

Legends

OF EARLY BROWARD

by RODNEY E. DILLON, JR.

Until relatively recently, accounts of Broward County's early history were as likely to be composed of tall tales as they were of facts. In the early decades of the twentieth century, as the first attempts to recount the region's history were being made, difficulties in recovering reliable sources, combined with the natural human inclination to embellish facts, laid the foundations for a complicated web of myth and legend. Although many entertaining stories of early Broward were unable to stand up against the scrutiny of recent scholarship,

most have never been laid to rest entirely.

Because of their impact on Broward County's perception of its past, these legends have attained a historic stature of their own. In "Legends of Early Broward," Rodney E. Dillon, special projects coordinator for the Historical Commission, examines several of Broward's most powerful legends and traces their origins, development, and ultimate unraveling. The sources used in this study are on file in the Historical Commission archives.

Numerous accounts of Broward County's history begin by recounting the "Wonderful Legend of New River." According to this colorful tale, Fort Lauderdale's historic river burst forth overnight, in the midst of a violent thunderstorm and earthquake which terrified the primitive Indians of the region. While clearly labeling the story a Seminole legend, the authors of these "histories" asserted that it could have had a sound basis in fact. An earthquake, they claimed, could have collapsed a limestone formation, freeing an underground river. Even the river's name, said to be an English translation of the Seminole "Himmarsee," or "new water," seemed to give the legend at least partial validity.¹

Naturally, such explanations do not take into account the considerable geologic age of the river's channel, or the fact that the name "New River" appeared on maps as early as the seventeenth century, over one hundred years before the first Seminoles reached south Florida. A number of theories have been advanced to explain the origins of the legend. Prehistoric Indi-

ans could have witnessed a cataclysmic change in the river's course, and their recollections could have been passed down through successive waves of inhabitants in southern Florida. More likely, the story originated in Seminole folklore or in an early white settler's vivid imagination. Rather than deriving from "Himmarsee," itself a word of questionable origin, the New River appears to take its name from its frequently shifting inlet.² Regardless of its original source, the story of the river's miraculous appearance has become a genuine twentieth century legend, reprinted with minor variations in a number of newspaper articles, pamphlets, and books, passed along by word of mouth, and, in many cases, accepted as fact.³

The "Wonderful Legend of New River" is only one of several legends to become imbedded in accounts of Broward's past. Based upon the few facts readily available at the time, and filled out with large doses of assumption and imagination, they first appeared in print in the early decades of the twentieth century, as the county emerged

from its struggling pioneer origins. The drama, romance, and seemingly irrefutable logic of these historical legends carried wide appeal, both for boosters attempting to imbue the region with a sense of mystery and antiquity and for residents seeking to discover a heritage in a newly-developed land. Ironically, rather than revealing the past, the legendary accounts often obscured much of the county's genuine history. Only in recent decades have historians been able to separate fact from fiction, and lay to rest some of Broward's most enduring historical tales.

The first non-Indian settlement on Florida's southeastern coast flourished on New River in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This same period witnessed the arrival of the first small bands of displaced Creeks and related Indians collectively known as Seminoles as they moved down the peninsula from northern Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. It was the destruction of the New River Settlement by a Seminole attack on the Cooley family that spawned one of the most complicated mix-ups, and some of the most

persistent legends, in Broward's history.⁴

The facts of the Cooley Massacre are simple enough. William Cooley, a coontie starch manufacturer, ship salvor, wilderness guide, and justice of the peace, was the acknowledged leader of the New River Settlement. A Maryland native, he had moved south from Alligator Pond, near present-day Lake City

about 1824, and made his home on the north bank of New River, in the vicinity of today's 4th-7th Avenue bridge, with his wife and children. About noon on January 6, 1836, while Cooley and other men from the settlement were salvaging the wrecked Spanish brig *Gil Blas* at Hillsboro Inlet, a band of Indians descended upon his homestead and killed his wife, his three children, and the children's tutor. Their apparent motive was Cooley's failure, in his capacity as justice of the peace, to secure the conviction of white men who had murdered their old chief Alibama. As word of the massacre spread, the terror-stricken settlers gathered a few of their possessions and fled to Cape Florida.⁵ The Cooley Massacre was one of a series of attacks on white settlers and armed forces throughout the state at the beginning of the Second Seminole War, and was recorded in military and civil records, in newspapers, and in personal accounts and letters. It is perhaps significant, perhaps coincidental, in light of subsequent developments, that one of these accounts, written by twelve-year-old Edmund Kirby Smith, later a famous Confederate gen-

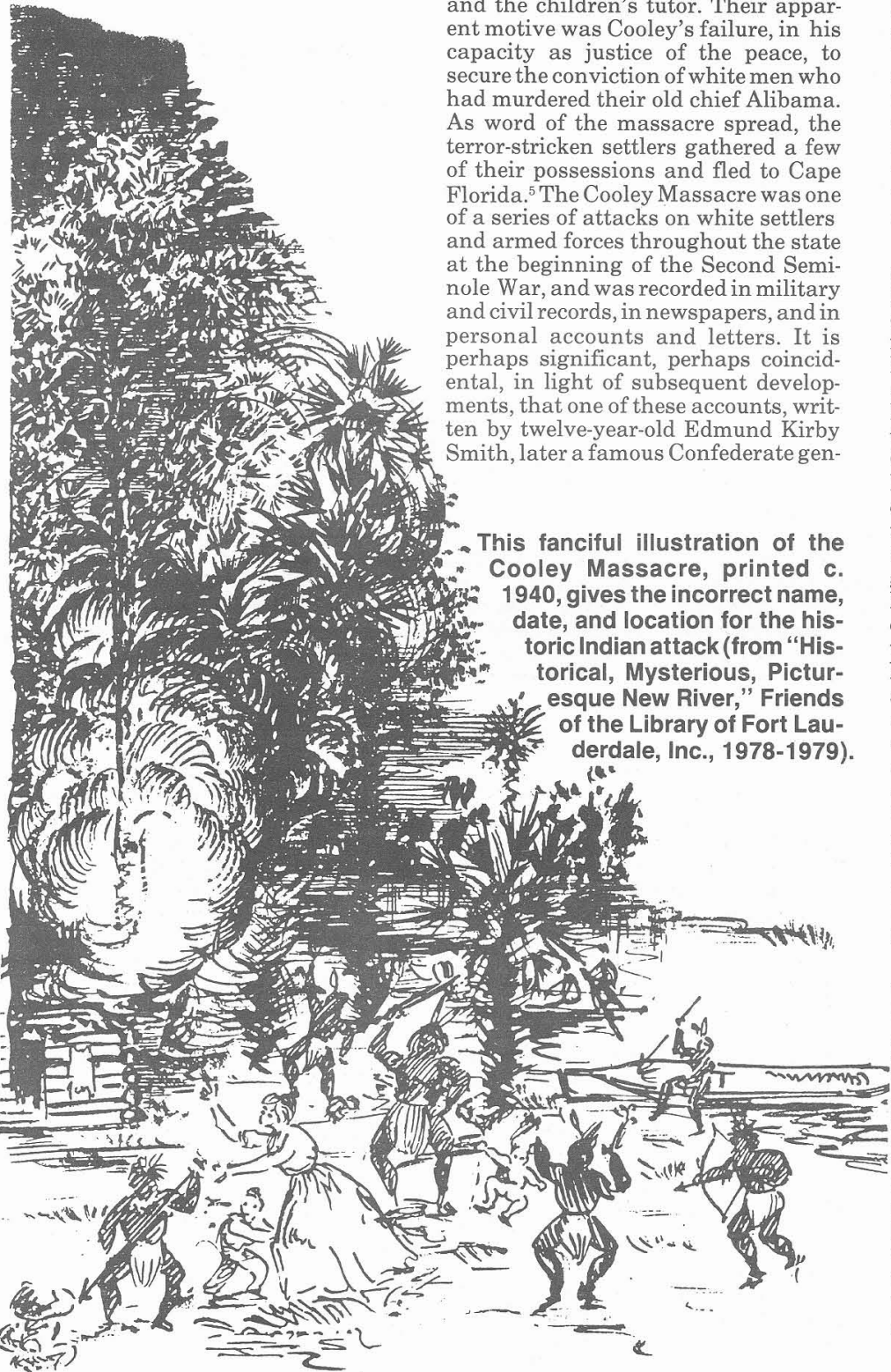
eral, spelled the name of the doomed family "Coley."⁶

The Second Seminole War, and the Third Seminole War and Civil War which followed, delayed south Florida's development for decades. In 1879, the State of Florida chartered the Florida East Coast Canal and Transportation Company to connect the chain of lakes, marshes, and lagoons immediately to the west of the Atlantic beach ridge into a single, navigable, inland waterway. Although beset by technical and financial difficulties, work on the canal proceeded through the remainder of the nineteenth century. The section through what is today Broward County was completed in 1895, and the entire waterway, from Jacksonville to Biscayne Bay, opened in 1911.⁷

The civil engineer in charge of canal construction was James Louis Colee of St. Augustine, member of an old and distinguished northeast Florida family. Colee was a familiar figure in the Fort Lauderdale area. He was an acquaintance of William and Mary Brickell, who, in the 1890s, owned large tracts of land on New River. In 1891, Colee purchased property adjoining the Brickells', and in 1895, when the town of Fort Lauderdale was platted, a street was named Colee Avenue in his honor.⁸ Several writers have also suggested that Colee, while dredging the East Coast Canal, established a work camp at the Tarpon Bend hammock which now bears his name. Located on high, dry ground, shaded by oak trees, and overlooking New River, Colee Hammock, which was owned by the Brickells in the 1880s and 1890s, would have made an excellent base camp for canalmen working in the mangrove marshes to the east. However it received its name, the hammock was known as Colee Hammock by the early twentieth century, and the name became official when the property was platted as a park and a residential subdivision.⁹

Whether or not James Colee had any knowledge of the Cooley Massacre is unknown, but Frank Stranahan, who arrived on New River to operate a ferry in January 1893, and camped at Colee Hammock, wrote his brother soon after his arrival, "You will probably see quite an article in the *Tropical Sun* this week don't let it scare you out on account of a family being murdered on this campground in 1825." Unfortunately, the original *Tropical Sun* article to which Stranahan referred, and which might help clarify the confusion between the names of Cooley and Colee, has not been found.¹⁰

This fanciful illustration of the Cooley Massacre, printed c. 1940, gives the incorrect name, date, and location for the historic Indian attack (from "Historical, Mysterious, Picturesque New River," Friends of the Library of Fort Lauderdale, Inc., 1978-1979).



COLEE MASSACRE BY THE SEMINOLE INDIANS AT TARPON BEND 1842

Sometime during the early decades of the twentieth century it became firmly implanted in the minds of Fort Lauderdale residents that the almost century-old Indian massacre had taken place at Colee Hammock, and that the victims of the attack had been named Colee. A 1923 newspaper article entitled "Facts in History of Seminole Indians" placed the massacre at the hammock, but spelled the family's name "Coolie" and correctly stated that the attack took place at the beginning of the Seminole War. While writing during the 1920s and 1930s about his late nineteenth century experiences in south Florida, Charles W. Pierce, who had explored New River in 1883, recalled passing "a large dense hammock on the north bank . . . known as the 'Coulee hammock,' noted for the massacre of the Coulee family here by the Seminoles about 1837." Pierce does not state whether Colee or "Coulee" Hammock was known by that name when he saw it in 1883 or not.¹¹

Unsubstantiated testimony by descendants of the Colee family only added to the plausibility of the legend.

Canal constructor James L. Colee had died in 1912, but family members testified that his father, George, had indeed been a veteran of the Second Seminole War, and had received an eighty-acre land grant from the federal government for his service "in the war of 1835," in which he had lost his left eye. Furthermore, George Colee and his family had left their home at Picolata on the St. Johns River in 1837, after one of their children contracted typhoid fever. When they returned the following year, "they spoke of Indians they had encountered near a great lake."¹²

As Fort Lauderdale history buffs and representatives of the Colee family pooled their information and speculation, the legend grew. In early 1934, city officials decided to commemorate the Indian attack by dedicating Colee Hammock Park as a historic site and erecting a monument to the Colee family who were supposedly massacred there. The Himmarshee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution joined the effort, and provided a plaque bearing the inscription:

This Monument Marks Site
Of the Historical

COLEE MASSACRE

Which effectually destroyed
the earliest known white
settlement on New River in a
surprise attack by Indians
following Seminole Indian War
1842¹³

The dedication ceremony on March 16, 1934, was attended by Fort Lauderdale Mayor Ed Pynchon, former Illinois state senator H. C. Kessinger, and representatives of the Colee family, including Harold W. Colee of Jacksonville, executive manager of Florida Motor Lines (now part of the Greyhound Bus Company) and director of the Florida State Chamber of Commerce. Also present were a large delegation from the D.A.R., which had just completed its annual state convention in Miami, and a contingent of Seminoles, led by Special Commissioner James L. Glenn. All city offices were closed for the day.¹⁴

Speeches given by the various dignitaries that day presented the legend as it had finally evolved. George Colee, the story said, brought his family to south Florida from Picolata in 1837, after his son William became ill with typhoid fever. His settlement on a choice New River hammock, where the Seminoles had formerly planted vegetables, had forced the Indians into the Everglades, and instilled in them deep resentment against the white man. In 1842, Colee and his oldest son, James L., set off for Key West to purchase supplies. While they were gone, the Seminoles attacked, killing the remaining members of the family and burning their home to the ground. George returned to Picolata with his son, where "he founded a family widely known in St. Johns, Duval and Volusia Counties."¹⁵

In the years following the dedication of the marker, elements of the true story of the Cooley Massacre continued to surface, raising questions as to the accuracy of the widely accepted legend. As early as 1938, State Librarian W. T. Cash refuted the post-Seminole War date assigned to the massacre in various legendary accounts. In his book *The Story of Florida*, Cash cited M. M. Cohen's 1836 volume, *Notices of Florida & the Campaigns*, to prove that the massacre took place on January 6 of that year. Although he acknowledged that Cohen spelled the name "Cooley," Cash maintained that the family killed was that of George Colee.¹⁶

Despite irrefutable evidence to the contrary, a number of popular histories printed in booklet form and in newspaper articles during the 1940s con-



Marker which stood in Colee Hammock Park from 1934 to 1971 (courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society).

tinued to claim 1842 as the massacre date. Several of these accounts asserted that the massacre was carried out by a band of Seminoles led by the infamous chief Arpieka or "Sam Jones." In reality, Sam Jones and his followers did not arrive in the vicinity of New River until nearly two years after the attack on the Cooley family.¹⁷

Prodded by historically-interested individuals, the City of Fort Lauderdale decided, in the mid-1950s, to address the issue of the massacre date. As a result, the inaccurate marker in Colee Hammock Park was rededicated, although it was not corrected or replaced. The rededication ceremony took place on November 16, 1958, and featured speeches by Harold W. Colee, Mayor John V. Russell, Seminole minister Billy Osceola, local historian August Burghard, and others.¹⁸ Ernest G. Gearhart, Jr., president of the Historical Association of Southern Florida, gave the main address, stating:

Unfortunately, the facts surrounding the settlement of the Colee Family at New River and the Indian attack that subsequently took place are rather obscure. As is so often the case, it is difficult to separate fact from legend.

That an Indian attack on a white settlement at New River did take place on January 6, 1836, has been fairly well established. In fact, there is little doubt that this was part of a general uprising that was triggered by the Dade Massacre just a few days before — on December 28, 1835 — which marked the beginning of the Second Seminole War.

It is also known that a family of similar name was living on the north side of the New River at that time. However, according to at least one account, the name of the family was pronounced "Cool-ey." Here, our story gains credence from the fact that in later years many members of the Colee family in St. Augustine pronounced the family name "Cool-ey."¹⁹

The rededication of the Colee monument proved to be the last major public affirmation of the Colee Massacre myth. Within a year, the myth would be exploded, and the even more incredible true story of William Cooley would begin to unravel. The man responsible for rediscovering Cooley and bringing him to public attention was Wesley W. Stout, former editor of the *Saturday Evening Post*, Fort Lauderdale resident, and persistent amateur historian. Wading through long-forgotten old newspapers and documents, Stout glean-

ed nuggets of Broward and Florida history, which he published in his popular daily *Fort Lauderdale News* column, "The Beachcomber."²⁰

Stout first encountered Cooley's name in James Gadsden's account of his survey for a military road down the east coast from St. Augustine to Biscayne Bay in 1825. Gadsden reported finding "a Mr. Cooley and Williams" at New River. Stout, like previous researchers, at first assumed that the reference was to George Colee. "The Colees then pronounced the name Cooley," he explained, "usually so spelled." The breakthrough came in 1959, when Stout received photostatic copies of the 1830 Florida census schedules. These records plainly showed George Colee living in St. Johns County and David Williams and William Cooley living side by side in Monroe County, of which the New River Settlement was then a part.²¹

In succeeding years, additional research verified and enlarged upon Stout's findings. August Burghard and Philip Weidling's history of Fort Lauderdale, *Checkered Sunshine*, published in 1966, presented a factual account of the massacre. In their research for the book, Burghard, Weidling, and the staff of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society located additional documentation of the Cooley family and their deaths on the New River, including contemporary accounts from the *Key West Inquirer* and *Charleston Courier*, reminiscences of early New River settlers Mary Rigby and Stephen R. Mallory, and Cooley's own petition for compensation from the United States government, filed in 1840.²²

The publication of these facts did not erase all traces of the Colee legend. In 1961, for instance, an article in the *Fort Lauderdale News and Sun-Sentinel* argued that "Even after the Seminole War, Indian attacks continued," and cited the nonexistent postwar "Colee Massacre."²³ Apparently, some members of the Colee family were unconvinced as well. Old George Colee's grandson, Samuel J. Colee, published a small genealogical booklet entitled *George Colee—His Record* in 1967. According to this version of the story, it was George, and not his son James, who had established a work camp on New River while constructing the Intra-coastal Waterway (although, in reality, the canal company was not chartered until two years after George's death).

According to this account:

While living there he was attacked by the Indians of South Florida but was not killed there as has been stated in later years. During the fight with the Indians

George Colee lost his right eye. After this the Colee family went back to the home at Picolata, where they raised a family of four boys."²⁴

Although acknowledging that it was William Cooley's family which had been massacred at New River, Florence Hardy, president of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society, in 1971 echoed Samuel Colee's account, when she reported that "History has shown that George Colee, an ancestor of Harold Colee and a civil engineer, established a work camp in Fort Lauderdale at the time they were building the East Coast Canal."²⁵

By 1970, despite the annoying recurrence of the George Colee story, the facts were sufficiently established for the City of Fort Lauderdale to consider correcting the marker in Colee Hammock Park. The new plaque, dedicated by the city and the Daughters of the American Revolution in April 1971, read:

COOLEY MASSACRE

This monument marks the site of the earliest white settlement on New River, that of the Lewis family in the 18th century, and that of the Cooley Massacre of Jan. 6, 1836, when members of William Cooley's family were murdered in a surprise attack by the Indians at the onset of the Second Seminole War

Erected by the Daughters of the American Revolution and the City of Fort Lauderdale

1971

To complement the new marker, the park itself was renamed "Cooley Hammock Park."²⁶

The revised marker carried the correct date and name of the New River Indian massacre for posterity, but its continued location in Cooley Hammock Park itself perpetuated a historical error. Contemporary accounts of the massacre consistently describe its location as being further west, closer to the river's forks, although the hammock site had been associated with the massacre at least as far back as Frank Stranahan's arrival. The Cooley-Colee confusion aside, the high, densely-wooded hammock would have made an excellent home and farm site, and was, in fact, part of the land granted to Cooley's predecessor, Frankee Lewis, by the Donation Act of 1824, although documentary evidence indicates that the Lewis family also lived farther west.²⁷ Furthermore, accounts of the massacre written by military men during the 1830s explain the location of the

Cooley homestead in relation to the first Fort Lauderdale, a site which was itself frequently confused with the two other Fort Lauderdals constructed during the war, one of which was located at Tarpon Bend.²⁸

In the early and mid-1970s, Broward County Historian Cooper Kirk conducted extensive research on the life and career of William Cooley. His findings, published as "William Cooley: Broward's Legend," in volume I of *Broward Legacy*, not only detailed Cooley's remarkable career as lawman, manufacturer, explorer, sailor, and guide, but also established the location of his homestead near today's 4th-7th Avenue bridge in Fort Lauderdale. To support this contention, Kirk cited the diaries of Lieutenant Robert Anderson and Surgeon Jacob Rhett Motte, both stationed at the first Fort Lauderdale, and an 1838 letter from Anderson to Brigadier General Abraham Eustis, all of which placed the Cooley residence near the fort at the "windings" or forks of New River.²⁹

The reason that many early accounts of the Colee Massacre legend insisted on the post-war date of 1842 was apparently to accommodate another legend, the tale of "Crop-Ear Charlie." According to this story, Charlie was a young Indian who had befriended the

Colee family and had attempted to warn them on the night the massacre was to take place. His efforts were in vain, and as punishment for betraying his fellow Seminoles his ears were cropped and he was banished from the tribe, condemned to wander up and down the southeast Florida coast until his death in 1922 at the age of nearly 100. "We are here," Harold Colee was fond of saying, "because of the Grace of God and a 'Friendly Indian.'"³⁰

Picturesque as this story is, it is yet another element in the mythology which grew around the Cooley Massacre. In 1918, the actual year of Charlie's death, Lake Worth pioneer Charles W. Pierce wrote Frank Stranahan from Boynton Beach, and reported the true story of the outcast Indian.

Just saw in the paper that my old Seminole friend Charlie Tiger is dead and that you buried him, but the story about his cropped ear is dead wrong . . .

Some years before we came to Florida, which was in the latter part of the summer of 1872, a man was turkey hunting a few miles south of New Smyrna. Just as he was about to shoot a turkey, an Indian rose up in front of him and killed the turkey. The man at once killed the Indian and left the coun-

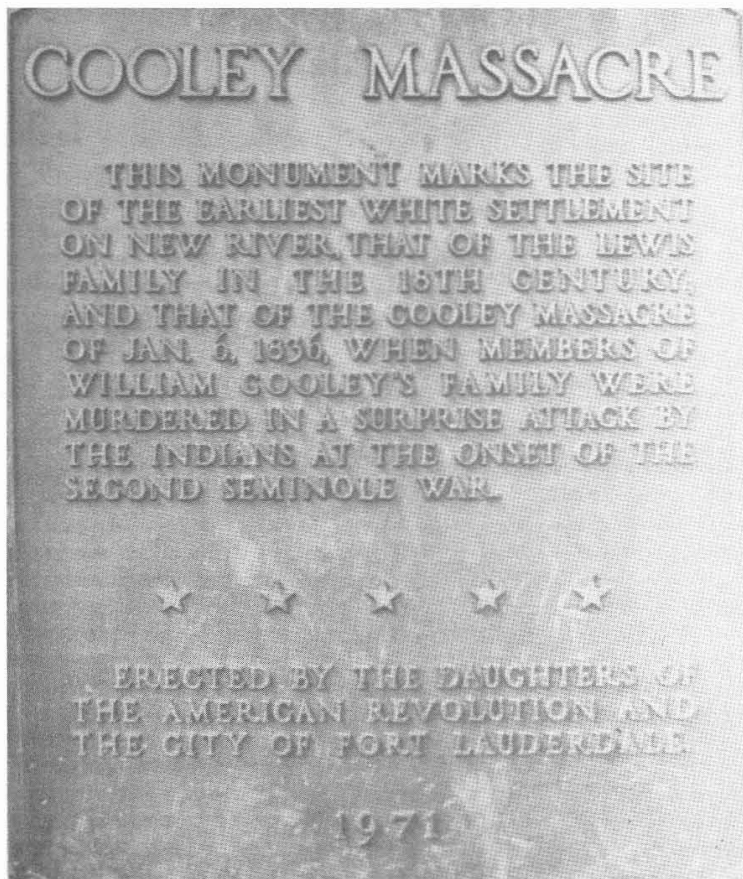
*try a few days later. Not long after that a man named Shives with his wife and daughter moved into the same house this man had left. The Indians finding out how the Indian had been killed, made up a party to avenge his death and Big Tommy was one of that party. They killed the whole Shives family, but no one knew at the time what Indians were in the party."*³¹

Pierce went on to say that in 1872, a group of Indians had come to Jupiter, where the Pierce family then lived, to salvage a shipwreck. They became drunk on bitters from the wreck, and, while in this condition, Charlie Tiger told two white men that Big Tommy had been one of the group that had killed the Shives family. Frightened that the white men would report Big Tommy's involvement to the authorities, the Seminoles cropped Charlie's ear and banished him to the Everglades for one year.³²

In some stories, the Indian who supposedly warned the Colees was punished by being forced to wear a short shirt or woman's dress, a circumstance which gave him the nickname "Shirt-tail Charlie."³³ Actually, Shirttail Charlie and Crop-Ear Charlie were two distinct individuals. Shirttail Charlie, whose real name was Charlie Tommie, was a familiar character on the streets of Fort Lauderdale in the early twentieth century. Some stories related that he was forced to wear shirttails and banished from the tribe because he had beaten or killed his wife. Ivy Stranahan, who worked closely with the Seminoles for over seventy years, denied these charges, stating that Charlie's wife had died of natural causes, and had been buried by Ivy's husband, Frank Stranahan. According to Mrs. Stranahan, Charlie was treated as an outcast because he was a drunkard, "a victim of liquor and the softening influences of the white man's civilization."³⁴

Apparently, Charlie was not completely banished. His obituary reveals that he died in 1925 at the Seminole village west of Fort Lauderdale, and was buried in a Seminole burial ground by three other Indians. Since he was only sixty years old at the time of his death, it is evident that he had no connection with the Cooley Massacre, which took place approximately thirty years before his birth.³⁵

Charlie's "shirttails" also appear to be the subject of legend, since photographs and descriptions of Seminoles at the turn of the century show the dress-like "longshirt" to be the traditional costume of Indian men. Perhaps Charlie's was considered unusual because it was shorter than most, or



Corrected marker which was erected in Colee Hammock Park in 1971.

because he persisted in wearing it after most Seminole men had switched to the white man's shirt and trousers.³⁶

Fully as obscured by legend in early accounts of Broward County's past as the Cooley Massacre was the history of the establishment of Fort Lauderdale and the identity of its first commander. Official army records, as well as contemporary newspapers, diaries, letters, and maps, confirm that three separate fortifications constructed on or near the New River at different times during the Second Seminole War bore the name Fort Lauderdale.³⁷ The first was constructed at the forks of the river in March 1838 by a combined force of United States artillerymen and Tennessee Volunteers, who had marched south from Fort Jupiter, carving the "Military Trail" along the inland pine ridge. The fort was named after the expedition's commander, Major William Lauderdale of Sumner County, Tennessee, a veteran Indian fighter and friend of former president Andrew Jackson. This outpost was abandoned after being occupied for a little over two months. On May 11, 1838, on his journey back to Tennessee, Major Lauderdale died in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, as the result of a respiratory ailment which had plagued him at least since leaving Fort Lauderdale.³⁸

In February 1839, the army returned to the New River area and constructed a second Fort Lauderdale on the north bank of the New River at Tarpon Bend. During the spring and summer, soldiers stationed at this second fort erected a third, more permanent, Fort Lauderdale on the beach, near the present site of the Bahia Mar Hotel and Yachting Center. General Zachary Taylor, commanding all army forces in Florida, ordered the third fort constructed on the beach to protect shipwreck survivors from Indian attacks. This fort was occupied as early as May 1839, although it was not completed until late September. It was garrisoned continually until February 1842, near the close of the war.³⁹

From the time that Major Lauderdale arrived at New River, his name was indelibly stamped on the area. Even after the last troops left the outpost on the beach, the name Fort Lauderdale, printed on a number of maps, both for military and civilian use, became synonymous with the New River region.⁴⁰ The house of refuge constructed in 1876 on the beach, at what is today Hugh Taylor Birch State Park, by the United States Life Saving Service was commonly referred to as the "Fort Lauderdale Station." The name was retained when the station was moved down the beach, to the site of the third fort, in 1891. The post office established at the

house of refuge that same year was also designated Fort Lauderdale. The name, as well as the post office, moved up river in 1892, when a county road was completed from Lantana to Lemon City, a road that crossed New River by ferry, and the Bay Biscayne Stage Line took the mail contract away from the famous "Barefoot Mailmen." In 1895, when Frank Stranahan, who had operated the ferry and post office for two years, opened a trading post at the ferry site, it, too, was called Fort Lauderdale. Early photographs show that name prominently displayed on the front of the building.⁴¹

The name was not all that remained of the old fort as settlers began trickling into the area in the 1890s. Traveling the stage route between Lantana and Lemon City in 1893, a correspondent for the *Titusville Advocate* wrote, "The name of this coming town of southern Dade ought to be 'Lauderdale' in honor of the old fort by that name, the ruins of which are visited with so much interest."⁴² Some ruins of the third fort were still in evidence as late as 1906, when young James Vreeland, son of the new keeper of the house of refuge, collected an assortment of Seminole War musket balls, buckshot, pottery, and flint there.⁴³

The legends that for years clouded the true identity of William Lauderdale began about 1905—in February of that year, according to one account—when a yacht carrying a group of wealthy Palm Beach residents anchored near the Fort Lauderdale House of Refuge. On board was Gwendoline Maitland, Countess of Lauderdale. The countess, wife of the fourteenth earl of Lauderdale, was a frequent visitor to the United States, and kept a winter home, "Villa Azura," at Palm Beach. According to a widely repeated story, which may itself be part of the legend, the Countess, "not knowing the name of the port . . . sought information from a Negro on shore. 'Fort Lauderdale, ma'am,' he replied. Astounded, the Countess thought she was the victim of a joke until she was shown a remaining corner of the old log fort."⁴⁴

Regardless of how the Countess actually discovered Fort Lauderdale, she was evidently delighted to find a town on the Florida coast bearing her family name. The people of Fort Lauderdale proved to be equally impressed with this "royal connection," particularly once the Florida land boom was underway, and such romantic tales and the publicity they generated could be easily translated into dollars.

Coincidence, as well as wishful imagination and calculated promotion, played a significant part in the growth of the Lauderdale legend. Major William

Lauderdale, genealogy buffs claim, was a descendant of a branch of the same family which produced the countess's husband, although the relationship was so distant that the Virginia-born major may have been completely unaware of it. Another descendant of the same Scottish family was army Captain William Seton Maitland, a native of New York City, who came to Florida with the Third Artillery in 1835. Severely wounded at the Battle of Wahoo Swamp in November 1836, Maitland took his own life the following August by jumping from a steamer en route from Savannah to Charleston. Fort Maitland in central Florida, and the city of Maitland, which now occupies the fort site, were named in his honor.⁴⁵

Although William Lauderdale and William Maitland had served together at Wahoo Swamp, there is no evidence that they regarded each other as kinsmen. Yet, from the perspective of over a century, the number of similarities between them is striking enough that confusion seems entirely understandable. Both were officers in the "Florida War," both had the same first name, and surnames derived from the same Scottish forebears, neither survived the war, and both left forts, and eventually cities, in Florida named for them.

The Countess of Lauderdale may have been the first to pick out threads of fact about William Maitland and William Lauderdale and to weave them together with the genealogy and mythology of the Maitland/Lauderdale family in Scotland. Perhaps she had been intrigued enough by her early visit to do some superficial research on the matter. In February 1920, the Countess wrote Mrs. Fanny Fern Brown of Fort Lauderdale from New York,

*"Ft. Lauderdale was named by an ancestor of my husband, after his father, the Earl of Lauderdale. Hon. Col. Maitland made a fort there generations ago, after much fighting, and did much, I believe, for that part of America; also named another town Maitland, after the family name. Our home 'Thirlestane Castle' was called 'Fort Lauderdale' until 1590."*⁴⁶

The legend of Captain (or Major, or Colonel, according to various accounts) Maitland attracted considerable attention in 1925, when the Countess of Lauderdale, in conjunction with Mrs. E. T. Stotesbury, Mrs. Horace Dodge, James H. R. Cromwell, the ex-King of Greece, and other wealthy members of high society formed the American-British Improvement Company and began development of Floranada at the Oakland Park subdivision north of Fort Lauderdale. Floranada was incorporated on November 25, 1925. An ad-

vertisement in the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* entitled "Why the Earl and Countess of Lauderdale are Building in America" featured a picture of the couple's Scottish home with the caption, "until 1500 Thirlestane Castle was known as Lauder Fort," and also quoted a slightly different version of the Maitland legend, as told by the Countess:

*It was twenty years ago, I was cruising on a friend's yacht, that I first saw the enchanted spot where I am going to build in the country that lies just north of Fort Lauderdale. Then Fort Lauderdale was just one house. I remember how surprised I was when they told me its name, I thought they must be joking, it was so odd to find our name in a tiny settlement on that green and sun-drenched and then almost unsettled coast of Florida. Perhaps my original enthusiasm was heightened when I discovered that it was a great-great uncle of my husband who, building a little fort to fight off the Indians, had named it for his grandfather the seventh Earl of Lauderdale, and so given the town its name."*⁴⁷

On February 18, 1926, the Countess was present at the laying of the cornerstone at the Floranada Club, which was to be the centerpiece of the new community. The following month, the Countess was honored in a ceremony at the Rainbow Roof Garden on East Las Olas Boulevard, during which she was presented the key to the city by Mayor John W. Tidball, and seated on a throne designed by archi-

tect Francis Abreu. For years afterward, this event was remembered as "one of the most brilliant social functions ever to be held here."⁴⁸

The collapse of the Florida land boom destroyed the plans of the Floranada developers to establish an exclusive resort in Broward County, but it did nothing to diminish the legend promoted by the Countess of Lauderdale. In April 1928, the year after Floranada declared bankruptcy, the Countess wrote to Mayor Tidball's successor, C. D. Kitteridge, offering to donate two stones from Thirlestane Castle for use in a new municipal library. Then, on January 30, 1929, the Countess died unexpectedly at her Palm Beach home. She was buried in Scotland, but the legend of Fort Lauderdale's name survived her.⁴⁹

Fortunately for the historical record, the story of Captain Maitland and his fort on New River did not go long unchallenged. A 1923 *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel* article, while inaccurate in many particulars, correctly reported that Major Lauderdale had followed the ridge south to New River, where he "established camp in present Waverly Place near the North Fork and built 'Old Fort Lauderdale.'" On May 13, 1929, just months after the Countess's death, the Himmarshee Chapter of the D.A.R. erected a marker at the Coast Guard base north of New River Inlet, commemorating what they believed to be "The Site of Old Fort Lauderdale Built in 1838 by Major William Lauderdale in Command Here During the Seminole War."⁵⁰ The Florida volume in the Federal Writers' Project's *American Guide* series, published in 1939, stated simply and accurately that the

modern city of Fort Lauderdale "occupies the approximate site of a Seminole War fort constructed in 1838 and named for its commander, Major William Lauderdale." The *Pocket History of Fort Lauderdale*, published in 1940, announced, "We know that there actually was a Major Lauderdale, for a map of those times shows 'Major Lauderdale's Trail,'" although this small and notoriously inaccurate volume went on to conclude that "the Maitland partisans appear to have all the best of it in documentary evidence, so we are impelled to endorse their version — 'without prejudice.'"⁵¹

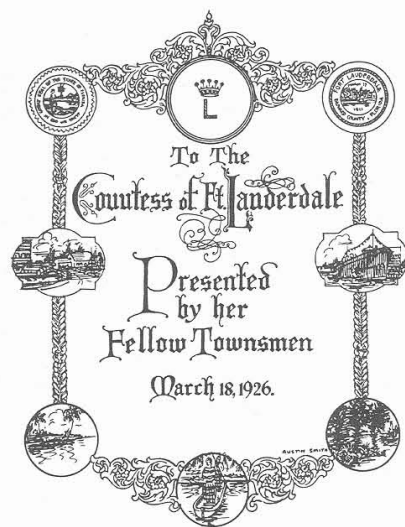
Nevertheless, by the mid-1950s, the "Maitland version" began to crumble under the weight of facts which supported William Lauderdale's claim. Locally, Wesley Stout, debunker of the Colee myth, and Philip Weidling, *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* columnist and Broward County resident since 1912, were instrumental in setting the record straight. In January 1954, Henry Lauderdale visited Fort Lauderdale, and, understandably, became curious about the origin of the city's name. Returning to his home in Texas, Lauderdale, a great-great grandson of Major William Lauderdale's brother, Samuel D., wrote to Weidling for information. Weidling relayed the letter to Stout, who informed Lauderdale that local history recorded little about his ancestor except that he was a major of Tennessee Volunteers in the Second Seminole War. Whether the fort had been named for Major Lauderdale or for Captain William Maitland's family, Stout added, remained a mystery.⁵²

Appreciating Stout's interest, Henry Lauderdale referred him to another of



At left, Fort Lauderdale Mayor John W. Tidball presents the key to the city to the Countess of Lauderdale in 1926 (courtesy of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society). The greeting on the right was also presented to

the countess on this occasion (from "Historical, Mysterious, Picturesque New River," Friends of the Library of Fort Lauderdale, Inc., 1978-1979).



the major's descendants, Russell Wright of Hartsville, Tennessee. Wright, too, was initially ignorant of his ancestor's accomplishments in Florida, but he diligently sought out William Lauderdale's military record, which revealed that the major had indeed served on New River in 1838. Back in Fort Lauderdale, Stout promptly printed Wright's findings in two consecutive "Beachcomber" columns, although he did not completely discard Maitland's alleged presence in the Broward County area.⁵³

*Local history has been much confused by a coincidence. The first U.S. troops to pass through here were led by Captain William Seton Maitland, a West Pointer, bound for Biscayne Bay a year before there was a Fort Lauderdale. And the Maitlands and the Lauderdalees were of the same Scottish clan, all Maitlands until one of the clan was made Earl of Lauderdale. So it has been written repeatedly that this post was established by Capt. Maitland.*⁵⁴

Maitland, according to this revised version, had nothing to do with the naming of Fort Lauderdale, but had traversed present-day Broward County in the spring of 1837, on his way south to build Fort Dallas on the Miami River. In 1963, Betty Campbell, executive assistant of the newly-formed Fort Lauderdale Historical Society uncovered the fact that Maitland never returned to active service after receiving his wound at Wahoo Swamp in 1836. He remained at Black Creek in northeastern Florida from the time of that battle until August 1837, committed suicide on his return to Charleston on August 19, and thus never came to south Florida. Fort Dallas, which occupied the site of the present city of Miami, was established by a joint army-navy force under Captain Lucian B. Webster and Lieutenant Levin N. Powell at the same time that Major Lauderdale established Fort Lauderdale.⁵⁵

Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, some members of the Scottish Lauderdale family continued to claim direct relationship to the man for whom New River's fort was named, although the identity of that man was often altered. Visiting Fort Lauderdale in 1964, the fifteenth Countess of Lauderdale asserted that:

According to the family archives, in the 1830s a young captain in the Royal Navy happened to anchor in this little bay in the tropics. He was so enchanted by the beauty of it and the kindness of the natives that he named it after his own family name, which

*was Maitland. Later on, when his father died, the young captain became the sixth earl of Lauderdale.*⁵⁶

Apparently, this Countess knew nothing about the Seminole War.

Knowledgeable residents and students of local history gave such accounts little heed, but some confusion remained concerning the location of William Lauderdale's fort, although several sources correctly pinpointed the site on the north bank of New River, at the forks. The D.A.R. marker erected at the Coast Guard base in 1929 was moved and rededicated in 1965 and moved again in 1970 and 1972, but each time to another location on the beach. A 1970 newspaper article, accepting the information on the marker, stated that Lauderdale's fort was "located at what now is the Atlantic Boulevard-Seabreeze Boulevard intersection."⁵⁷

One reason for the recurrent errors regarding William Lauderdale's activities, despite documentation of his arrival, his construction of a fort, and his departure from the New River, was the fact that Lauderdale himself was such a shadowy figure. Except for the fragments of information that he was born in southwestern Virginia, lived in Sumner County, Tennessee, served in the War of 1812 and the Creek and Seminole Wars, and died in Baton Rouge on his return from Florida, the major's life and personality remained a mystery.⁵⁸

In the early 1970s, Broward County Historian Cooper Kirk determined to break through the shroud of obscurity which had settled upon Fort Lauderdale's founder. Scouring archives in Florida, Tennessee, Virginia, Louisiana, and Washington, D.C., and linking Lauderdale's career to the more publicized exploits of his friend, neighbor, and commander, General Andrew Jackson, Kirk ferreted out the details of the Tennessee major's life, and placed him squarely in the context of his time, region, and society. His biography, *William Lauderdale, General Andrew Jackson's Warrior*, was published in 1982, and revealed not an insignificant volunteer officer, but "one of the great plantation operators of Middle Tennessee... a notable warrior in his day."⁵⁹

Another, less durable, legend surrounding the old fort from which Broward's county seat takes its name is the story of the Battle of Fort Lauderdale. According to the most common version of this tale, a three-day long battle took place shortly after Captain Maitland established Fort Lauderdale on the beach. On the night of August 27, 1838, a band of Seminole warriors assembled at Colohatchee Creek and traveled

down Middle River and New River Sound to within 100 yards of the fort. They planned to surprise and kill the outpost's lone sentry, and then set fire to the stockade and massacre the sleeping garrison. As they approached the sentry's position, however, one of the braves slipped and fell, alerting the guard, who, in turn, was able to warn the garrison. Failing to catch the soldiers by surprise, the Indians launched attack after attack against the fort for a period of three days and three nights before retreating into the wilderness. Despite the ferocity of the battle, one account alleged, Captain Maitland's "official report" listed the only casualties as a few wounded Indians. Needless to say, this "official report" has never come to light.⁶⁰

Some versions of the fictitious battle state that the besieged fort was commanded by William Lauderdale, although the fort at the beach was not erected until 1839, one year after the attack was supposed to have taken place, and over a year after Lauderdale's death. Furthermore, actual military records make no mention of a "Battle of Fort Lauderdale." Fighting a defensive guerrilla war, Florida's Seminoles hid in the desolate, flooded swamps and Everglades and ambushed troops sent in to dislodge them, but rarely launched frontal attacks on heavily armed fortifications.⁶¹ In the absence of any authentic documentation, it is interesting to speculate on why various accounts of the story pinpoint such a specific date as August 27, 1838. In reality, the New River area was occupied only by the Indians on that date. The garrison of the first Fort Lauderdale departed in May, and the troops that built the second fort did not arrive until the following February. One account gives the battle date as August 27, 1837, months before any troops had come to New River. The August 27 date may have derived from the September 27, 1839, attack on two soldiers and an interpreter from the fort by Indians from Sam Jones's band, but this derivation is a matter of conjecture.⁶²

The period of permanent settlement in Broward County, from the 1890s to the present, has produced its share of tall tales, suppositions, and outright inaccuracies, but few, if any, of these have been as deeply enshrined in legend as tales purporting to tell of the region's earlier history. Perhaps the expanding documentation offered by newspapers, public records, and other written sources, and the increased number of witnesses to local events, have decreased the chances for complex misunderstandings, such as those of the Colee Massacre and Captain Mait-

land's fort, to develop. Perhaps the more solid, less romanticized achievements of founding a county and cities, dredging canals, and establishing agriculture and commerce do not inspire the same dramatic effusion as Indian massacres, ruins of abandoned forts, or Scottish countesses.

Nevertheless, as mistakes, half-truths, and unverified rumors arise, and are repeated and sometimes committed to print, time and imagination may entangle the amazing story of Broward County's twentieth century growth into legend as well.

FOOTNOTES

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- 2 — Bill Raymond, "The Legend of New River—Fact or Fiction?" *New River News*, vol. XXII, no. 4 (Spring 1984), 4-8; *America Septentrionalis*, 1631 map, copy in BCHC archives.
- 3 — "The Wonderful Legend of New River"; Crim, "The Story of Lauderdale," chapter II, "Believe It or Not by Ripley," *Miami Daily News*, October 10, 1935, clipping in BCHC files; Lorna W. Simpson, "How New River Came by Its Name," in *Fort Lauderdale Welcomes You* (Fort Lauderdale, 1936), 8-9; L. L. W. Collier, *The Pocket History of Fort Lauderdale* (Fort Lauderdale, 1940).
- 4 — Cooper Kirk, "William Cooley: Broward's Legend," part I, *Broward Legacy*, vol. I, no. 1 (October 1976), 12-17; Daniel T. Hobby, "The Cooley Massacre: A Summary of What is Known," unpublished paper in files of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society.
- 5 — Kirk, "William Cooley," 12-20.
- 6 — Edmund Kirby Smith to his Mother, January 31, 1836, cited in Bill McGoun, "Broward Heritage" *Miami Herald*, November 25, 1973, 6-BR; William Cooley file, BCHC archives.
- 7 — Cooper Kirk, "Foundations of Broward County Waterways," *Broward Legacy*, vol. 8, nos. 1 & 2 (Winter/Spring 1985), 7; *Business Directory, Guide and History of Dade County, Fla., For 1896-97* (West Palm Beach, 1897), 30, 32, 33.
- 8 — W. H. Sanders to Hon. Harold Colee, November 3, 1958, Family Papers of Ethel Colee in BCHC archives; Kirk, "Foundations of Broward County Waterways," 7; McGoun, "Broward Heritage," May 13, 1973, November 25, 1973; Plat of "Town of Fort Lauderdale, Dade Co., Fla.," surveyed by A. L. Knowlton, 1895, copy in BCHC archives.
- 9 — Kirk, "Foundations of Broward County Waterways," 7; McGoun, "Broward Heritage," ay 13, November 25, 1973; "Facts About Fort Lauderdale and Broward County," *Fort Lauderdale Herald*, December 16, 1921, 2.
- 10 — Frank Stranahan to Brother, January 31, 1893, *New River News*, vol. XI, no. 1 (July 31, 1972), 2; *The Tropical Sun*, 1891-95, microfilm in BCHC archives.
- 11 — "Facts in History of Seminole Indians," *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, February 23, 1923, 6; Charles W. Pierce, unpublished manuscript in BCHC archives, 382.
- 12 — "Widow's Pension Claim Under General Pension Law of Florida" for Georgia V. Colee, October 28, 1922, Kathryn Colee, "George Colee — Tryphena Riz," unpublished typescript, both from Family Papers of Ethel Colee, BCHC archives.
- 13 — McGoun, "Broward Heritage," November 25, 1973; Original Cooley Massacre plaque in collection of Fort Lauderdale Historical Society.
- 14 — "Colee Monument to be Unveiled at Tarpon Bend," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* March 15, 1934, 3; "Monument to be Dedicated," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, March 16, 1934, 1; "Colee Monument Dedicated With Impressive Ceremonies," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, March 17, 1934, 1; "Monument is Erected in Fort Lauderdale Where Members of Colee Family Died," typescript in Family Papers of Ethel Colee, BCHC archives; Elwood Nance, *The East Coast of Florida* (Delray Beach, 1962), vol. III, 40-43.
- 15 — "Monument is Erected in Fort Lauderdale"; "The Cooley Massacre" typescript in Family Papers of Ethel Colee, BCHC archives.
- 16 — W. T. Cash, *The Story of Florida* (New York, 1938), vol. I, 317-318; M. M. Cohen, *Notices of Florida and the Campaigns* (Charleston, 1838; facsimile ed., Gainesville, 1964), 79-80.
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- 18 — Colee Monument Rededication, program in Family Papers of Ethel Colee; "Scene of Massacre," undated clipping, both in BCHC archives.
- 19 — Ernest G. Gearhart, Jr., Address at Colee Monument Rededication, Colee Hammock Park, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, November 16, 1958, Family Papers of Ethel Colee, BCHC archives.
- 20 — Hobby, "The Cooley Massacre: A Summary of What is Known"; Miscellaneous clippings and obituaries in Wesley W. Stout file, BCHC archives.
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- 24 — Samuel J. Colee, *George Colee — His Record* (St. Augustine, 1967), 1.
- 25 — Florence C. Hardy, "Annual Report—May 1, 1970-April 30, 1971," *New River News*, vol. X, no. 1 (July 1971), 2.
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- 30 — Crim, "The Story of Lauderdale," chapter IV; Federal Writer's Project, *Florida* 318; Response of Harold Colee at Colee Monument Rededication, Family Papers of Ethel Colee.
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- 32 — *Ibid*.
- 33 — Collier, *Pocket History of Fort Lauderdale*, 31.
- 34 — Mrs. Frank Stranahan, "Shirt-tail Charlie," December 12, 1938 typescript, in Stranahan Collection, Fort Lauderdale Historical Society; Stuart McIver, "The Legend of the Indian in Drag," *Sunshine Magazine*, *Fort Lauderdale News*, 1986, clipping in BCHC archives.
- 35 — "Shirt Tail Charlie is Dead Here," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, August 31, 1925, 1; "Death of Shirt Tail Charlie Fails to Disturb Seminoles," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, September 1, 1925, 2.
- 36 — Harry A. Kersey, Jr., *Pelts, Plumes, and Hides, White Traders Among the Seminole Indians 1870-1930* (Gainesville, 1975), 10, 17, 92, 110, 113; McIver, "The Legend of the Indian in Drag."
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- 41 — Stephen Kerber, "The United States Life-Saving Service and the Florida Houses of Refuge (unpublished masters thesis, Florida Atlantic University, 1971), 69; Eugene E. Wiley, "Life Saving Station No. 4," part 2, *Broward Legacy*, vol. I, no. 2 (January 1977), 16; Burghard and Weidling, *Checkedered Sunshine*, 14-16; "An Historic Site," *New River News*, vol. XVII, no. 3 (January 31, 1979), 6-9.
- 42 — Stagecoach Visits Fort Lauderdale in 1893," *Broward Legacy*, vol. 9, nos. 1 & 2 (Winter/Spring 1986), 38.
- 43 — Relics from Fort Lauderdale, collected at fort site on Fort Lauderdale beach, 1906, by James Vreeland, donated to BCHC by Harold Vreeland.
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- 45 — Kirk, *William Lauderdale*, 7-9, 176; Stout, "The Beachcomber," August 15, 1954; Allen Morris, *Florida Place Names* (Coral Gables, 1974), 96.
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- 47 — Why the Earl and Countess of Lauderdale are Building in America," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, March 20, 1926, 5; "Society Notables Attend Ceremony at Floranada Inn," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News* February 18, 1926 section 2, 11; Philip Weidling, "County Royalty Goes Back to Lauderdale Kin, undated clipping in BCHC archives; Stout, "The Beachcomber," March 18, 1953.
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- 49 — "Stones Offered From Castle at Lauderdale," *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, April 11, 1928, 2; "The Countess of Lauderdale Dies Today"; Weidling, "County Royalty Goes Back to Lauderdale Kin."
- 50 — "History of Battle of Fort Lauderdale," *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, February 23, 1923, 6; *D.A.R. Magazine*, November 1929, clipping in Fort Lauderdale Historical Society archives.
- 51 — Federal Writers' Project, *Florida* 318; Collier, *Pocket History of Fort Lauderdale*, 22.
- 52 — Stout, "The Beachcomber," August 15, 1954.
- 53 — *Ibid*, August 15, 16, 1954.
- 54 — *Ibid*.
- 55 — *Ibid*, November 14, 1963; "The History of Fort Lauderdale," *Sunday Express*, December 7, 1978, 41; Arva Moore Parks, *Miami, The Magic City* (Tulsa, 1981), 30.
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- 57 — Old Fort Lauderdale," *Miami Herald*, October 10, 1970, 4-BR; "Monuments and Markers, City of Fort Lauderdale," *New River News*, vol. III, no. 3 (April 30, 1965), history section, 1; Markers, Fort Lauderdale," *New River News*, vol. XI, no. 3 (January 31, 1973), 2.
- 58 — Kirk, *William Lauderdale*, 1-2; Stout, "The Beachcomber," August 15, 16, 1954.
- 59 — Kirk, *William Lauderdale*, 1-292; William Lauderdale Collection in BCHC archives.
- 60 — "History of Battle of Fort Lauderdale"; Crim, "The Story of Lauderdale," chapter III; Collier, *Pocket History of Fort Lauderdale*, 24-26.
- 61 — "History of Battle of Fort Lauderdale"; McGoun, "Broward Heritage," November 25, 1973.
- 62 — "History Endears Name of City," *Fort Lauderdale Sentinel*, February 18, 1921, 7; "History of Battle of Lauderdale"; Crim, "The Story of Lauderdale" chapter III; Kirk, intro., "Ambush on the New River," 8-15.

BACK COVER: The Himmarshee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution dedicated a marker on the beach commemorating "Old Fort Lauderdale," 1929. D.A.R. members and guests are: 1) Mrs. Charles LeSeuer of Coral Gables, 2) Mrs. Brooke G. White, Jr., D.A.R. national vice president, 3) Mrs. Theodore Stimon, 4) Mrs. B. C. Brown, Florida D.A.R. regent, 5) Reed A. Bryan, Jr., 6) Rev. John King, First Presbyterian Church, 7) Lieutenant Bernier, U.S. Coast Guard, 8) Rev. R.D. Tracy, All Saints Episcopal Church, 9) Virginia Garven, 10) Douglas Stoner, Jr., 11) Mrs. Hubbard, 12) Mrs. Sturgis, 13) Mrs. J.O. Stranahan, 14) Mrs. Stoner, 15) Mrs. Belton, 16) Mrs. Hunter, 17) Mrs. Richardson, 18) Mrs. J.A. Johnston.