A Well-Connected Man:

THE CAREER OF MARCELLUS A. WILLIAMS

by Joe Knetsch

When the early history of Broward County is discussed, invariably the names of William Cooley, Frank Stranahan, Captain Bill Valentine, or the Bryan family come to mind. With the exception of Cooley, almost all of these brave pioneers of the south Florida wilderness were preceded by someone few in Broward County know, U.S. Deputy Surveyor Marcellus A. Williams. Though he began his career in surveying about the same time as George MacKay, another who trekked the wilderness of south Florida, Williams did not draw his lines in Broward until the 1870-71 surveying season. It is the Williams surveys upon which many of today's south Florida property lines depend. Yet, this man of motion was not one dimensional; he also became one of the founders of a famous land agency, Williams, Swann and Corley, and was one of the men responsible for the first attempt at establishing an intracoastal canal. He was one of the leading proponents of the drainage of the Everglades and produced some of the strongest arguments for this cause. Thus, although his surveying career led him to the swamps and mosquitoes of south Florida, he was important to the development of the lower peninsula in ways not yet explored by the historical community.

Born in North Carolina in about 1818, Williams settled in the neighborhood of Palatka and began rearing his family some time in the mid 1850s.[1] The details of his early life and move to Florida are unknown at present; however, we do know that in 1847 he had joined the crew of U.S. Deputy Surveyor Arthur M. Randolph, who strongly recommended young Williams to the Surveyor General as a qualified surveyor. In Randolph's words, "Mr. Williams has for eighteen months past been employed with me in locating State lands and in executing my existing contract with

In Broward County and along Florida's Gold Coast, Marcellus A. Williams is best remembered as the man upon whose surveys most property descriptions are based. As this article points out, Williams' career in Florida spanned over forty years and covered much of the peninsula. Equally at home in the wilderness and in the world of business, Williams became a partner in one of Florida's foremost land selling firms, a position which often put him in the thick of the state's unsettled political and financial scenes during the Reconstruction and Gilded Age decades. Significantly, his various activities allowed him to make the acquaintance of many of nineteenth century Florida's leading figures, and these contacts, in turn, led to additional opportunities. Williams' remarkable vision for the future of the south Florida wilderness, his diverse interests, and the fact that he was indeed a very "well-connected man" make him one of the more remarkable characters to pass through the pages of Broward County history.

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Marcellus A. Williams

Government for the survey of Private Claims in the course of which he has acquired a competent knowledge of the theory of our profession and an ample and correct acquaintance with the operations in the field."[2] He was also recommended for the job by General Benjamin Hopkins of the Florida Militia, who referred to Williams as "My friend."[3] Williams had, by 1849, won the admiration of his immediate boss, Randolph, and one of the more powerful frontier personages in Florida, Hopkins. This knack for knowing the right people was to be characteristic of Williams' career and life in Florida.

In his early years as a U.S. deputy surveyor, Williams handled many private claims along the St. Johns River and the east coast of Florida. By 1851, he was a regular surveyor getting steady work in the field and beginning to receive contracts across the state. In 1851, he was at Mellonville when the mail rider was reported to have been shot at by two Indians on the route from Mellonville to Tampa Bay. He describes the incident as follows: "When I first heard of this matter I disbelieved it altogether but on Friday I saw the man, examined his clothes, and the slight injury received by him, and it leaves me no room to doubt that he was actually shot at by some persons, whom he does not pretend to say himself. . . . He says that he has frequently seen Indian signs in that region, knows that they frequent that neighborhood, that it is visited by white persons, and that he is satisfied that they were Indians who shot at him."[4] This report, along with others from the area, almost convinced the state government that the Indians were ready to attack the settlements again; however, the rider eventually admitted fabricating the story to cover his drunkenness.[5] But, before this admission, the panic along the frontier was, again, well on the way to causing a major disturbance. Because of this incident, Colonel John Winder, commanding at Fort Myers, insisted upon another meeting with Chief Billy Bowlegs. Bowlegs, who knew most of the particulars, was not in a mood to listen to removal talk from the U.S. Army and rejected Colonel Luther Blake's attempts to discuss the matter with him. Williams, while informing the Surveyor General of the generally peaceful intentions of the Indians, decided to leave the fields of southern Florida and survey some private grants in the Lake George region.[6] He did this after consulting with Captain John Casey, the former Indian agent who may have been more negative towards the prospects of peace than the situation warranted.

In February of 1852, Williams reported upon another incident which happened to cause alarm along the frontier, the alleged attack of Captain Aaron Jernigan upon some Indians and the death of a captured squaw. This attack Williams labelled as "nothing but pillage," and stated that Jernigan had run off about 120 hogs and butchered and sold some of them for personal profit. He added that the attack also netted Jernigan some Indian ponies and other goods which should have been turned over to the proper authorities. He then quoted Henry A. Crane as saying that the attack was "altogether unnecessary and improper."[7] As historian Brenda J. Elliott has recently pointed out, some of the people Williams relied upon for information in reporting this incident are questionable in their veracity and had motives of their own for castigating Jernigan. Williams did note, however, that he had discussed the death of the older Indian woman with Mrs. Jernigan, who told the surveyor that the woman had "expressed repugnance to being sent to Bowlegs."[8] As a witness/reporter of these two incidents of frontier life, Williams' letters played a role in keeping the authorities in St. Augustine and Washington informed about the dangerous conditions in the more remote areas of Florida. Unfortunately, his sources were not unbiased, and his reports reflected the constant rivalries of various factions on the Florida frontier of 1850-52.

Marcellus Williams did not escape the usual problems faced by the surveyors of Florida's frontier, problems such as high water, illness, and occasional Indian troubles. On February 23, 1852, Williams reported to Surveyor General Benjamin Putnam:

> For the last two months I have laboured under greater difficulty in prosecuting my work than I have ever encountered before, and more I imagine than has often befallen any surveyor. The region of Country bordering on the Kissimmee is a perfect labyrinth of Lakes, Marshes, Swamps, Hammocks and Prairies. The difficulty in getting a pack along in running Township lines has caused me much delay, and to make matters still worse I could not procure any supplies from Tampa, and but for the Kindness of Capt. Grafton at Fort Meade I should more than a month since have been Compelled to Quit the field in Consequence of the want of provisions.[9]

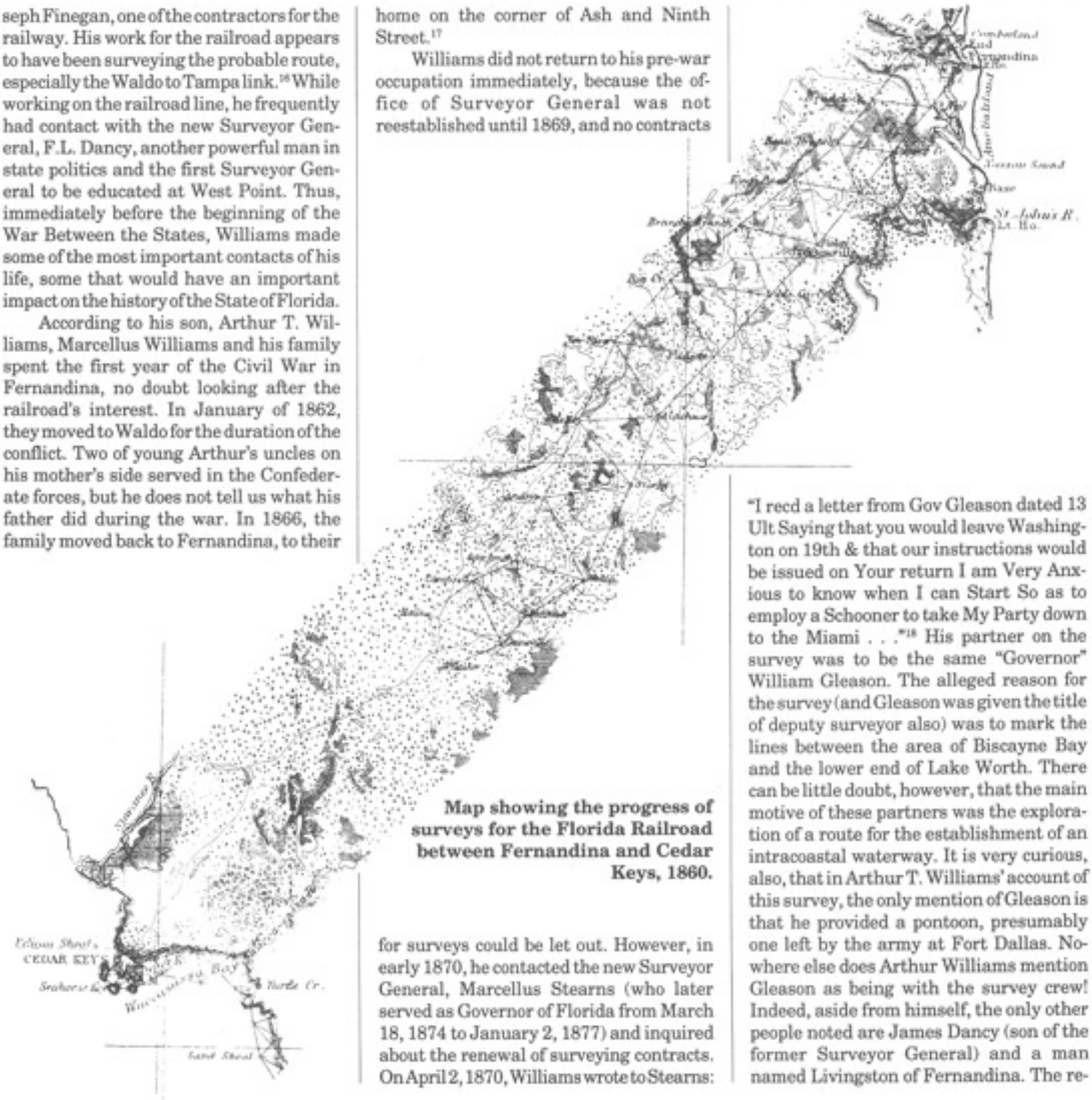
Nearly two months later he continued in this vein: "A large portion of this work was inaccessible by pack horse and had to be done by taking supplies upon our backs, on several occasions we had to work in this way for more than a week. I am satisfied that taking the whole of the above work together has been none worse in the State, or that was rendered by its location more difficult of Survey."[10] On August 5, 1853, Williams wrote from Fort Capron that his chainmen were sick and that he would have to suspend operations in that area until he could procure others to take their place.[11] Added to the volatile Indian situation which he reported, Marcellus Williams' troubles mirrored the experience of most of the U.S. deputy surveyors who laid out the lines of the original government surveys of Florida at great risk to life and limb.[12]

Under the term of Surveyor General John Westcott, Williams conducted surveys of private grants in the Duval County area, especially on the St. Johns River near today's downtown Jacksonville.[13] He was also involved in the survey of St. George Island, off of Apalachicola, in the late 1850s, which exposed him to the difficult task of coastal surveying.[14] Just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War, Williams began work for the Florida Railroad of David Levy Yulee, moving from Palatka to Fernandina in 1859 to facilitate working on this important line.[15] In working on this railroad, he came into contact with Samuel Swann, the treasurer of the line, and Jo-

seph Finegan, one of the contractors for the railway. His work for the railroad appears to have been surveying the probable route, especially the Waldo to Tampa link.[16] While working on the railroad line, he frequently had contact with the new Surveyor General, F.L. Dancy, another powerful man in state politics and the first Surveyor General to be educated at West Point. Thus, immediately before the beginning of the War Between the States, Williams made some of the most important contacts of his life, some that would have an important impact on the history of the State of Florida.

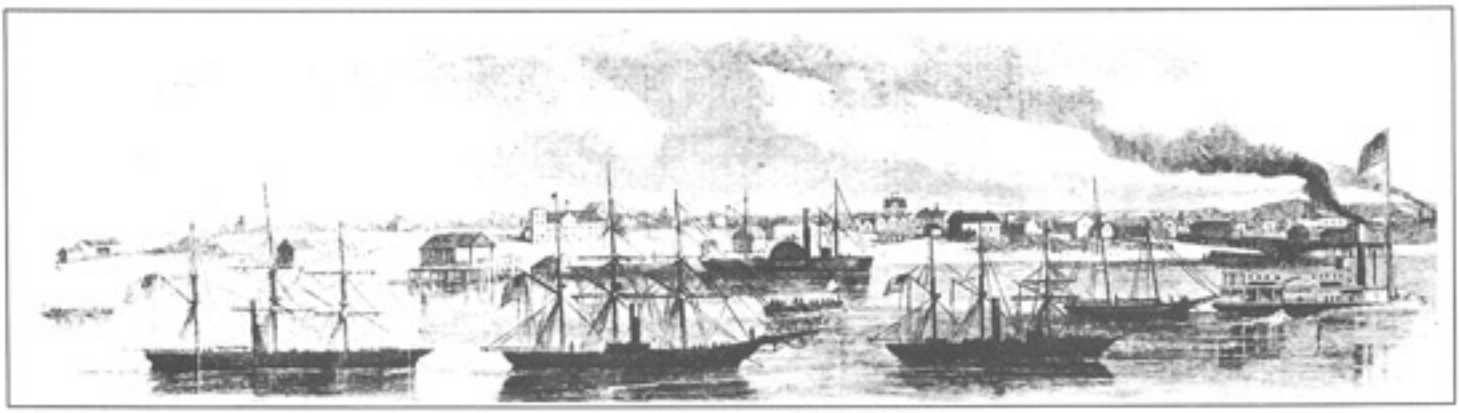
According to his son, Arthur T. Williams, Marcellus Williams and his family spent the first year of the Civil War in Fernandina, no doubt looking after the railroad's interest. In January of 1862, they moved to Waldo for the duration of the conflict. Two of young Arthur's uncles on his mother's side served in the Confederate forces, but he does not tell us what his father did during the war. In 1866, the family moved back to Fernandina, to their home on the corner of Ash and Ninth Street.[17]

Williams did not return to his pre-war occupation immediately, because the office of Surveyor General was not reestablished until 1869, and no contracts for surveys could be let out. However, in early 1870, he contacted the new Surveyor General, Marcellus Stearns (who later served as Governor of Florida from March 18, 1874 to January 2, 1877) and inquired about the renewal of surveying contracts. On April 2, 1870, Williams wrote to Stearns:

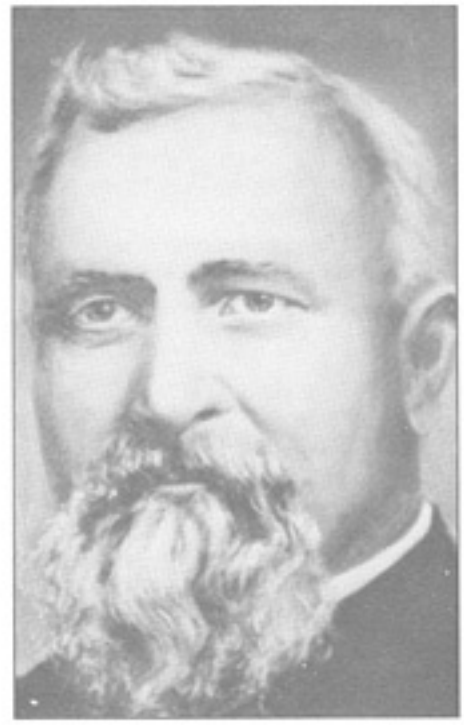


Map showing the progress of surveys for the Florida Railroad between Fernandina and Cedar Keys, 1860.

"I recd a letter from Gov Gleason dated 13 Ult Saying that you would leave Washington on 19th & that our instructions would be issued on Your return I am Very Anxious to know when I can Start So as to employ a Schooner to take My Party down to the Miami . . ."[18] His partner on the survey was to be the same "Governor" William Gleason. The alleged reason for the survey (and Gleason was given the title of deputy surveyor also) was to mark the lines between the area of Biscayne Bay and the lower end of Lake Worth. There can be little doubt, however, that the main motive of these partners was the exploration of a route for the establishment of an intracoastal waterway. It is very curious, also, that in Arthur T. Williams' account of this survey, the only mention of Gleason is that he provided a pontoon, presumably one left by the army at Fort Dallas. Nowhere else does Arthur Williams mention Gleason as being with the survey crew! Indeed, aside from himself, the only other people noted are James Dancy (son of the former Surveyor General) and a man named Livingston of Fernandina. The re-



Fernandina at the time of the Civil War.



At right is Marcellus L. Stearns, United States Surveyor-General for Florida and later Governor (courtesy Florida Photographic Archives). Below is the entrance to the Everglades at the head of the Miami River as it appeared in the late nineteenth century.

mainder of the crew, with the exception of George Norman, were unnamed blacks, presumably from the Fernandina area.[19]

Young Arthur T. Williams was only thirteen at the time of this important survey and was anxious to view the wilderness of south Florida. In his *Memories*, he tells us, "It was the one desire of my life to see a sure enough live Indian." This desire was accomplished before they left the W.H. Hunt residence on Biscayne Bay, and Arthur, as all young boys might, felt the urge to run at the first sighting. He did not, however, and stayed around the Indians long enough to make some short-term friendships.[20] These newly found friends, particularly Young Tiger Tail, helped to smooth over the now well-known incident which took place because of Marcellus Williams' inappropriate lighting of a pipe in the presence of Old Alec (or Alex). This story is too famous in south Florida lore to bear repeating here.

After this incident at the camp on Snake Creek, the party made its way to New River. There, according to Arthur Williams, they camped, "about where the City of Fort Lauderdale is now." "At that time," he continued, "there were two families living on New River — a Mr. Brown on the north side of the river with his wife, two grown sons, two grown daughters, a boy about 3 and another probably 14 or fifteen; and on the south side of the river opposite Brown's place was a Mr. Hall with his wife, a son and a daughter. These were the only people living between Biscayne Bay and Jupiter Light House — a distance of about 80 miles."[21] In his later *Memories,* the younger Williams added the following about these settlers: "Hall had a little farm, but Brown seemed to make his living by wreck and beachcombing. He owned a little schooner, which was manned by his two grown sons."[22] At this camp the surveyors made their last sighting of Indians on this trip to south Florida.

The second camp of the Williams party on New River was located near "Old Fort Lauderdale," on a strip of beach between the sound and the ocean. Arthur Williams noted that a grove of coconuts was growing there, probably, he speculated, planted by the soldiers during the Third Seminole War. He also adds, interestingly: "At this time the inlet to New River was about five miles South of this camp, the New River Sound paralleling the ocean for this distance, but after Fort Lauderdale was settled, someone cut a ditch across from where we were camped, and it is now the inlet to New River. The place where we camped is now probably in the middle of the inlet."[23] A third camp was made on New River, ". . . down at the mouth not far from where the town of Hollywood now is."[24]

Arthur Williams also recalled a very pretty tropical hammock situated between New River Sound and Lake Mabel (Port Everglades) which so fascinated him that eleven years later James A. Harris and he purchased this land. Lake Mabel, he tells us, was named after Harris' then girlfriend and later wife, adding that the name first appeared on a map that he made with Major J.W. Bushnell.[25] The 1870 surveying crew, according to Arthur Williams, subsisted mostly on wild turkey and fresh turtle eggs which he procured from the plentiful turtle nests on the beach, which, he noted, were, "on an average of every 200 feet . . ."[26]

The surveying party left New River and headed northward through the inland passage to the Hillsboro River, where they set up camp near the mouth. The second camp on this waterway was near a point where the river turned towards the west and exposed a small promontory, ". . . just about opposite to where the East Coast Canal comes into the river now." At this camp, young Arthur passed his thirteenth birthday and also lost his little yellow hen, which had been bitten near the head by a rattlesnake. The young boy stayed with his pet, giving it small doses of spirits of ammonia. The lad stayed up until about 10:00 o'clock in the evening dosing his feathered friend and thought she might survive, but this was not to be. She died very early on the following morning before young Arthur awoke.[27]

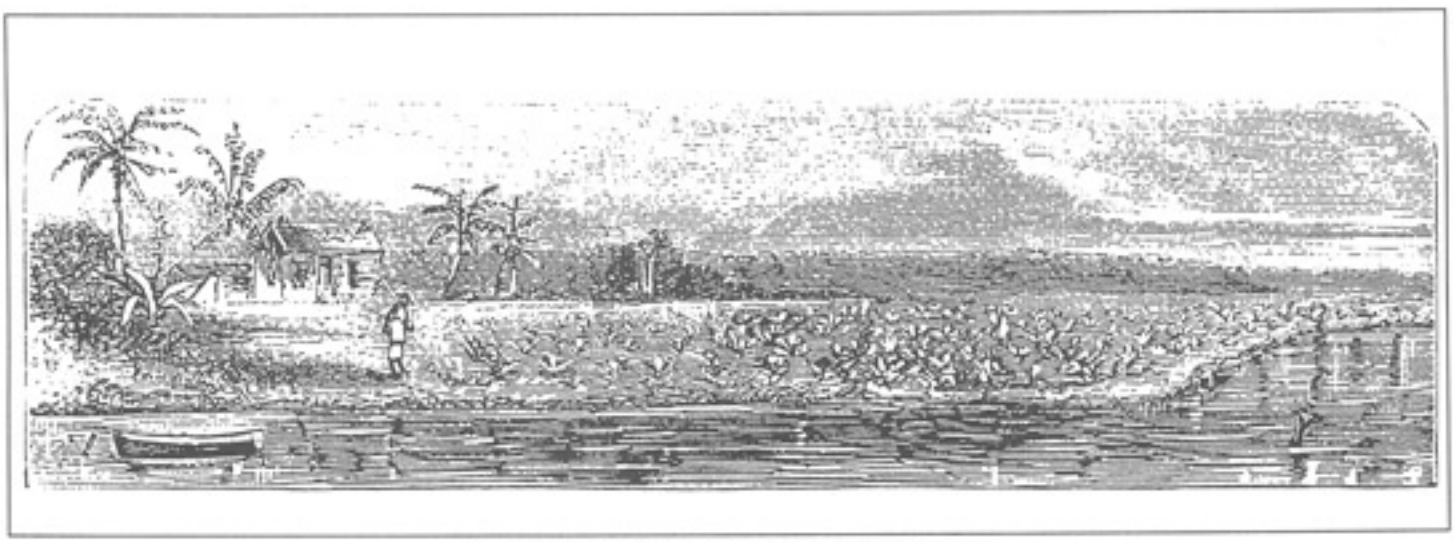
Following the inside passage, the party headed further northward and soon arrived at Lake Boca Ratones. The crew continued to work hard and finished the surveys of this marshy area in a few days time. They then went up to the area of the old "Orange Grove Haulover" and finished the contract in that place. The trip to Jupiter Inlet proved to be a very lengthy one, lasting over ten days because of unfavorable winds. Upon their arrival at the inlet, the party was nearly swamped by the breakers. Arthur Williams credits one of the hired help with going to get the lighthouse keeper to guide them through the treacherous waters.[28] By early September the crew had arrived safely back at Fernandina after "a Very laborous Summers work."[29]

That surveying, as a profession, was rewarding is common knowledge; however, like modern businesses that have to rely on the government for payment, the rewards were often slow in arriving. Though Marcellus Williams had turned in his work in mid-September, by February 7, 1871, he was writing the Surveyor General: "Will you do Me a great Kindness by Sending the next in immediately as I greatly need the money to pay the debts incured for the Survey."[30] To help tide himself over between the federal contracts, Marcellus Williams continued to work for the railroads. In February of 1871, David L. Yulee wrote to Stearns asking for his approval to have the salt marsh area near Fernandina surveyed by Williams on behalf of the railroad, which would assume the cost of this survey.[31] This extra work was useful in helping fend off creditors.

That Williams remained close to Samuel Swann and other railroad men can be seen in a letter of April 24, 1871. In this letter, M.A. Williams asks the Surveyor General to send his instructions to Swann, who would forward them to him at Indian River, where he was performing a survey for the state. At this point in time, he was again headed down the coast to survey the lands between Lake Worth and Jupiter Inlet.[32] The Lake Worth survey, according to Williams, would have been financially disastrous had it not been for the state work he did on the trip down the coast. He lost his boat, the greater part of his supplies, and nearly drowned because of a "hard blow" that forced him to beach his craft. To make matters worse, he had to pack the gear and supplies which remained into one of the worst sawgrass areas he had ever seen and face a hot south Florida sun, which forced him to abandon the work. Because of these problems, he had to request an extension of time on his contract and purchase two mules to complete the work in such difficult terrain.[33]

Marcellus Williams was not finished surveying in south Florida. In 1872, he received the contract to survey Key Largo and other islands in the northern Keys. Even this survey was delayed by a serious sickness in his family, which delayed the start of the survey by nearly twenty days. Williams left Fernandina in the first week of February of 1872 (not 1874 as his son has written). He finished his work on this difficult contract in mid-May of 1872 and wrote to M.L. Stearns: "I have gotten home quite exhausted, and wish for a few days rest. . . . I send you two pine apples gathered from My Survey, and will as Soon as I can get it Made Send you a walking cane made of Crab wood which was also cut upon My Survey."[34] Williams' survey of the upper Keys was not the most thorough of jobs. Years later, when the Florida East Coast Railway was extending across the Keys to Key West, the engineers of that marvelous feat found an "inland sea" which they called Lake Surprise because it was not on the Williams survey of Key Largo. In all fairness to Marcellus Williams, it should be noted that his notations of the upper Keys observe a vast amount of mangrove and buttonwood on the islands, which would be impossible for a crew of four (which is what he could get) to cut through to find an "inland sea" like Lake Surprise.

A change of Surveyor Generals,



A pineapple clearing on Key Largo, 1871.

Surveyors crossing the Everglades.

Stearns having become Lieutenant Governor under Governor Ossian Hart, did not bode well for Williams. On October 5, 1873, we find Williams soliciting the aid of General Horatio Jenkins, Jr., to intercede for him with the new Surveyor General, J.W. Gilbert. Jenkins, who was obviously well acquainted with Williams, had agreed to intercede and had written a glowing letter of recommendation on September 15, 1873, but this letter did not have the desired effect, hence the letter of October 5th. A second letter to William L. Apthorpe, Chief Clerk in the Surveyor General's Office seems to have gotten the correct response.[35] More important, however, was the enclosure to one of the Jenkins-Apthorpe correspondence. The telling enclosure was Marcellus Williams' "Rough Notes" on why the Everglades should be surveyed.[36] Because of the significance of these notes, both as description and prophecy, a large selection of them follows:

> The United States Surveys particularly on the Atlantic Coast have closed upon the Everglades except in a few instances where they penetrated a few miles into its borders.
>
> Under Act of Congress Sept. 28th 1850 all this region will inure to the State of Florida, but under the ruling of the Genl Land Office at Washington no patents are issued to the State until the land is Surveyed.
>
> Now with the present and increasing desire to engage in tropical productions, particularly in fruits and Sugar Cane, it becomes of paramount importance to the best interest of Florida, that this section of the country should be acquired in order that it may be utilized by grants from the State or otherwise in reclaiming this vast region, or at least partly so, and thus opening to profitable cultivation the only really tropical portion of the United States.
>
> That it can be at least partly reclaimed is beyond question. All of the many streams flowing from the Everglades have considerable fall at or near the drain of the same, indeed the fall in some instances is so considerable as to amount to almost a Cascade. By deepening these streams at the point from which they flow from the Everglades would let off an immense volume of water. It would in fact require comparatively no great amount of labour, and no very large expenditure of money to reclaim a large area of the richest Marsh (interspersed with hammock islands) in the State. To reclaim these lands and render them Cultivable would add immensely to the wealth of the State.
>
> The Everglades are fed chiefly from the valley of the Kissimmee, the waters from which Valley emptying into the great Okeechobee Lake, which lake at its South border overflows into the Everglades. It would be practicable and desirable to cut a Steam boat Canal from Okeechobee to navigation on the St. Lucie river, a distance of 20 miles, the effect of which would be to reclaim and render productive an immense area of the richest Sugar land in the State, and at the Same time give Steam boat Navigation for more than 100 miles up the Kissimmee river from the Okeechobee and give Steam boat navigation from the head of navigation on the Kissimmee, Down the same and through the Okeechobee and by canal into St. Lucie, which connects with Indian river and thence up Indian river to the St. Johns river near its mouth by the Hillsboro Halifax, San Sebastian, North river and Pablo would require Comparatively but little excavation to make the most attractive Steam boat route in the United States.
>
> To Survey parallel lines across the Everglades 6 miles or a Township apart, would give the topography Sufficiently accurate to establish the character of the country . . .[37]

Williams also asked that the survey be done at a higher rate per mile than that normally paid to surveyors because of the difficulty involved in such a territory. The difficulty he foresaw could not be denied; however, before he could get on with this arduous task, he was asked to survey more of the eastern Everglades.

In mid-July of 1874, Williams wrote the Surveyor General that he had, " . . . returned yesterday from the hardest and most expensive Survey that I ever had during more than 20 years experience." What had occurred in south Florida was one of the longest dry spells in nearly twenty years, and the surveyor had extreme difficulty in getting to the area to be measured. The canoes he had hired were of little use to him under the circumstances, and this meant walking and packing the equipment on the backs of his workers and himself. He began by trying to retrace the survey lines of John Jackson, an earlier deputy surveyor, and found the task very difficult because the water level was so low

as to preclude rapid work in the Everglades, where canoes were normally used. However, he persevered and completed most of the contracted lines in a few months. Still, the hard work seriously drained his energies and caused him some financial difficulties.[38] Not until September 26, 1874, a full two months after he had returned home to Fernandina, was he able to transmit his notes to the Surveyor General for inspection.[39]

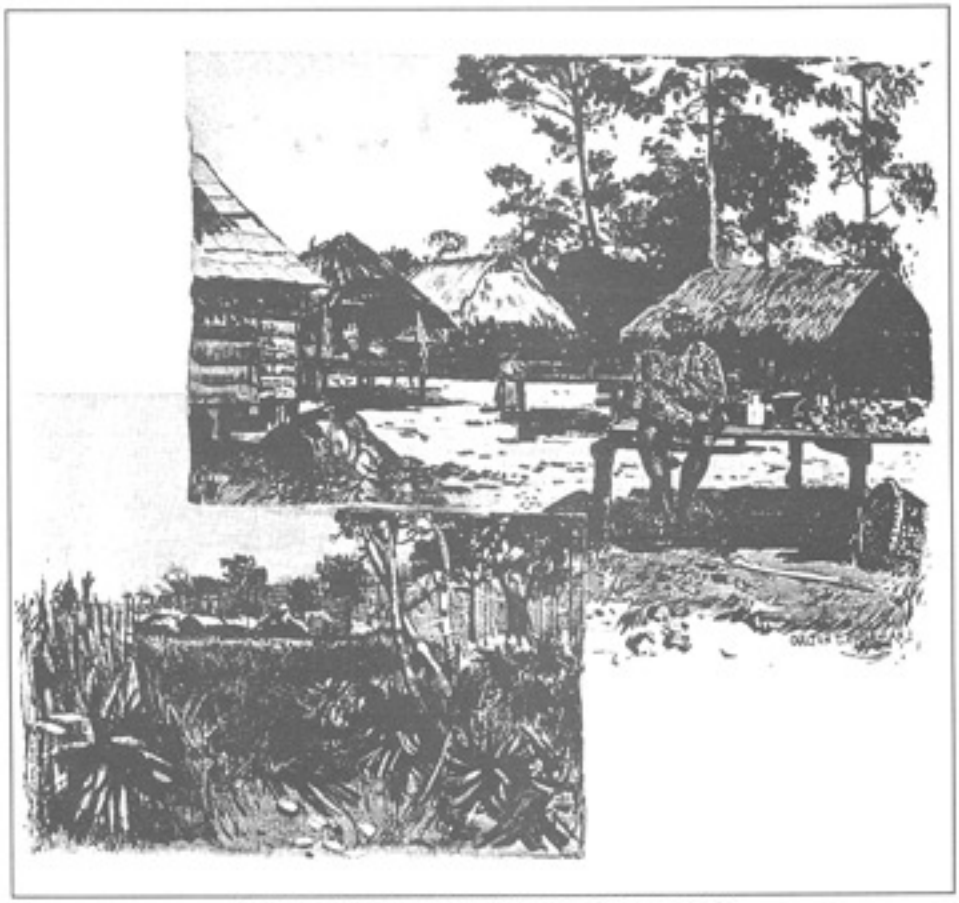
Horatio Jenkins joined Williams in his contract to survey the Everglades in early 1875. They would have started their survey earlier, had the Commissioner of the General Land Office in Washington authorized the project sooner than he did. The duo, therefore, had to request an extension of time on their contract until August 31, 1875, to complete their contracted work.[40] By July 17, they were reporting to the Surveyor General that they had completed the task and had run their lines to the islands in Charlotte Harbor, particularly Pine Island and Sanibel. However, "The parallel or connecting line between Townships 50 and 51 S. connecting the survey east of the Everglades was not done." They rationalized their action of not finishing this line by stating that the rainy season was approaching and that they had decided to "hasten to the Western borders, with a view of surveying this line first . . ."[41] Again, they found the territory too dry to use their canoes; indeed, the land was so dry that "A party of Miami Indians were detained on the West side being unable to cross."[42] The failure to run this line was the beginning of difficulties in aligning the township lines, a difficulty that is still apparent to the casual viewer of any Florida map depicting the area of the central Everglades.

On July 23, 1875, Williams and Jenkins wrote to Surveyor General LeRoy Ball that there were still enough significant unsurveyed areas in the Everglades and the surrounding islands to make more contracts worthwhile. They noted that the Everglades contained roughly 3,000,000 acres of land that may be made useful by competent drainage and that the islands along the west and southern coasts of Florida were potentially very productive. Their reasoning included the significant detail that many of the "Thousand Islands," including Cape Sable, were already being cultivated and were very productive. They further stated that this rich land was ". . . almost as Much unknown as Central Africa." Therefore, the duo argued that more work needed to be done in the area.[43] Of course, the surveyors most qualified and knowledgeable to do this work would be Williams and Jenkins.

One of the more agreeable aspects of the surveying of the Everglades, from Arthur Williams' point of view, was the renewal of friendship with Old Tiger Tail, whom the younger Williams noted, "seemed to have entirely gotten over his suspicion of us and was in our camp very frequently."[44]

This late survey, which commenced in the 1874-75 surveying season, was also the last survey on which both father and son worked as a team. By this time, the elder Williams had entered into the lucrative field of land sales with Samuel Swann, the former treasurer of the Florida Railroad, and Hugh Corley, the register and receiver of lands before and during the Civil War, always an active promoter of immigration, and later Commissioner for Land and Immigration for the State of Florida. The contacts with their old Seminole "friends" would soon mean little in the plans of Marcellus Williams, as one of his first moves in the land investment field was to apply to the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund for the right to sell lands south of the Caloosahatchee River which had not yet been patented to the state and were the center of Indian interests in southwest Florida.[45]

The firm of Williams, Swann and Corley was one of the principal actors on the stage of land sales, or attempted sales, in the State of Florida, then struggling with the injunction placed upon such sales by Francis Vose. Vose, who held the majority of the bonds for the defunct Florida Railroad and other failed, state-underwritten enterprises, had persuaded the courts to restrict the sale, granting, and purchase of lands by the State of Florida, through the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund. These injunctions were often at odds with the goals of the state in encouraging immigration into the unsettled portions of its lands, and the government tried various means to get Vose to cooperate. The firm of Williams, Swann and Corley was given the contract to work with Vose and try to sell as much of the state's lands as possible under the restrictions imposed by the courts. The major thrust of the firm's action was to sell as much land as possible, at prices sufficient to reduce or eliminate the debt certificates held by Francis Vose. The firm, having been appointed agents for the Trustees, had to report to the receiver, the noted lawyer Aristides Doggett, and to the Trustees all transactions and return to the receiver all monies collected from the sale of lands. After examination, a receipt would be given the firm for return to the state treasurer, who would then pay them from the Internal Improvement Fund account. The court ruling in the affairs of the Trustees initially allowed the firm to sell for prices that they, not the Trustees, considered fair market value, and the pro-



Indian village in the Everglades, c. 1893.

Arthur T. Williams, c. 1880s (photo courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society).

vision that the approval for such sales was in the hands of the court-appointed receiver meant that the Trustees had no control over lands of the state. This state of affairs led to another round of legal battles, with the firm of Williams, Swann and Corley in the middle of the in-fighting.[46] This complicated portion of Florida's history need not detain the story of Marcellus A. Williams, except to note that these legal battles took up much of the time and effort of the firm and delayed the expected profits from their ventures.

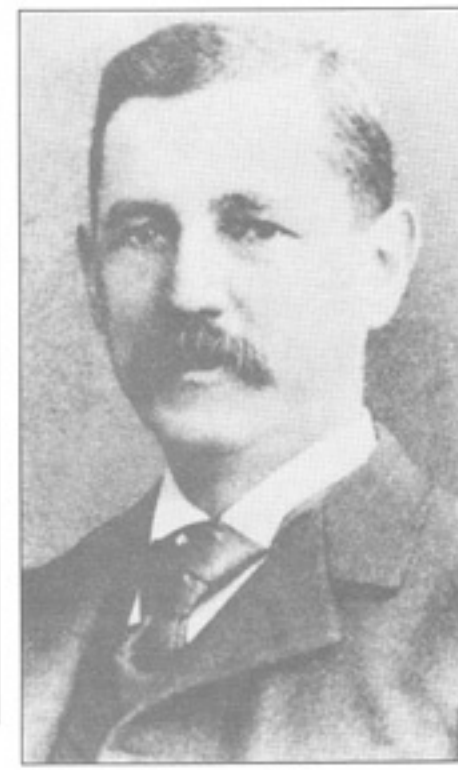
What is unique about Marcellus Williams' role in the affairs of the 1870s is his ability to be an active partner in a major land selling firm and, as noted above, conduct his business as a U.S. Deputy Surveyor. The melding of these roles is a remarkable fact and leaves Williams open, in modern judgement, to charges of conflict of interests. However, his career in the field of surveying allowed him to view, first hand, the lands known as swamp and overflowed and make judgements which no other person in the state could. That he used this knowledge to benefit his firm and the interests of the Trustees, as seen by the mores of his day, is very obvious. This, in the contemporary viewpoint, did not violate any sensibilities, as almost all of his work, both as a surveyor reporting to the Surveyor General and as a land agent, reporting to the court-appointed receiver and the Trustees themselves, was done in the open and was available for public inspection. Throughout the era, many other competitors attempted to underbid, outsell, and promise great changes which, they implied, the Williams, Swann and Corley firm could not bring about. The uncertain world of Reconstruction Florida politics was made even more uncertain by such attempted manipulations.

The firm went through many transformations during the 1870s and 1880s, including a number of name changes and shifting of the main partners. The only constant among the principals was Marcellus Williams. As an added incentive for the father, the son, Arthur T., joined the firm as a clerk in 1876, in the Jacksonville office of Williams and Corley (not Cauley, as written in the WPA typescript of Arthur Williams' "Incomplete Notes"). Young Arthur noted that he was entrusted with the task of collecting notes due to the firm in such frontier areas as Polk County and that most of the money taken in was "Spanish gold doubloons." Arthur worked for the firm until Marcellus Williams decided to close the Jacksonville office in 1881.[47]

The firm had been in the forefront of selecting swamp and overflowed lands for the state and had sold thousands of acres under various contracts with new settlers. During its existence, the various manifestations of Williams, Swann and Corley played an important role in trying to work out the problems of land settlement, the financial burden of the Vose decisions, and the attempts to return the Internal Improvement Fund to solvency. Only in the former were they partially successful. Even as late as 1886, the firm's letterhead boasted that it owned 370,000 acres of prime mid-Florida land. And they were still writing the Trustees, asking for that august body to remit payments due to the firm for contracts as old as 1873. As Marcellus Williams pointed out to the Trustees: "Nine years is a long time to await such decision — on an ordinary debt the interest would nearly double it."[48] The problems caused by the political nature of the Trustees meant that many of the firm's best efforts were unrewarded or rewarded in land which, in turn, had to be sold to realize a profit. Fortunately, Marcellus Williams' first hand knowledge of the lands of southern and central Florida allowed him to select wisely on behalf of the firm.

Williams also had an important role in the famed Disston sale, which freed the Internal Improvement Fund from the Vose injunctions and allowed the state to get back into the land-granting business. The Disston sale, as most are aware, was the purchase of 4,000,000 acres of swamp and overflowed lands for the price of twenty-five cents per acre. Within four months of this sale, Hamilton Disston sold half of this land to a syndicate headed by Sir Edward James Reed, a name which appears on thousands of south Florida abstracts. Reed hired Marcellus Williams to make many of his selections, which would amount to 2,000,000 acres. Hugh Corley, it will be noted, was also hired by Reed to manage his sales office, and Corley hired Arthur T. Williams as his clerk, thus reuniting the old firm one more time. This arrangement lasted for about a year, at which time Corley resigned and Arthur Williams was appointed in his place. Thus, the Williams family played an inconspicuous, but highly important, role in the settlement of south Florida as the selecting agent and sales manager of the Reed interests in Florida.[49]

Marcellus A. Williams passed from this world on July 2, 1888. In his will, he left two lots and buildings in Fernandina to his family, and the remainder of his estate, which was unspecified in the probate records, was to be divided equally among the surviving family members. His sons Arthur T. and Herbert P. were named executors, and his wife, Emma, was the principal beneficiary. Named in the will are Arthur T., Herbert P., Marcellus A. and Edwin R., the sons, and daughters



Hamilton Disston

Kate, Emma, and Fannie, along with his wife, Emma.[50] In a not too uncommon confusion, the 1870 census listed his wife's name as Anna (aged thirty-four) and included another daughter named Sally, not named in the will.[51] No solution to this little mystery will be offered here, except to note that, as modern experience has recently taught us, census records are not always the most accurate documents.

As a minor player on the Florida stage, Marcellus A. Williams had an important impact on the development of south Florida, especially Broward County. His surveys and descriptions of the land constituting most of the county are still the basis of almost all property holdings in Broward. His promotional ability led to the settlement of some of the areas of the county. Williams' ties to the Reed interests definitely had an impact on the peopling of the region. Finally, through the many important contacts he had, Yulee, Swann, Corley, Reed, etc., his role as a non-resident promotor of south Florida can hardly be denied. Marcellus Williams may have been a minor character in the grand play of Florida history, but his connections make him more significant than many more well known pioneers.

Notes

1. The census of 1870 notes Marcellus A. Williams as being fifty-two years of age at that time (Page 400, Nassau County, Florida Census). It also states that he was from North Carolina. Arthur T. Williams, in his "Incomplete Notes," (WPA Transcript, State Library of Florida) writes that he, Arthur, was born in Palatka in 1857, the second child of the family (page 1). The census is available at the Florida State Archives, Department of State, Tallahassee, Florida. The author would like to thank Mr. Chris Myers of the Florida State Archives staff for his assistance in obtaining the census and probate records used in this article.
2. Letter of April 25, 1849, A.M. Randolph to B.A. Putnam, Surveyor General, Applications for Employment, Volume 2: 1845-56, Land Records and Title Section, Department of Natural Resources, Tallahassee, Florida, 193.
3. *Ibid.*, 197.
4. Letters and Reports to Surveyor General, Volume 2: 1848-56, 865-66, Land Records and Title Section, Department of Natural Resources, Tallahassee, Florida (Hereafter L & R, vol. # and page #).
5. *Ibid.*, 873-79.
6. *Ibid.*, 869-70.
7. *Ibid.*, 873-79.
8. Brenda J. Elliott, "Aaron Jernigan: Alleged Frontier Vigilante," *Proceedings of the 90th Annual Meeting of the Florida Historical Society* (Tampa: Florida Historical Society, 1993), 121-34; L & R, 2, 873-79.
9. L & R, 2, 873-79.
10. *Ibid.*, 885.
11. *Ibid.*, 899.
12. Joe Knetsch, "A Surveyor's Life: John Jackson in South Florida," *Sunland Tribune*, 13 (November 1992), 3-8; Knetsch, "The Forgotten Pioneer: Florida's Land Surveyors as Pioneers," *Plumb Lines*, Florida Society of Professional Land Surveyors (July 1991), 11-18; Knetsch, "False and Uninformed Charges: The South Florida Surveys of Sam Reid," *Florida Surveyor*, 1(February 1993) 3-6.
13. Miscellaneous Letters to Surveyor General, Volume 2: 1849-56, 1079, Land Records and Title Section, Department of Natural Resources, Tallahassee, Florida (Hereafter, MLSG, vol. #, P. #).
14. Drawer: U.S. Deputy Surveyors N-Z, File: U.S. Deputy Surveyor, M.A. Williams, Contracts and Bonds, Land Records and Title Section, Department of Natural Resources, Tallahassee, Florida.
15. Arthur T. Williams, "Incomplete Notes" 1.
16. MLSG, 3, 409.
17. Williams, "Incomplete Notes," 1.
18. MLSG, 4, 62.
19. Williams, "Incomplete Notes," 6.
20. Arthur T. Williams, *Memories* (privately printed, c. 1928-30), 5-7.
21. Williams, "Incomplete Notes," 7.
22. Williams, *Memories*, 13.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Williams, "Incomplete Notes," 8.
25. Williams, *Memories*, 14.
26. Williams, "Incomplete Notes," 8-9.
27. *Ibid.*, 9.
28. *Ibid.*, 10.
29. MLSG, 4, 91.
30. *Ibid.*, 108.
31. *Ibid.*, 113.
32. *Ibid.*, 127.
33. *Ibid.*, 136.
34. *Ibid.*, 166.
35. *Ibid.*, 225-230.
36. *Ibid.*, 233.
37. *Ibid*; The remainder of the Rough Notes concern mostly surveying matters, including a recommended rate of $12 per mile.
38. *Ibid.*, 273.
39. *Ibid.*
40. MLSG, 5, 18.
41. *Ibid.*, 30.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, 34.
44. Williams, *Memories*, 19.
45. *Minutes of the Board of Trustees Internal Improvement Fund*, Volume 2 (Tallahassee: T.B. Hilson, 1904), 82.
46. *Ibid.*, 50-58.
47. Williams, "Incomplete Notes," 18-19.
48. Letter of February 1, 1886, Marcellus Williams to Trustees, Miscellaneous Box (broken) "Salesmen Certificates," Land Records and Title Section, Department of Natural Resources, Tallahassee, Florida.
49. Williams, "Incomplete Notes," 19-20.
50. Probate Record, July 23, 1888, Nassau County, Book 1, 142-43 (Microfilm: Florida State Archives, Department of State, Tallahassee, Florida).
51. 1870 Census, Nassau County, 400.