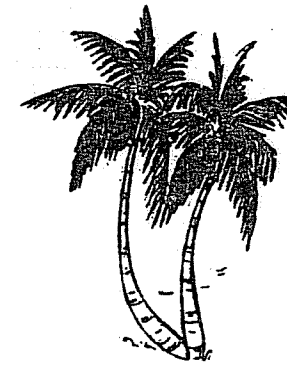


EARLY DAYS
on
ESTERO ISLAND
An Old Timer Reminisces
Leroy Lamoreaux



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Leroy Lamoreaux

Leroy Lamoreaux, one of the first Koreshans to come to Estero Island, arrived early enough to have been among the first home-steaders. However he did not take this step until 1914, becoming the last one to apply for a homestead which was granted him in 1918.

The present Catholic Church of the Ascension is part of the property where Mr. Lamoreaux had had a large guava orchard.

In our early exploration of the history of the Island we became very well acquainted with the old gentleman and at one time he gave us a copy of his story of the early days here, to use as we saw fit. We believe you will find it of interest as to the times here starting before the turn of the century.

Mr. Lamoreaux lived in Estero the last few years of his life but he never lost interest in our Island. This is the story of his life as he wrote it, with no changes in any way.

EARLY DAYS ON ESTERO ISLAND

It has been suggested to me by a number of people that I write a history of Estero Island - Fort Myers Beach - but it has always looked as if that would be a thankless job. Yet I am the only one left that can tell about the days before we got a bridge. There will be very little in this about things since we got a bridge. Others that were closer to it can tell that.

There is one thing I can't understand about this specimen of humanity, and that is how I can remember even minor details of things that happened more than a half century ago when I can't remember what I was doing a few days ago. Perhaps it is because we didn't have the movies, radio, automobiles, motor boats, and many other things that we have now to take our attention. To me this old time stuff has no interest unless it rings true. Everything that will be in this that is listed as a fact, I believe to be true.

Here are my credentials. I was brought to these parts when I was 16 years old. A traveling companion and I arrived at what is now Estero on June 12, 1894. We had ridden the day coaches from Chicago, changed cars seven times, finished the trip below the rails at Punta Gorda in a sail boat and it had taken a little more than a week. Times have changed. Not so long ago I made the trip from Tampa to Chicago in four hours.

The first members of the Koreshan Unity - four men - had arrived the preceeding December and a much larger contingent consisting of both male and female had arrived in February. My companion and I, along with Gustave Damkohler and son, on whose place they had settled, about thirty in all, made up the community at that time.

Life here wasn't much like it had been in the cities where I had spent my life so far, but I liked it. About the only signs that civilization had ever touched this place was two ruts in the ball bearing sand and a pole bridge across the river. Leaving Kate and Mollie - the Koreshan Unity team - out of it, I think that there aren't many hours during a year that as few vehicles cross that stream now, as crossed it an entire YEAR back in those days.

The neighbors were few and far between. About a mile to the northeast, Andrew Allen and his family lived on a homestead, and about four miles up the road towards Fort Myers was the log cabin belonging to another homesteader, Billie Roberts and his family. The next house on that road was just south of Victoria street in town. To the south of us, at what is now Bonita Springs, someone had put in a lime grove, and it had a caretaker named Ramsey. His wife introduced me to my first mango pie. That was the year of "the big freeze" and after the freeze there was no more caretaker. At the head of the Auger hole, a Norwegian boat builder by the name of Donaldson was trying to put in a grove. The Johnson family lived on Mound Key.

A partially paralyzed Spanyard (sic) by the name of Augusta lived on Black Island. There was plenty of speculation as to why this old man got his being the way he did. Every month a big supply of groceries was sent to him by Mr. Mac Gregor. He was buying food all over the place and some people thought he expected to get the old man's place. I don't think he was that stupid. All Augusta had was a squatters claim and as he hadn't taken out his citizens' papers he couldn't get anything else. Once every week that kindly old soul, Mrs. Johnson, rowed over from Mound Key. She cut a supply of food and put it where the old man could get it; baked him some bread and done everything else she could find to make him comfortable. I know that she never got anything for him and I doubt if she ever got any thanks for all the years of care she gave him.

Now we come to Estero Island. For the first six months I was here, I don't remember landing on that island. Then in December I went with some men to Fort Myers to tear down a saw mill and move it to the lower end of the island. For the next four years, I spent a good deal of my time at the Beach. A lot of it was being home-steaded and I became acquainted with all but one of them.

Then I left. I vowed that I had killed my Florida mosquito, and I didn't think that gag about Florida sand in my shoes would work. I got as far away as the State of Washington, but in about two & a half years I was back again trying to get every Florida fish in a crock pot. After a number of years of this I left again. This time I expected to be back soon, but circumstances made it, that I was gone about that same length of time.

Shortly after getting back I filed on that last piece of homestead land on the island. I was the only unfortunate that really had to work for what I got. Homestead land was getting scarce, and just the year before they had passed a new law that made us put one eighth of it under cultivation in the first three years, and keep it under cultivation for another two years. When they sent me the papers telling me I was a homesteader they sent me a copy of that law and told me that I would have to obey it. I can show you a homestead that never had a palmetto root grubbed or a seed planted on it. He obeyed the law, but I who came a little later had to grub palmetto roots 23 feet long, and hoe and plant crops for five long years.

When we met up with one another naturally we had to have something to talk about. We couldn't look ahead and talk about the things that were coming in the future, and there was nothing happening to merit much talk so we had to talk of the past and that took a lot of talk. Hugh McPhie was my closest neighbor for about a quarter of a century. He wasn't one of the kind that liked to tell big stories. When he told something for the truth he believed it. He was the one that gave me most of my knowledge of the earliest history of it.

Let's go back to the first survey made of the island. That was in 1878, and according to the old timers it didn't amount to much. There had been a plat made but the first of the homesteaders couldn't find any markings that would definitely let them know where their lines went.

I am not so certain just what year the next survey was made, but I believe it was in 1889. I know it had been made some time before I got here in 1894. That time they surveyed all the islands in the bay and the surrounding country. They put a township stake in that was the only real stake I saw on the island. They used very few of them, and most of them weren't any bigger than a stick of firewood. Mack had three lots and that Township stake was the only one that touched them. The only other stake anywhere near them was a quarter of a mile away.

I will start in at the north end of the island and plat it out as it was in those days and if I know anything about them tell some thing about the homesteaders. Forty acres of the extreme point was a lighthouse preserve. I believe that was about a standard preserve they made around deep water channels. This channel was already being used by schooners carrying cattle to Cuba. The point of what then the mainland was know as "Cattle Dock Point". They had to tear out the remains of that cattle dock when they put in the bridge. That point had another name and I have been wracking my brain to think of it but so far I can't be certain. However there was a Bowdich Point that I can't place and I think the name belongs there. Next to the Lighthouse preserve was a quarantine preserve and the combined acreage of the two preserves was about 220. The head of the Koreshan Unity coveted every bit of land his eyes rested on. He put a little house with a squatter in it on this land. Then he had some of his people go to work on the government to see if it couldn't be changed back to homestead land. I believe it had been done in some cases. He finally gave it up and moved his house off.

I think I had better give some general information. Back in those early days the vegetables were grown on the islands. I doubt if many of truckers then could have been made to believe anything but a fuss could be raised on the flat woods where the vegetables are grown now, and I doubt if many of them would have believed it was worth making a fuss over. Our county was a huge one in those days. The main producer at the upper end of it was Sanibel, but most of the others with high land in them -- even to Mound Key in Estero Bay -- hebedswell the volume. The islands around Marco were much larger producers, and they also grew a lot of pineapples.

At first the only grower on the mainland was Donald Bain who was growing them on the river bank at Iona. I didn't know the Bains early enough to get their history from them, but my neighbor McPhie was a crony of theirs and told me the following. Donald came first and settled at Iona. John wanted to come but didn't have the money, and Donald wouldn't send it to him. John finally told him that if he didn't send him the money to come here he was going to join the army. According to Mc that is the last thing a Scotchman wanted to see a close relative do, so he got the money.

That is a hearsay story, but the following I got from John himself. He took up a homestead on Captiva, and guided in the winters. When Med Kellem married money and came back here, John told me that they used to be guiding partners. I don't know just when he went to Iona but he became postmaster and the agent of the steamer that carried out the produce.

Now back to Estero Island. The south line of the reservation was just north of the Pelican Store, and the first homestead was just south of that line. I believe he spelt his name Dr. Britt although everyone called him Brat. I never saw him but once that was at some distance. He had next to the largest homestead on the island, about 183 acres, and that year he had in 56 acres of tomatoes. The other homesteaders all had in small acreages, but most of them were glad to get the ready cash paid by the Doctor. He told them to come down on the first day of the new year and they would start the picking. That night came the first one of the freezes we had that winter, and Mc told me that all the tomatoes they could find fit to ship was 56 crates of three-fourth bushels each. That put an end to the Doctor's vegetable growing, but that big clearing was an attraction to others, and I have known as high as five men at a time to have truck patches on it. One homesteader that I think grew as much stuff as anyone grew most of it on that place. It was easier to grow it there than to clear land on his own place. A.M. McGregor finally got hold of it, and it was T.P. Hill that first subdivided it. There is more of the road on that homestead than any other with the possible exception of McPhie's. I don't know where the south line of it crosses the road.

The next homestead was the Richard Gilbert place -- better known as the Winkler place. It comprised about 110 acres, and its south boundary line crossed the road just north of the Red Coconut Trailer Park.

Now we come to the James Gilbert place. I believe he came from Georgia but I am not certain. He was kind of a stringbean of a man with a big black mustache. My remembrance was that he had two girls but one of them didn't stay down here enough for me to know much about her. I mentioned this to a woman that was just a small girl at the time and she said that I was right, and she thought that her name was Sarah. The girl that stayed here was named Freda. His boys might be called the three Rs: Richard, the oldest that took up the homestead; Robert, a wizard with a sailboat; and Roy, a teenaged boy. Richard and Roy died here. Mr. W.H. Case subdivided this place. One time when I was down there working for him I came onto a little burying ground. My remembrance is that there was four graves in it. The woman that assured me that I was right about the girls told me that I was right again, but she didn't know anymore about who was in those graves than I do. They could be anyone that happened to be near when the grim reaper met up with them for in those days of slow motion the country dead didn't travel far. That place consisted of 173 acres, and the south line of it crossed the road just north of the road that leads to the Sander's boat yard.

It was Dan McNab that got the next homestead, although a lot of people seem to think that George Sanders was the homesteader. He was just a late comer. For a very short time I pulled on one end of a cutoff saw while Dan pulled on the other. He had been a woods boss for a shingle mill. They didn't have the machinery in those days to get the logs out of the swamp that they have now. They simply cut the logs into shingle lengths and rolled them out to where they could be loaded onto wagons and hauled to the mill or railroad.

I don't know if McNab was another Scotchman, or how he and Hugh McPhie became acquainted. When the railroad was built from Jacksonville to Tampa they built depots where they hoped towns would build. McPhie had bought some land across the railroad from the depot at Davenport. There was little or no immediate growth there, and there was a place over on the East Coast where a lot of people were homesteading, and these two Mcs concluded to go over there and get one. In those days it was

a moot question whether it was better to go overland or by water--it was a slow laborious trip either way. These two landlubbers decided to go by boat. They came down the Kissimmee River, across Lake Okeechobee and then down the Caloosahatchee River. They stopped at a well half way down Big Hickory Island. One couldn't get a drink of water out of that well at low water, but there was plenty of it there at high water, and as there were no saw palmettoes on the island it was among the best waters on the coast. In those slow speed days a day's travel didn't get one far, and a place with good water like this was a popular place to camp. These voyagers concluded to rest here for awhile, and while they were doing it they took trips around to see what the country looked like, and one of those trips was to Estero Island. There was only three homesteaders here then -- the Doctor and the two Gilberts. The going was hard ahead and they concluded they had reached the end of the run. There was about 110 acres on this place, and the south line of it crossed the road just south of the Shawcross place.

The next homestead was a little triangular piece along the beach that contained 24 1/2 acres. It was Albert Austin that took up that place, and the entire homestead became the Gulf Heights subdivision. Al was an Indiana glass-blower that came down here to join the Koreshan Unity. Judging by some of the things he told me I think getting this far away from his wife was some incentive. Al was the only one that hadn't proved up on his place by the time I came here as a homesteader. As soon as he did become the owner he wanted to sell. A brother had visited me and told me that if I ever saw a chance to get him some land here to let him know. I found out from Al what he wanted for it and my brother sent me the money to close the deal.

When my brother came down he wanted to see what he had bought so he got Harry Davidson and we ran out the lines. Harry had subdivided some of the places at the upper end of the island but he had done no surveying down this far so he didn't know anything about the stakes down here, so we went to that source of knowledge McPhie. He showed us the Township stake and then showed us two stakes on the north line of the place we wanted to survey. One of them was a corner stake, and I believe Harry Davidson called the other a variation stake. He explained to us that all the surveying in this section was done on two variations, and once in a while they put an extra stake

on one of the lines to be used as a check. Those three stakes were all that Mc knew anything about.

Some of our tax collectors have tried some very shady tricks on our tax payers that live in the far places, and from things that I have heard all too often they have succeeded. Only once have I heard of one of them getting careless and to save himself from a lawsuit having to pay for the thing he tried to get for nothing. One of them tried to work this on my brother but it didn't pan out.

Back when we had a real editor on our paper I used to do a lot of writing for the mail bag. When I saw something I didn't like I didn't pull my punches even though it was the editor that had written it. A friend told me this editor had told him that I had hit him pretty hard sometimes, but he had published everything I had sent him. There never was a truer statement made.

I have always thought that if a newspaper was doing right by its readers it would point out any injustice done the general public by our elected officers, but that isn't the idea of the present editor. I wrote up the deal a tax collector tried to put over on my brother and sent it in to him. If I hadn't told him before that I thought he wasn't playing fair when he threw communications in the waste basket without a word of explanation, I don't doubt that kept this from going there. He sent it back to me saying that he wouldn't publish it because it would hold that tax collector up to ridicule. He said he didn't doubt its truth. I don't think he was in this country at the time as I didn't use names he must have looked up. Now for the story.

I think I am one of the world's worst correspondents, and my brother was far from the top of the list of the world's best. It took more than the death of Aunt Mary's old grey cat that had been such a comfort to her to make us patronize the United States mail. One year I got a letter from him telling me that he knew it was about time for the tax sale and he hadn't gotten a tax bill, nor had he gotten a reply to the letter that he had written the tax collector about it. He asked me to go to the court house and straighten it out.

That was the start of the game where tax collector hoped to get the place for the taxes, and it isn't the only time that it was worked. When a tax collector saw a place he coveted that was owned by a man in a far place, he didn't send out a tax bill hoping that the owner wouldn't think of it until it could be sold for the taxes -- then he

would have someone bid it in for him. Even if the owner came to soon enough to keep them from perfecting title they got their money back with fine interest. They could always pass the blame for the owner not getting a tax bill on to Uncle Sam.

Later I got another letter from this brother saying that he had received a letter from our tax collector saying that while land wasn't worth much on the island he would like to own a piece of it, and he would give him \$500 for his. There wasn't much chance of his taking that offer for he had paid more than that for it a number of years before. His son-in-law had bought an interest in it. They wrote back that they couldn't accept that offer but they might consider \$5,000. As soon as the mails could bring it came another letter with a check for \$500 in it to close the deal at that figure. Jumping the price ten times after saying that the land wasn't worth much made him suspicious, so he wrote me wanting to know what was doing.

I wrote him that we had just got a passable road and bridge and things were just starting to move. That I wouldn't advise him to sell, but if he did want to sell I could get him more money than that. A real estate man knew that it was my brother owned that land. We voters hadn't furnished him with a list of the tax payers' addresses so he asked me to find out if he wanted to sell; I knew that he would go higher than that.

They held this place a few years until the boom came and sold it for \$50,000 cash. That would have paid this collector whose conscience would let him use the information brought to him by the office to defraud the tax payers perhaps as much or more than his salary in those days. Skinning Yankees may be good business, but as some of our tax money is spent for advertising we have all had a hand in asking them to spend their money here, and the things they spend it for hadn't ought to be taken away from them by the officials that we put in office. The laws have been changed and I hope it has been made harder for the officials to do their dirty work, but I don't know.

Now that I have pointed out the perils of owning land if one lived at a distance, and from what I heard some of them weren't as lucky as my brother, let's get back to describing the island in those days.

The lot east of this one was one of McPhie's, and the one east of it was mine. The southern line of these lots

crossed the road at the north end of the second bend in the road in McPhie Park. I have already told you that I was the only one that had to work for my land, but there were a few advantages in being off on an island. I had been on the place some time when I met a homesteader from the mainland. He asked me if the homestead inspector ever visited me. I told him that I had never even heard of such an animal. He said that I was lucky for they were visited twice a year, and if they didn't have their work done to suit him they were told about it in no uncertain terms. He would have had to hire a boat and spend the best part of a day to visit me so I never saw him. However I kept my work up pretty well.

There was another way in which we had an advantage over the homesteaders on the mainland, we didn't have to fence our clearings. One property owner -- he wasn't a homesteader -- didn't get along well with his neighbors. He fell out with some of us and never got back on speaking terms with them again. Some of the rest of us were like me, made it up after a time. Once when he was especially sore at us he said that if we didn't mend our ways and be good to him according to his ideas he was going to get a bunch of hogs and turn them loose. I wasn't a bit afraid of that man running hogs over on us. He wasn't the kind that would have chased around in the brush to look after them, and they would have developed such a bad epidemic of lead poisoning that the last hog would have died.

However, I knew that the island would make a fine hog range, and if the right man was to turn loose a bunch of hogs it would mean plenty of trouble. If the hogs were turned loose at the right time they could destroy about a year's work before the material to make a fence could be secured. The legislature had passed a law that on the surface looked as if districts of 51% of the property owners would sign a petition for it could get a fence law. Our representative was a cattle man, and I knew that they were so completely in control of the legislature that it was next to impossible to get such a law but I thought I would try it.

I got the name of every property owner of the island but the man that made that threat. The law required me to have this published for four weeks. The editor of the paper told our representative that the law had been complied with and asked him to introduce the bill. He said that he would introduce the bill but it wouldn't do any good for the boys had made up their minds not to let any inroad

be made on their range. These lawmakers wanted the property owners to pay the taxes. Then if they wanted to use any of their land they must build fences strong enough to keep out these lawmakers and their friends' cattle. Some of these cattle seemed to be crossed with a bulldozer and others of them with kangaroos. If these critters jumped over or tore down the fence it was the owner's fault for he hadn't built the fence high enough or strong enough. When our representative got back from the legislature he told us that more than forty bills asking for no fence laws had been introduced at that session but ours was the only one that passed, and it wouldn't have passed if it hadn't been an island.

The land just south of this line was McPhie's two other lots. He had 184 acres making his the largest of the homesteads by just one acre. His land reached to the township line. I used to be able to go to that stake but I couldn't do it now, so I can't tell you where the line crosses the road.

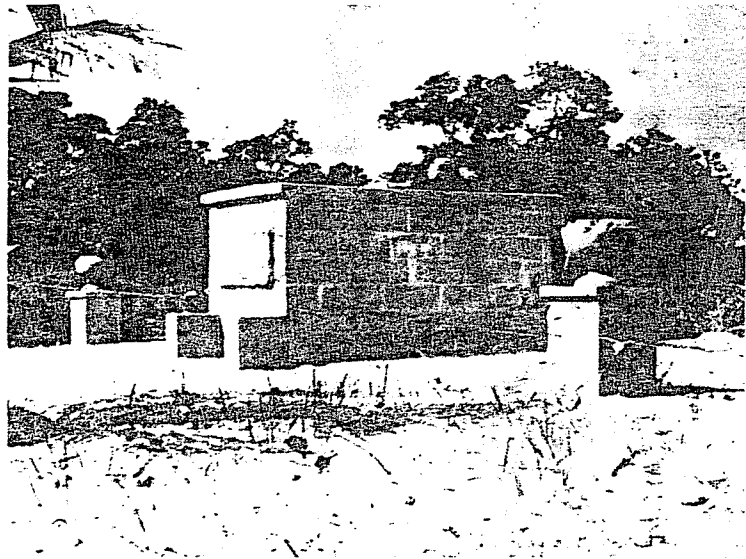
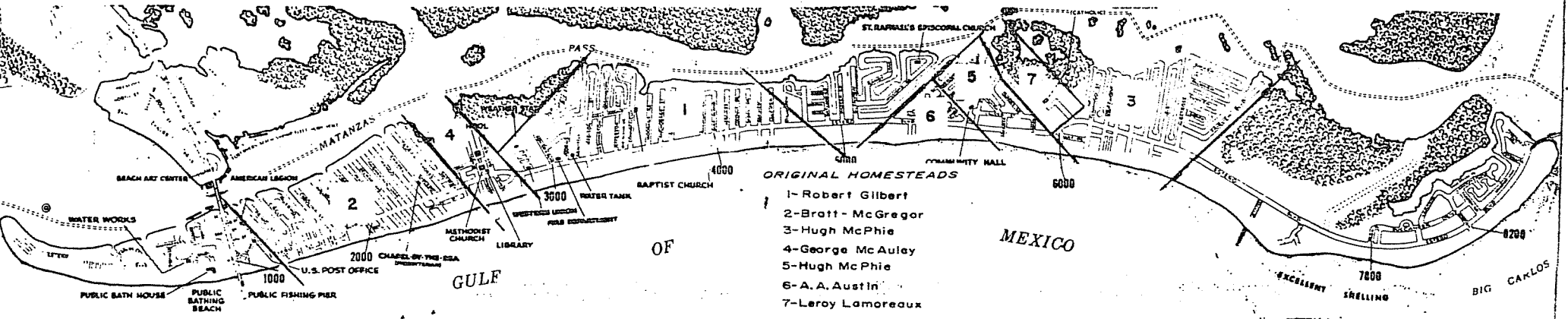
Just south of this line were two homesteads. The one on the bay side of the island was taken up first. It was only 66 acres, and was taken by a man by the name of Petit. I suppose he had a first name or at least some initials but I don't remember ever hearing him called anything but Petit, or old man Petit. He had a widowed sister living with him. Her name was McLain and she died there. He came from Ohio. The only reason I know this is that he died shortly after going back there and his heir, a woman, wrote McPhie asking him if he could suggest a way for her to get the balance of the money for the land which had been sold to the Koreshan Unity without giving the lawyers a large percent of it. They hadn't even answered her letters. It was a source of wonder to Mc that Petit hadn't taken up the lot next to his which would have given him some Gulf frontage. The two lots wouldn't have made a full homestead, and it wouldn't have cost him an extra penny and with the laws as they were then an extra lick of work.

It was A.M. Smith that got the other lot that my remembrance is that it was about 76 acres. He also sold out to the Koreshan Unity, and went to Bonita Springs and put in a grove. I haven't seen him in years, but I also haven't heard of him leaving this world so I suppose he is still down there.

Now we come to the point. I don't know how much land there was supposed to be there, but it wouldn't make any difference anyway for a lot of it was washed away. Nature used some of the sand to build up the inside of the island, and some more of it to widen out the beach to the north, but the most of it was taken some other place. There was one lonesome pine on that place. It was about equal distance from the Pass and the Gulf, and I would guess about 150 yards or more from the shore. One of the K.U. members had died down here and was buried under that tree. It wasn't the Pass that ate in there and took that tree but the Gulf.

When the Koreshan Unity wanted that point to put a saw mill on there was a squatter by the name of Carl Briant living on it. I don't know if he intended to homestead it or had tried and failed. Anyway he sold any claim he had to it for \$20. In those days with the water full of fish -- sometimes when I get to thinking about the vast schools of fish I know that I saw I feel like calling myself a liar although I know that I am not -- the air full of birds, plenty of game on the ground, and no officers to put you behind bars if you helped yourself. Not much money was needed. Carl got his by gathering angel wings, for even in those days they were worth a little if one knew where to sell them.

Carl had a cabbage house that I think was as big as any on the island with the exception of Dad Gilbert's which was on the shell mound. It was built without a nail. The frame was poles. Some with crotches in them were set in the ground to carry the ridge pole, and shorter ones to carry the plates that carried the eaves end of the rafters. Everything was notched together and lashed there with vines. It must have taken a long time to build, but as only a little time could be put in gathering angel wings he must have had plenty of it. It was a neat piece of work, but one of the first squalls of rainy season ended its days. It wasn't blown to pieces, but just laid over like a tired old man. My bedroll was on one of those homemade canvas cots that was the sole sleeping furniture of the institution -- and comfortable sleeping furniture at that -- in that house when it went down.



The Tomb of Koresh, Head of the
Koreshan Unity, Built on Estero Island,
1908.



The Tomb after the hurricane of 1921.

The K.U. had one of their members try to file on the land. He got back a letter from the Gainesville land office that it wasn't available for homestead. No reason was given, and that started a lot of speculation. The charts didn't show it but perhaps it was another government reserve. Perhaps it was a part of the land that had been deeded to the state. While they were trying to find out about this a new little cabbage house was discovered hidden in the brush. The man that was trying to homestead it got me to go with him and when we came away there was no shack there. We never did know who it was that built that shack, but I think it was some local guy trying to horn in and perhaps claim prior rights because he was a squatter.

It took some time to find out about this place, and when they did they found that it was owned by a man in Polk County. He had never been in these parts, and as far as I know no one here ever knew how he came by the title. There were stories that if one didn't want to spend five years getting a title it could be arranged by a payment to the head of the land office, I don't know, but I am inclined to think some one saw a chance to make some easy change and took it.

The Estero post office was started on the point and kept there until the saw mill burned down and the Koreshan Unity activities there slacked up. The first postmistress of that office married the first mail carrier to carry mail to it. She left these parts for some time, and then she came back. She finally took her old job back and held it until Uncle Sam told her that she had reached the age limit. She lives at Estero now with a sister that is also an ex-postmistress.

Now we will go on south across Little Carlos Pass. Between it and Big Carlos Pass was an island listed on the charts as Carlos Island. It was about half a mile long, and five or six hundred feet wide at the widest place. The north end of it was very high and covered with sea oats -- I don't think there is anything on Estero Island but the mounds that is as high as it was -- the south end was lower and covered with brush. I have already told you that the head of the Koreshan Unity coveted every foot of land in these parts that his eyes rested on and he couldn't help but see this island. He had one of those little houses built on it and one of his men rowed over and spent some of his nights on it. The idea was that a

squatter was supposed to have prior right to a place if it could be homesteaded. Before they could find out if it could be homesteaded it began to wash away.

I heard a man tell a bunch of people that one hurricane washed that island away. No hurricane washed that island away. It was washed away just like most of the changes are made around the passes, by a change in the currents. It started to wash at the north end, and every full or new moon tide would undermine a little more of it and it would cave down and be washed away. When that house began to overhang the drink and a few more high tides would have dumped it in and they concluded to save the material in it. I was the boatman that hauled it back to Estero Island. If anyone thinks we could have taken a doll's house off that island after a hurricane that had made up its mind to wash the island away had started he simply don't know his hurricanes.

I think the truth should be told about hurricanes. God knows that's bad enough. Bit stories told that are far from the truth don't help anyone. Just before I heard that big story a man had told me that he had spent a winter vacation on the Beach for nine years. He was nearing the retirement age, and if he hadn't been afraid that a hurricane might take not only his home but the land on which it was built he would build and make it home and spend his vacations elsewhere. I hardly think this story of an island being washed away by one hurricane would have been reassuring to him.

Some folks are so afraid of storms that they let that fear govern their lives. A sister spent several winters here, but nothing would have induced her to stay here during a hurricane season. She lived on a farm in southern Illinois. She had what she called a cave in the yard. It was simply a hole in the ground with a rod over it and a mound of dirt on top of that. Night or day if there was a thunder storm she sat shaking in her shoes in that hole.

One man that helped develop the Beach pumped me a lot about hurricanes. A business associate of his told me how he got some first hand information about these storms. That storm that hit the New England Coast caught him in a bank, and he had to go to the second floor and stay there until the water went down.

The Koreshan Unity also put one of those little houses on Big Hickory Island. They found that it couldn't be homesteaded but it could be bought. So could Little Hickory, so they bought them both; they weren't given their names because of their size, but Big Hickory had the longer beach. The deed to Little Hickory called for nearly three times as much land as the one for Big Hickory. Little Hickory is now Bonita Beach. There was a Little Hickory Pass, but it never was much of a pass and finally filled up entirely.

Looking back from this distance life in those days looks as if it must have been much harder than it seemed to us then. Those so called "gay nineties" weren't so gay in these parts. The only mechanical means of getting from place to place was five little steamers. One ran up the Caloosahatchee River; another belonged to an old steamboat man that had settled up that river; another one was for hire in Fort Myers, and another made three round trips a week from that city to the end of the railroad at Punta Gorda; and another one that was for hire was kept at St. James City. The internal combustion engine had been invented for the presses in a printing office that I had worked in were run with one. It was two horse power run with city gas without an electric spark and it weighed a ton.

If your travels were in a boat that was too large to pole or row they could be slow indeed as the following will show. I once made a trip from Naples to Marco on the schooner that carried the mail. It was already 24 hours late in getting from Punta Rassa. We left Naples about ten in the morning and got to Marco about two p.m. the next day. There were several other passengers and the sleeping accommodations were certainly not in the luxury class. Mine was simply a blanket in which to roll up in on the floor. I was used to that kind of thing, but there was an agent for a New York commission house going to Marco to try and get some vegetables shipped to his concern that didn't think much of our transportation facilities that took two nights out in a continuous trip of less than 50 miles. The crew entertained us by telling of their fastest trip, considerable less than three hours, but I would have rather taken the slow one.

There were just two stores on the entire coast from Fort Myers to Key West. The one belonging to Mr. Whiteside at St. James City and Captain Bill Collier's

store at Marco. There had been one north of Fort Myers for there was a place known as the Burnt Store then as there is today.

Every homesteader had to get his produce to Punta Rassa as best he could, either with the help of his neighbors or his own efforts, usually with a small boat and an armstrong engine. It wasn't long after the Estero Post Office was moved from the island until they had another one known as Carlos. I carried the mail to that post office for a short time in a flat bottomed boat built for rowing but was equipped with a sail and a lee board. For the information of you late coming land lubbers a lee board was a board that could be hung on the lee side of the boat and in a way perform the function of a center board. It made it so that the boat would go much closer to the wind, but every time the sail was changed to the other side of the boat the board had to be changed also.

Things had improved some by the time I came to the island as a Homesteader, even though the population had shrunk and there was only one of the homesteaders left that had been there in the nineties and of course that was my neighbor, McPhie. The Koreshan Unity was running a boat to Fort Myers twice a week. The main trouble with it was that it came out of the Estero River and it had to traverse the shallow water at the mouth of that stream. It might be a day or more late, and during the winter months the high water was at night and that made it inconvenient for us vegetable shippers. I soon found that it was only a little more trouble to send my stuff to Punta Gorda on the same boat that carried my fish, and it left there the same day while the other way it had to lay over for 24 hours in Fort Myers.

As soon as I came to the island as a homesteader I got a small launch to use in fishing, and if I had to go to the county seat I went in it. It was a long hard trip, and once I was a year and a half without getting that far from home. My neighbor, McPhie, went for about five years. I could get my groceries, the pin-check pants, hickory shirts, and other simple things that made up my wardrobe at Estero. There wasn't many attractions in the city in those days to make us take that long hard trip.

I don't know why I stayed on after I had proved up and could have left. I certainly didn't intend to. A friend got a man on the string that had some money that he thought he would like to put in to a convalescent home on the island. This friend didn't want the place but he painted a nice picture of the easy money that I would make. This home that never put in an appearance would start things going and they would never stop. I don't know that I would have gone onto the place if I had known about the change in the law that was going to make me work for it. After I had proved up I couldn't have gotten enough for it to give me half of the meager pay that I would have gotten for a like amount of work elsewhere.

Perhaps, I sure don't know, the fact that I came of pioneering stock had something to do with it. Father was born in New York state in 1829. When he was five years old they took the long trek to Bureau County, Illinois, 100 miles west of Chicago. By the time the grim reaper became interested in that grandfather he had moved on to Colorado. I never did know much about mother's folks although I can remember seeing that grandfather, but I can't remember seeing the other one. When his time was up, he was in the wheat fields of Kansas.

I am the youngest of a large family, and before I was born my oldest brother had moved onto a Nebraska homestead that was about 50 miles from a railroad. He visited me for about two weeks just before he died. In fact he never reached home but died while visiting friends on the East Coast. He told me a lot about his experience on that homestead. The first winter he was there was a hard one. Coal was very scarce and was doled out to the settlers, and his share had been less than 250 pounds. He had kept his wife and baby girl alive by poking ear corn in the stove. He said it made a hot fire, but not a lasting one.

The life of an early settler is not a hilarious one no matter where one settles, but I believe I had it better than that brother. The buffalo had already gone from his section, and little other game and no fish were to be had. I had little cold weather, and far more fuel than I knew what to do with. I did have untold millions of sandflies and mosquitoes, and nothing to fight them with but a smudge and citronella. On the credit side there was vast quantities of fish and lots of game, and not a confounded officer to say you're under arrest if you helped yourself.

My only other brother took up what was called a timber homestead also in Nebraska. I don't know what a timber homestead was in a place that didn't have even a stick of firewood, but it didn't take much effort to get it for that brother only visited it for a day or two twice a year.

I don't think that I could have stayed if I couldn't have taken an interest in what went on around me. If I stopped for a rest I always looked for something amusing going on. It might be feeding of the mosquito hawks, but it was more apt to be the antics of a bunch of ants getting a worm into their nest that I had provided for them. That was a messy looking engineering job with the workers seemingly working at cross purposes, and some of them even snitching rides, but the progress was always toward their home and often the burden being moved was so big in comparison to the little things moving it that seemed impossible. If I put a barrier in their path that was too big for them to take their burden over they went around it. Nothing could deter them from their purpose or mix them up as to where home was.

Still, it was the birds that furnished the big show. Only about a hundred yards from my clearing there was an eagle's nest. It was on McPhie's land but was much closer to my clearing than his. They had been nesting there when he moved onto that homestead, and he took

a great interest in them. He knew almost to a day when they should be back from their northern trip, and if they were a little late he would worry that they weren't coming back. Only twice in all the years they nested there they were disturbed by us meddling humans. The first time was before I became their neighbor and Mc had to tell me about it. A friend of mine had shot one of the old birds. The other time was by one of our first sun hunters. Four cottages had been built on the beach, and rented to folks that liked to get off of the beaten path and it was one of them that had disturbed our long time neighbor. I was away at the time but the next morning a very angry McPhie hunted me up to tell me about it. This human -- I don't like that word human in there -- animal had shot one of the old birds, and then he had shot up through the nest and killed one of the young birds. As a usual thing they only had two young but this year there had been three. I don't know if the remaining bird was papa or mama for they had no distinguishing marks, but it done double duty and finished raising and educating those young. We were glad to welcome that hardworking parent and its new mate back at the next nesting time.

Later I was introduced to this bird killer, and I told me that I wasn't shaking hands with anyone that would come almost into my yard and kill a nesting bird. As eagles are predators he tried to claim that he was doing me a favor. I told him that I as well as the neighbor on whose land the nest was located had guns, and that for about eight months of every year for many years we could have killed those birds any day if they had been a pest to us. He admitted that they were protected in his home state of Michigan and he wouldn't have dared to kill one. If they had been protected here then there would have been a little additional Michigan money left in the state.

I never had any living things but a cat (I forgot the mules). I didn't want anything going hungry if I left for a few days, and a cat was the only thing that filled that bill. Mc always had some chickens, and not once in all the years that they were neighbors did the eagles molest them. Outside of the amusement angle we couldn't claim that they were of much benefit to us, but both of us had seen them get an occasional rat or rabbit that ventured too far out into the open.

There was never anything that had its home life more out in the open for anyone to see. One year one of them

showed up and a little later was joined by another. I noticed that they didn't seem to be too friendly and I never saw them on the nest. Late one evening I was impersonating the man with a hoe when one of them took off with a scream. There was an answering scream from the north, and they met right over my head. They put on a big air show and scream fest, and then they flew directly to the nest. The other bird that had been hopeful of taking the place of the late comer stayed on for a few days and then went home hunting elsewhere.

I have heard them called a noble bird. My dictionary gives many definitions of that word, and perhaps some of them fit the eagle but I think majestic would be a better word. They live largely on fish and they can't fish. Part of them are come by honestly. Picked up from on top of the water or on the beaches, but perhaps a large majority of them are taken by high air robbery from the fish hawks. Many times have I seen these acts of vandalism being committed. If it is over the water nothing can keep the robber from getting his loot for no matter how close to the surface it is released the eagle could get it before it sank. It was a different story over land, and I have seen these smaller birds make every effort to get near the brush before letting the fish go. It was lost to them, but I think they got a lot of satisfaction out of keeping it out of the talons of the robber. I have eaten a number of messes of fish delivered to me in this way. I was a receiver of stolen goods, but as I couldn't return them to their rightful owner my conscience never bothered me.

The 1921 hurricane put a bad list in the tree that had that nest in it. They gathered up enough more sticks to level it up and nested there for two more years before the tree went the rest of the way to the ground. Then they built a nest on the other side of the place. It was closer to the beach, and perhaps the many cars using the beach helped them to make up their minds to move over onto the mainland for they only nested there one year. They didn't forget the place and as long as there was plenty of dead pines for them to land in they spent a lot of time here, and always brought their young over to finish their education.

There was another eagles' nest on the James Gilbert homestead. The beach was our highway. Yet in all those years I could count the number of times I have seen an eagle landed on the beach on the fingers of one hand and have some fingers left. It was a laborious operation for them to get into the air again. They had to hop along the beach for some distance with their wings going before becoming air borne.

I want to pay respects to a little grey bird that made its home in an oak tree near the shack. I wish I knew its name for it was the spunkiest little thing I ever saw. It never quarreled with others of its size, but it never allowed a large bird even to fly by near its home and it had the speed to make its edict good. Its method of attack was to come up from behind and fly only a few inches above the big bird and dart in to the attack. It didn't make any difference what the big bird was named, hawks, buzzards, owls and the eagles were all attacked. One day when it was attacking one of the eagles a feather came down so close to me that I picked it out of the air without a step.

Sometimes when a common enemy is around the different species of birds will forget their own enmities to center their attack on a common enemy. One cold morning there was a big fuss being made down the field. It wasn't the cat they were fussing over for he was in sight. They were staying in one place so I investigated. A large black snake was stretched out on the white sand of a ditch bank getting the heat from that early morning sun. There must have been a dozen birds of several species flying around. I doubt if they were even disturbing the snake's sleep, but they were having a fine time telling the world that they thought about that snake. The loudest broadcaster was a butcher bird, and they are supposed to be an enemy of the others.

Quite a number of other times I have seen birds of different kinds attack a common enemy, but it was a large hawk that was in the worst panic. When the noise first attracted my attention, that hawk was getting every bit of speed out of its wings that nature had built into them, and attacking it from behind was a large number of small birds. I don't know how many kinds there were of them, but there were more redwinged blackbirds than any other. The hawk lit in the second growth pine about twenty-five feet from me. It was safe there among the branches. The little fellows lit in the tree and jawed and scolded. Perhaps they were telling that killer now ludicrous it looked fleeing from so much good food. I went over under the tree and heaved a club at the hawk, and it watched it go harmlessly by. On my next try I actually brushed its tail. I was looking for something else to throw when it took off with its little tormentors renewing the attack. It lit in another tree nearby and stayed there until the little fellows went on about their interrupted business of getting a living. It would be interesting to know how this

attack started and how the posse was formed, but your guess about that would be as good as mine.

As I have said the only animals I ever owned -- except a couple of mules -- was cats. I have no special liking for a cat. I respect their ability to look after themselves, but as far as I go their only excuse for existence is their ability to catch rodents. A dog is much more companionable but I would have had to take it with me every where I went, and playing nursemaid to a dog 365 days a year without a vacation made no appeal to me.

For a while a man lived about the same distance to the north of me as Mc did to the south. When he left he deserted two dogs. For a while both of them ran around and then I understood that someone adopted the bigger one but the little one stayed around but it was unable to catch the rats, rabbits and fish that were so plentiful. Its food had to be provided by humans and there wasn't anyone to do it. He tried to stay alive and no bit of food was too small for him to try for. One night he woke me when he tried to steal the bait from a rat trap and got a whack on his nose instead. I finally found what was left of him at the lower end of my field. He had starved to death.

If a cat of mine had even looked hungry when I returned from an absence I would have thought that it was worth more as fertilizer than as a going concern. Cats didn't stay put well on the island. I never did have one that didn't go on vacations. Usually they didn't stay long, but one of them was gone for about four months. He was his same old friendly self and took up life without making any excuses or explanations.

A number of cats that were brought to the island as pets left an apparently happy home for one in the wilds. Two white angoras that were valued highly by their owners left for a home in the wilds. Some time after the first one of these cats left home we had a hurricane. The water had just left the land and I was walking in the grass out of reach of the waves when I came up behind this cat. I was about ready to step on its tail for the cat was making so much noise that it didn't hear me when I spoke to it. It looked back, and when it saw me it took off through brush as fast as an animal whose only acquaintance with men was when it was being shot at. Yet not long before it had been a pampered pet. Its owner still lives in Fort Myers.

One of my cats was seldom far away when I was working, and there was a sporty mocking bird that loved to pester this cat. It would come over the cat at high speed and noisy wings. The cat would leap in the air in an effort to bring it down. The bird would come back over from the opposite direction and up would go the cat again. It would keep this up until it got tired of the sport, or the cat got tired of being made a fool of and went off and lay down.

It was before my time, but there used to be some deer on the island. Mc told me that the last one was killed on his land about where there is a road sign now with the word Aberdeen on it.

The bears came and went. There was some other things they liked but they loved turtle eggs, and during the turtle season the coast was lined with them. One time on one of the beaches below here I visited more than three dozen turtle nests before I found one that hadn't been robbed by the bears. A man from the Koreshan Unity caught a large bear in a box trap on the island. I saw the remains of that trap not so long ago although it has been more than a half century since it caught that bear and was never moved. Maybe I could find it now but I am not going into that jungle to look.

There used to be plenty of turtles, but there wasn't near as many used the Estero Island beach as they did the beaches on down the coast. I was told, I don't know on what kind of authority, that a turtle always came back to the same beach on which it was born to lay its eggs. Anyway I believe it. That would account for there being more on the less accessible beaches. Anyway if a salmon always goes back to the same river to lay its eggs that its mother had used, and they do, it doesn't seem crazy to think that a turtle would go back to the beach where it was born. These sea hens lay a lot of eggs. The smallest nest I ever found was 60 eggs, and the largest 244 and they will come out and lay about four times a year. When I found my first turtles I was using the means of locomotion that nature furnished me. The next bit of progress was a bicycle, and when I found my last turtle I was riding in the flivver that was the first car to make its permanent home on the island.

Of course there was always an over supply of raccoons. Back when they were worth skinning I always had a few traps out winters. I have gotten as high as \$7.75 each for them. That was real money that would buy something. For instance for the price of one hide I could hire a man to work ten hours a day for five days, and then every day if I could have gotten it had enough to set him up to a cold drink every day. A coon can dig a hole about two inches across near one end of a very big watermelon and scoop out all of the red part of the melon through that little hole. Or it can hang onto a papaya tree with three feet while it scoops out a papaya with the other one, and while doing it dig its claws into the stem of the plant so much that it will break off. I don't know whether I was a loser or gainer by having the coons, but I would have much rather not had them.

Here is something that is very strange to me. Until the bridge was built I had never seen an opossum on the island. Then they came and increased so fast that one year I caught more of them than I did coons. Then they disappeared and I haven't seen a sign of one for many years. I wish they had taken the coons with them.

Only once have I known a panther to be on the island, and that was before I had been a Floridian long. I suppose he had just landed and was looking the resort over, and by the sound of its howls it didn't seem to like it too well. And as for me the sound of one of those cats howling in the night has never added to my comfort. That was the first time I had ever heard one, and I was trying to sleep in the corner of that cabbage house that I have described as built by Carl Briant. Some of the stories told me by the natives weren't intended to be reassuring to me the city kid, and there was nothing between me and that animal but some cabbage leaves and some air overly full of unpleasant sound waves. It doesn't make me unhappy to tell you that it must have left the island for no one ever heard him again.

The island was always well stocked with wild cats. Quite a number of them put their foot in my soon traps. Once I saw two of them in my field playing like a couple of big awkward overgrown kittens and a third one was sitting watching the fun. Only once do I remember hearing of them doing any particular damage to anyone, and that was way back at the beginning of things as far as I am concerned. Richard Gilbert liked cats and he was said

to have more than a dozen of them. The wild cats--or bob cats if you prefer that name--got after them and didn't leave him a one. I don't know whether they ate them or just killed them for the fun of it, but my remembrance is that the killing was just a sporting proposition.

Nature stocked some of the islands with quail, but not Estero Island. George Sanders thought he would rectify this oversight on nature's part, so he persuaded the state to furnish some birds for the purpose. I believe it was fifteen pairs that they sent him. For a few years they nested here, and it looked as if he had succeeded. Then they left, and there hasn't been any here but an occasional straggler since. I once heard an expert on quail give a talk, and he said quail wouldn't stick around where there wasn't a certain feed whose name I have forgotten growing. We probably lacked that feed.

In reading this over it seems to me that I haven't said enough about those joy killers the sand-flies and mosquitoes. Back in the gay nineties about the only weapon we had against them was a smoke. Some folks used a "mosquito switch" made from the immature leaves of the cabbage palm. Mosquito ticklers would be a better name. If you killed a mosquito with one of them it was an accident. A friend that prided himself on making fine specimens of these things gave me one. I thanked him for it and hung it on the wall for an ornament. For years I never went outdoors without a heavy cloth over my shoulder in the mosquito season. If I was going to have to use energy to stay alive among those bugs I wanted to do more than scare all of them away for a few inches. When I brought that cloth down on a thickly populated back or leg a bunch of its population lost interest in me as an article of food.

Some of the holes used to breed the mosquitoes in almost unbelievable numbers. One such hole was between my place and the beach on the lots where our County Commissioner lives and the one north of it. It was a white sandy place that was the lower end of a long depression that went under water in a heavy rain. It was lower than the rest of it and as the water went down the wigglers collected in this place. I used to watch it, and when the time was right I could make a little kerosene do a tremendous killing job on them. One time I was a little late. The wigglers were there, but there wasn't enough water to let me use my killer. It was morning and no sign of rain, so I knew old sol would do the job for me. Later I

went back to see if he had. I didn't do any measuring, but I think a very conservative estimate was that there was a patch where the last of that water was that had an area of at least 100 square feet that was covered with wigglers one-fourth of an inch deep.

A few years later in a bad storm a channel was made from this place to the Gulf. At first that was quite a stream of water, and it was three days before it stopped. Every gallon of that water was black with wigglers. Telling about that three day stream of potential back biters became one of Mc's favorite stories.

The first of the so-called repellants was citronella. I used to buy that by the quart. I don't know whether it was a change in the citronella or my skin but after using it for years it took to burning my skin so bad it was about as bad as the bugs. There was some more repellants coming on the market and I tried them all. One called Sleep Insurance while not as good as citronella done a fair job and didn't hurt my skin. Another was called "Sweet Dreams." I don't know if it was the mosquitoes or man that got our money for it that was to have the sweet dreams. It sure wasn't us buyers. Both Mc and I tried it and couldn't see that it done enough good to pay to put it on.

The best time I had with the mosquitoes was after the DDT sprays came on the market but that came to an end shortly after they started the spraying. I sprayed my clothes before I put them on, and then rubbed my exposed skin with 6-12. Dolled up in that way I could have the mosquitoes around me in swarms and never get a bite. They would land on my sprayed clothes, do a peculiar little dance and then drop off dead. After the spraying started they soon became immune to this residue on my clothes. Perhaps if they hadn't kept everything covered with the spray even when there wasn't a mosquito to spray, they might not have become immune. They poured this stuff on my tender vegetation when I hadn't seen a mosquito in months. If anyone had mosquitoes they were running a private hatchery for they weren't breeding in their natural breeding places.

I was never able to find out much about the sand flies, and many years of experience with them has taught me nothing. They can be bad in wet weather, dry weather or any other kind but cold. There can be lots of them one day and none the next. For instance yesterday they were so bad at Estero that I had to go for the sprayer and repellent, but this morning there were none. Way back when I first became a homesteader I wrote to the Federal Bureau of Agriculture and asked them if they could tell me anything about the mosquitoes and sand flies. As there was a big insect up north they called by that name I explained what it was I meant. I got a bunch of literature on the mosquitoes but not a word about the sand flies. A mosquito leaves no mark on me and the least bit of a scratch and I can forget it -- not so with a sand fly. It leaves a red mark that doesn't respond to scratching. I have used two mules on the island and neither of them paid much attention to the mosquitoes no matter how bad they were, but both of them became unmanageable and had to be put up when the sand flies got bad.

I give the mosquito control credit for practically exterminating the sand flies. Late years my time has been divided between the island and Estero. Before they started this control there were I believe many hundreds at the Beach to one at Estero. That is changed now. I think I saw more sand flies yesterday morning than I have seen at the Beach since they started the control. A man that has fished the Lee County waters since he was old enough to give his father a little help asked me last fall how the sand flies were at the Beach. I told him that there weren't any, and he told me that he thought they had been the worst that he had ever seen them. So you folks that live at the island can see what you missed.

Well I think I have reached the end of my rope. I have had to explore crannies of my brain that haven't been explored for years. It is a disjointed affair for things have gone into it as I thought of them. I have tried to make a word picture of things as they used to be. It is also something of a history of my life. I haven't had the editorial we to hide behind so I have just let those big I's go in where they seemed to fit.