEN BY THEIR JUMPING, ALL OF THEM GOING IN THE SAME DIRECTION TOWARD THE PASS. WHEN THE FISH GET CLOSE ENOUGH, THE PREVIOUSLY PLACED BOATS WILL CROSS NETS AND SPREAD OUT, SO AS TO MAKE A TRAP AND THE MULLET WILL SWIM RIGHT INTO THE CIRCLE WHICH IS HASTILY CLOSED. THEN THE FUN BEGINS. WHEN THE FISH DISCOVER THEIR

MISTAKE, IT IS TOO LATE TO GET AWAY, BUT YOU OUGHT TO SEE THEM TRYING. THEY WILL JUMP AND THRASH AROUND ALL THE WHILE GETTING THEMSELVES GILLED IN THE STRONG MESHES OF THE NET. SOME WILL SUCCEED IN GETTING OVER THE NET BY MAKING SEVERAL PRODIGIOUS LEAPS AND SOME WILL FIND A LOW SPOT BETWEEN THE FLOATS AND SWIM OVER. OTHERS WILL SWIM ALONG ON THE BOTTOM AND LOOK FOR HOLES IN THE NET OR A PLACE TO CRAWL UNDER THE LEAD LINE. MANY OF THEM WILL GET AWAY, BUT IF THE SCHOOL IS ANY SIZE MOST OF THEM WILL BE CAUGHT BY GILLING THEMSELVES IN THE NET OR TANGLING UP IN IT SO THEY WILL DROWN OR BE CAUGHT WHEN THE MAN PICKS UP THE NET.

CASTILLO WAS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST OF THE FISH DRIVERS AND DID PRETTY WELL. HE NEVER FISHED AT NIGHT AS MOST GILLNETTERS DO.

THE REST OF BUD'S FAMILY ARE SCATTERED ABOUT THE COUNTRY, AND WE SELDOM EVER SEE THEM. OH YES, THE OLDEST GIRL, PEARL IS MARRIED TO GUS LOVE AND THEY HAVE A NICE HOME NEAR THE OVERPASS.
