

# Frank H. Taylor—19th Century Art-Journalist As Seen through His Sketches of a Trip with General U. S. Grant in 1880

Nancy L. Gustke

In January of 1880 Frank Hamilton Taylor accompanied former president Ulysses S. Grant on a trip of approximately three months to Florida, Cuba, and Mexico. Employed by *Harper's Weekly Journal of Civilization*, it was Taylor's responsibility to sketch newsworthy aspects of the journey. These sketches and accompanying notes were sent to New York where they were the basis for producing wood engravings and text in *Harper's Weekly*, the most popular weekly magazine of the day. At Taylor's request his original sketches were returned, and he incorporated them into a scrapbook. The scrapbook also contained copies of some of the engravings as well as newspaper clippings about this trip and other important events in Taylor's life. Fortunately, much of this material survived following his death in 1926 to be rediscovered at Taylor's last residence in Philadelphia. Recently acquired by the University Gallery at the University of Florida, the items are important for a number of reasons. They afford an opportunity to examine some of the challenges unique to journalistic artists of the 19th century, and in particular document their relationship to the craftsmen who translated their drawings into engravings. They also reflect an interesting, yet little-known event in American history giving insight into General Grant's thinking as he was being forced to make a major decision about his political future. Historically they are significant because they represent the landscape and culture of Florida, Cuba, and Mexico in the 1880s.

Frank Hamilton Taylor was born in 1846. He spent most of his life in Philadelphia, one of the artistic centers for American painting in the 19th century. Taylor worked as a free-lance artist and reporter for a number of newspapers including the *New York Graphic* and the *Philadelphia Times*. His many publications include a guidebook of Philadelphia for the Chamber of Commerce, illustrated records of trips for the Adirondack Railway Company and the American Society of Civil Engineers, and maps of the St. John's River in Florida for the tourist publication department of the state of New York.<sup>1</sup> Taylor's travels also took him to Canada, and two wash drawings of Quebec scenes are in the permanent collection of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.<sup>2</sup>

Just exactly when he began his association with *Harper's Weekly* is uncertain. Engravings of his sketches do appear in the 1879 editions and throughout the 1880 issues. The assignment to cover the Grant trip for *Harper's Weekly* was obviously a prestigious one indicating Taylor was well-respected for his work. He was also on assignment to report the trip for the *Philadelphia Times*, and an interview with their reporter in New Orleans after leaving the Grant party indicates the high regard in which he was held professionally; "Mr. Taylor, although a young man, is acknowledged as a journalist of both experience and perception. His forte

is observation, and hence he speaks intelligently on what he sees."<sup>3</sup>

Art journalists such as Taylor have played an important role throughout history documenting their culture and surroundings. Many times these drawings were the only visual record of extinct civilizations and landscapes altered by modern technology. For example, much of what we know today about the ancient Egyptians and Maya comes from the paintings and writings left by their early artists. Because people have always been interested in other people and places, artists were often employed to travel and paint them. This was particularly true after the 16th century with the expansion of trade routes to the East and the discovery of the new world. Artists such as Jacques LeMoyné were hired to accompany explorers and merchants, to draw maps and record the exotic surroundings which were often used for book illustrations. LeMoyné's paintings and descriptions of the early Florida Indians and the French Ft. Caroline were engraved by the Flemish printer Theodore DeBry for his *Brevis Narratio Eorum Quae in Florida* (Frankfurt, 1591).<sup>4</sup> In the early 19th century a growing middle class began to travel and artists such as Samuel Prout and Karl Bodmer were hired to record the "Grand Tour" for picture books popular at that time.<sup>5</sup>

Illustrated books were a costly and time consuming way of providing visual accounts of peoples, places, and events. What was needed was a method of producing both pictures and text quickly and inexpensively, readily available to the general public; it was not until the rediscovery of the technique of wood engraving that a satisfactory solution was found. Wood engraving is a variation of the woodcut, but the carving is done on the end grain of a block of wood that has been polished to a smooth, hard surface. (With the traditional woodcut, the design is carved with the grain; and the soft surface does not lend itself to detailed carving or to durability in printing.) The hard surface of the wood engraved block and specialized engraving tools meant that fine line drawings could be made and the block could withstand repeated printings. Most importantly, the images could be printed with the same press and at the same time as the wood type.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, illustrated newspapers such as *Harper's Weekly* began to appear both in Europe and America.<sup>7</sup> Many well-known artists began their careers as field artists for these papers including Americans Frederic Remington and Winslow Homer. Homer is best remembered in this capacity for his sketches of the American Civil War engraved for *Harper's Weekly*.<sup>8</sup>

In order to adequately cover a variety of events, many artists were employed by these journals. Taylor was among this group of artists, and his sketches and copies of the engravings provide an understanding of the relationship



between artist and engraver. The artist had to depend on the engraver's skill to accurately render his drawings. When engravers at *Harper's Weekly* received a sketch from the field, it would be traced in reverse or photographed onto a woodblock. Some artists were available to draw directly on the block, however, field correspondents like Taylor were usually on assignment and not afforded that luxury.

The block was made of sections cut  $3\frac{1}{2}$ " x 2" and 1" thick, the same height as the type. The sections were bolted together for printing but were dismantled for engraving which allowed many engravers to work on one block at a time. Engravers often specialized in rendering certain elements of a drawing and were only given those blocks containing their area of expertise to carve. The blocks would then be reassembled and a master engraver would go over the junctions to assure that the images were visually correct and properly aligned. A very skilled engraver was sometimes allowed to carve the entire block and sign it. Only one of Taylor's engraved sketches appears to contain an engraver's initials as seen in the lower left corner of Figure 1. In contrast to the engraver's limited recognition, Taylor was always credited for his work by a notation under the engraving (Figure 1). This would seem to indicate that the newspaper felt it was important to recognize the artist and that only the best engravers were delegated to render Taylor's sketches.

Because the art journalist needed to get his sketches back to the paper as quickly as possible, frequently he did not have time to complete them in detail. In many instances the artist supplied instructions or additional information to help the engraver in his elaboration of the drawing. Taylor's wash drawing, and the corresponding engraving of a banquet held for General Grant are evidence of this method of communication, (Figures 2 and 3). In the wash drawing Taylor has composed the basic format of the picture with the banquet tables in front displaying Florida produce. Taylor has also clearly drawn in General Grant, probably Mrs. Grant on his left, and the host on the General's right. The rest of the sketch is an outline of the setting and people. Written in pencil on the sketch are the instructions "see note on back." The note reads, "Two tables were arranged at right angles under a group of trees shown in the photograph, and laden with a display of early fruits and vegetables including strawberries and all products common to northern farms besides which were bananas, oranges, lemons, and limes. Bouquets of flowers were interspersed." Taylor also drew a portrait of the host, Mr. Benedict. Figure 3 shows the printed engraving made from the sketch. The engraver has retained the basic layout but refined the rendering of the fruits, flowers, and people. Grant is essentially in the same position, however, Mrs. Grant and the host are now on opposite sides of the General. People have been added on the tree platform and a horizon line indicates that the banquet is near a lake or river. In this example the engraver had a photograph which is referred to in Taylor's note to guide him. Because there is no mention of a photographer in any of the articles about the trip, it is probable that a local photographer was present and supplied Taylor a copy of his work.

The story told by the entire set of forty-seven Taylor drawings is a fascinating one. Grant, the hero and distinguished general of the Civil War had been president of the United States for two terms from 1869-1877.<sup>9</sup> Grant was still a popular figure even though corruption in his

administration had forced him to discard thoughts of running for a third term at that time. To remove Grant from Washington and disassociate him from the political scandal, advisors sent Grant and his wife on a good-will tour of the world for two and a half years. The tour was planned so that Grant would return to the U.S. about one or two months prior to the 1880 Republican convention in Chicago. He would arrive in San Francisco and then be hosted and honored in various cities on his route home to Galena, Illinois, continuing to ride the wave of enthusiasm to a Republican nomination and eventually the presidency. When Grant was unable to obtain passage to Australia, he sailed for San Francisco arriving in October of 1879 far ahead of the projected arrival date. The parties were held as planned as the Grants crossed the country, but after awhile the public's interest in Grant waned.

During the world tour Grant avoided references to seeking the presidency. However, as he traveled across the U.S., he began to deny that he was seeking a third term yet he met with political leaders at each stop. In order to dispel growing speculations about his candidacy, Grant's advisors once again sent him touring, this time to the South. This trip, like the world tour was positively reported with no mention of presidential aspirations.<sup>10</sup> When Taylor was queried about Grant's political plans by the *Philadelphia Times* interviewer in New Orleans, he replied, "From what I have observed of the ex-president, it is my opinion he left the states to be rid of the politicians. He is on a trip of pleasure, and almost the last thing that enters his brain is the political prospect" (see n. 3).

A map of the route taken by Grant on this southern trip is shown in Figure 4. The sketches Taylor made during this trip were basically documentary in nature and are important as an historical account. Selected drawings also reveal a great deal about his job responsibilities and working conditions.

Taylor joined the party at Fernandina, Florida where he recorded Grant's arrival on January 4, 1880, Figure 5.<sup>11</sup> Taylor's sketches always show Grant in a positive light and often the center of adulation as evidenced here. This was Grant's first visit to Florida and elaborate receptions such as this were held for him at almost every stop. The party also visited Jacksonville, Palatka, Ocala, and St. Augustine where Taylor made watercolor renderings of the City Gates and the Castillo de San Marcos built by the Spanish in the 16th century and still standing today.

The Grant party's last stop in Florida was Key West where another elaborate reception was recorded by Taylor. Taylor included a Cuban flag in his drawing which was deleted in the *Harper's Weekly* engraving. In his remarks to the crowd which included many Cuban liberals, Grant is quoted as saying, "Cubans or any other refugees in this country would always find a free home with us."<sup>12</sup> The U.S. policy on Cuban refugees was disputed in Washington in 1880 as it is today; while *Harper's Weekly* printed Grant's statement, they probably felt it was politically in their best interest to eliminate the flag. A later sketch Taylor made of the Havana carnival also included a Cuban flag which was again deleted from the final engraving.

The party sailed for Havana which served as their headquarters during their three-week stay. A violent earthquake occurred a few days following their arrival. Particularly hard hit was the town of San Cristobal a few miles outside of Havana. Since Taylor was a reporter and visual



recorder of events, he felt there was an important story to be told, and journeyed out to the town to sketch the aftermath of the quake. These sketches were not used by *Harper's Weekly* but were utilized in 1886 by the *Mechanical Illustrated News* to accompany a story entitled "Recollections of a Cuban Earthquake."<sup>13</sup>

The Grant party departed Havana for Mexico, a country Grant was financially interested in and one he knew well, having served there during the Mexican war as a young lieutenant. During the voyage Taylor made a number of sketches before the steamship landed at Vera Cruz. The seas were quite rough, and Taylor's sketch entitled "Voyage to Vera Cruz," Figure 6, illustrates the conditions which made drawing difficult. A small pencil sketch of Col. Fred Grant, Figure 7, seated on a lounge chair reading a book was among the group of drawings in Taylor's scrapbook. The final composition indicates that the artist probably made numerous quick, "on the spot" sketches for later reference. Taylor, conscious of the need for accuracy, carefully identified the major figures.

One of the most spectacular drawings of the collection is shown in Figure 8 and depicts Grant and Sheridan on horseback, inspecting a Mexican coffee plantation. Taylor's ability to render animals and foliage is particularly evident in this well-composed drawing—the only visual record of the General riding a horse. Taylor's wash drawing certainly brings to mind thoughts of the victorious Civil War hero inspecting the troops and could almost be perceived as an endorsement of his candidacy.

There is no indication that Taylor was ever excluded from attending private events and seems to have been accepted as an integral member of the official party. For example, he was able to sketch the Grants' official call on President Diaz of Mexico at the National Palace. Since a reporter's job is to be where the news and stories are happening, Taylor certainly fulfilled his journalistic responsibilities.

The Grant party had traveled from Vera Cruz through the Mexican countryside to the capital, Mexico City. They now retraced their route back to the port city. The Grants

sailed for Galveston in late March where they planned to make stops in San Antonio, New Orleans, Memphis, and Hot Springs before returning home to Galena. Taylor sailed from Vera Cruz to New Orleans and was there interviewed by the *Philadelphia Times* about the former president's trip and his thoughts about the General's political position. Taylor then left on assignment for Chicago where he eventually covered the Republican Convention for *Harper's Weekly*. Grant was defeated in his nomination attempt at the convention and James Garfield was nominated becoming president in 1881.

In 1888, eight years after Taylor's travels with Grant, Eastman Kodak introduced the roll-film camera which had a devastating effect on the field of art-journalism. Up until then cameras were bulky and exposure times needed to make a photograph were very long. Panoramic photographs of landscapes and events were possible but editors still required illustrations of events as they happened. The new cameras were light-weight and the photographer did not have to burden himself on assignment with boxes of chemicals and heavy equipment. These improvements along with refinements in the quality of lenses soon moved photography and the photographer into the role previously filled by the art-journalist. While the need for art-journalists and wood engravers did not disappear overnight, the end was clearly in sight.

Artists such as Taylor represented a significant response to the increased demand for illustrations of places and events in the 19th century. As the population became more educated and national weekly newspapers more readily available, the role of the illustrator took on more prominence. These artists were required to accurately portray the events under a variety of conditions as they traveled throughout the world. Today their pictorial accounts of events and documentation of buildings and landscapes are a clue to the past. Taylor's drawings are not only aesthetically pleasing, but are helpful in reconstructing the history and culture of Florida, Cuba, and Mexico in the late 19th century.

University of Florida

1 *The National Union Catalog Pre-1956 Imprints*, London, 1978, CLXXIV, 393-396.

2 M. Allodi, *Canadian Watercolours and Drawings in the Royal Ontario*, Toronto, 1974 (museum catalog).

3 This quote is from a newspaper clipping included in Taylor's scrapbook. The article is written by a reporter for the *Philadelphia Times* whose interview probably occurred in late March, though it is not known when the article was printed.

4 S. Lorant, *The New World*, New York, 1965, 34-119.

5 P. Hogarth, *The Artist as Reporter*, New York, 1967, 8-27.

6 G. E. Mackley, *Wood Engraving*, London, 1948, 1-30.

7 Hogarth, *The Artist as Reporter*, 8-27.

8 P. C. Beam, *Winslow Homer's Magazine Engravings*, New York, 1979, 33-37.

9 W. McFeely, *Grant—A Biography*, New York, 1981, 450-477.

10 *Ibid.*, 450-477.

11 The Grant party included General and Mrs. Grant; the ex-president's son, Col. Fred D. Grant, and his wife; Lt. General and Mrs. Philip H. Sheridan, Mr. Bryan Andrews of the *New York Tribune* and the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, and Taylor.

12 "General Grant in Florida," *Harper's Weekly Journal of Civilization*, New York, XXIV, February 21, 1880, 117.

13 "Recollections of a Cuban Earthquake," *The Mechanical Illustrated News*, New York, VXI, October 15, 1886, 229.





Fig. 1, "General Grant in Florida—A Trip on the Oklawaha, *Harper's Weekly Journal of Civilization*, XXIV, 100, February 14, 1880, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville.



Fig. 2, Frank H. Taylor, "General Grant and Party are Shown Some Florida Products," January, 1880, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville.

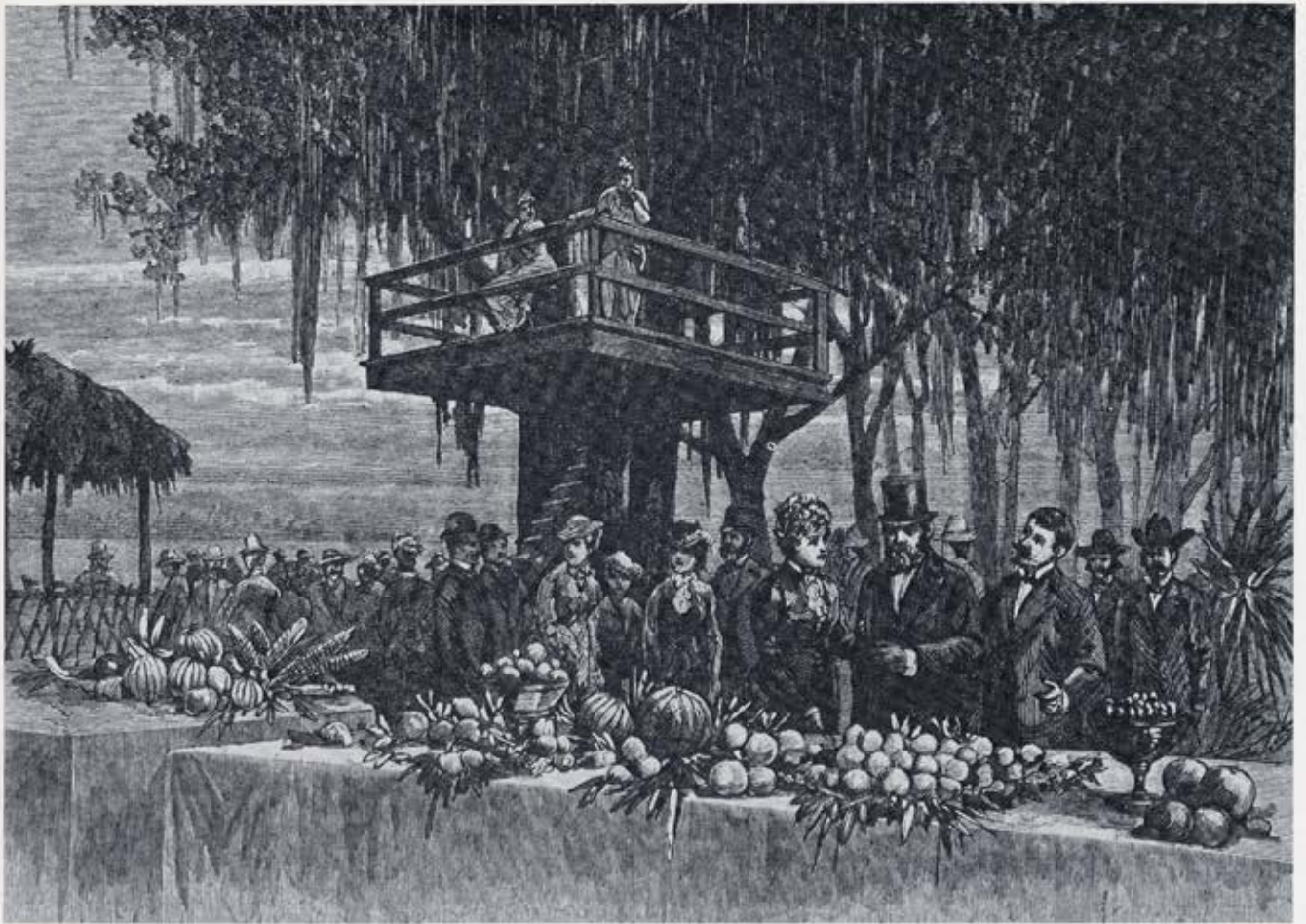


Fig. 3, "The Visit to Orange Park—Display of Fruits and Vegetables," *Harper's Weekly Journal of Civilization*, XXIV, 117, February 21, 1880, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville.



Fig. 4, Map Showing Route Taken by Grant Party in 1880.



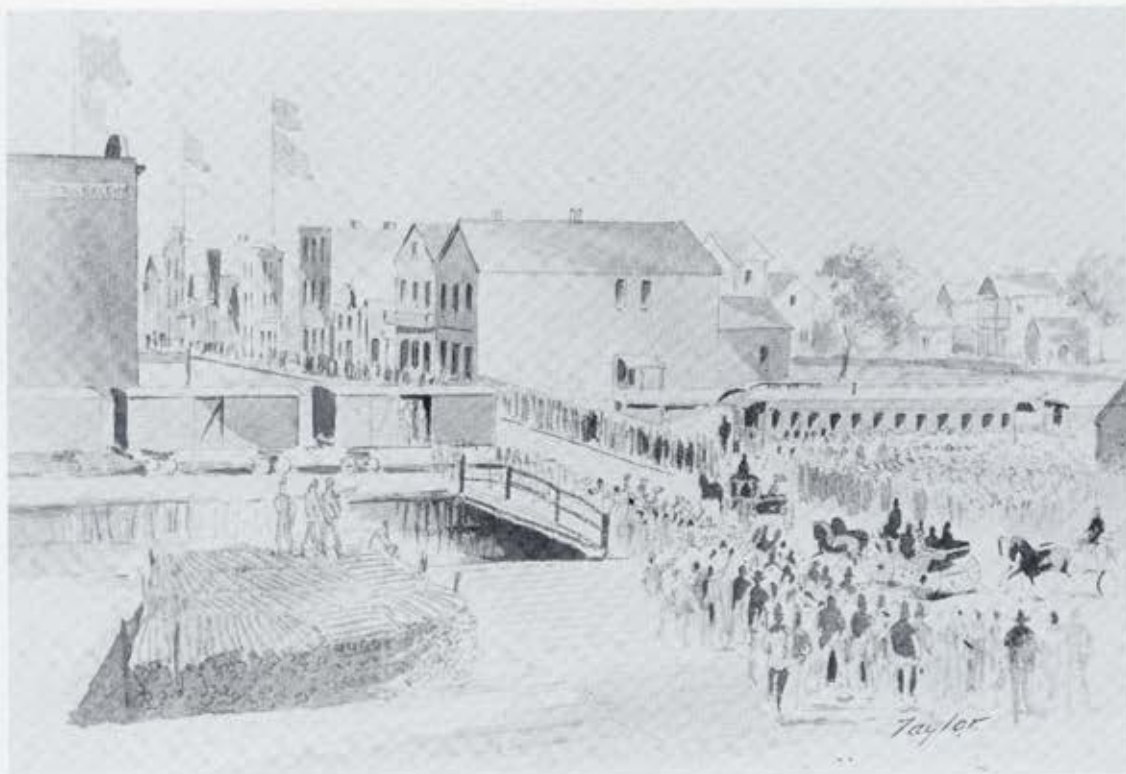


Fig. 5, Frank H. Taylor, "Arrival of General U. S. Grant, General P. H. Sheridan and Party at Fernandina, Florida," January 4, 1880, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville.

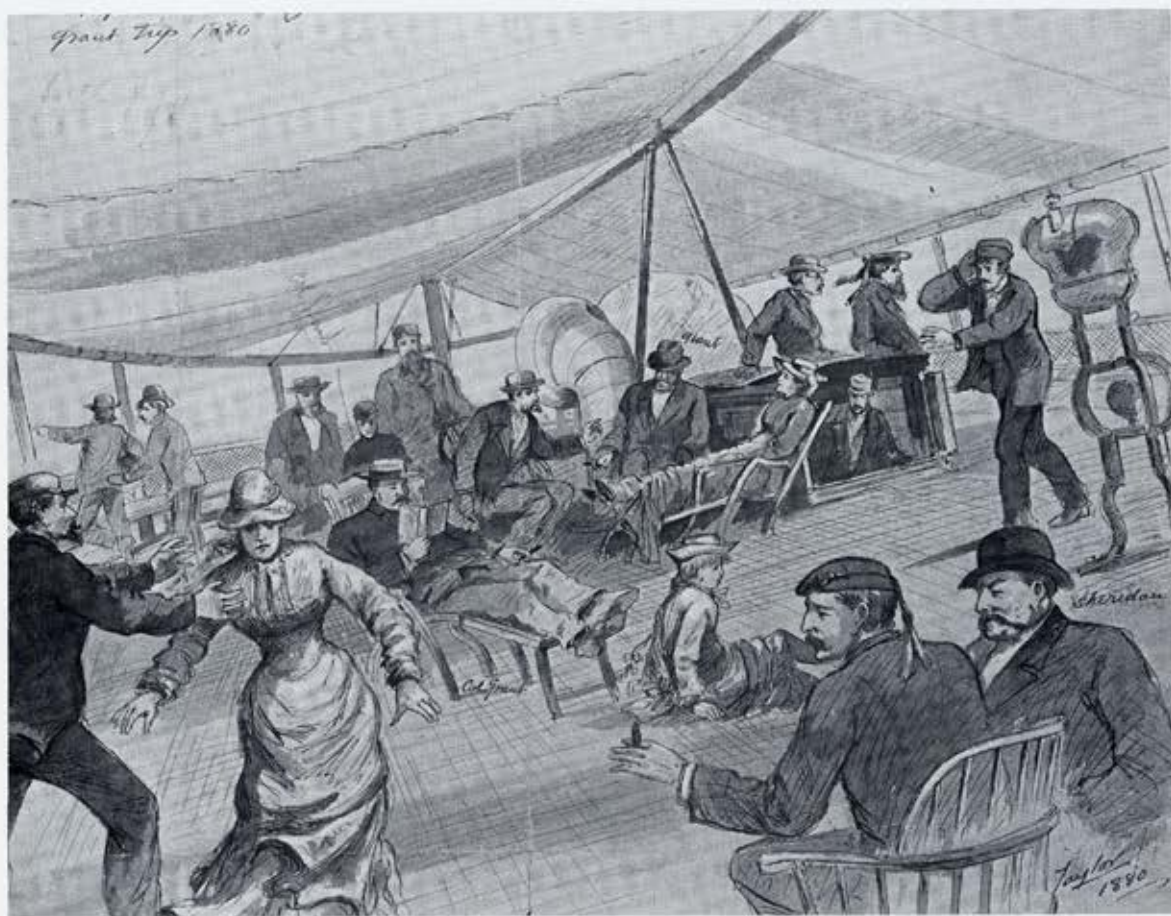


Fig. 6, Frank H. Taylor, "Voyage to Vera Cruz," February, 1880, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville.



Fig. 7, Frank H. Taylor, "Col. Fred D. Grant on Ship en Route to Mexico," February, 1880, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville.



Fig. 8, Frank H. Taylor, "With Grant in Mexico," March, 1880, University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville.