History Along The Hillsbоро: The Topography, The Agriculture and The People

Part I
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While traversing the northern perimeter of Broward County, west of the Intracoastal Waterway, pedestrians and motorists find themselves on a bridge which crosses a moderate-sized canal. This Hillsboro Canal, which is under the jurisdiction of the South Florida Water Management District, appears similar to any other drainage canal. However, before these waters were quelled, this estuary had been a natural river that drained the Everglades.

Although it may not seem significant today, the Hillsboro River did play an important role in the development of south Florida. Before, during and after the river was tamed, it affected the topography, the agriculture and the people. And because the Hillsbоро Canal is worthy of mention, we must review the first time in recorded history when this estuary was encountered. That is, we must consider early explorations in Florida.

When European expeditions first encountered the peninsula of Florida, their members recorded explicit references regarding the flourishing land and her prevailing dangers. Yet, their references to the Hillsboro region were vague. Perhaps, when Ponce de Leon was sailing along the coast of this bountiful province, he did not see the inlet that once emptied below the mouth of the Hillsboro River. Or, perhaps, the inlet was not open at that time. However, the inlet eventually was discovered and recorded on navigational maps.

Some of these early maps and documents reveal that the river and inlet below Lake Boca Ratones had more than one name. From the 1600s until the late 1700s the river and inlet were depicted as part of the Rio Seco. Some maps had designated that estuary as Rio Nuevo, or New River. On others it was not named. Even by the 19th century, maps did not accurately delineate the inland topography. In contrast, the coastal features were described fully because their purpose, and understandably so, was to guide mariners.¹

Britain, France and Spain, then the three world powers, fought the Seven Years War during the mid 18th century. In North America this was known as the French and Indian War. At first, Britain and France battled for global control. However, in the latter phase of the contest Spain joined France and, thus, risked her North American interests. Ultimately, the Treaty of Paris, signed on February 10, 1763, ensured British control of the eastern half of North America and the former Spanish province of Florida.

In order to control her interests, Britain needed more accurate geographical information. In effect, an Office of the Surveyor General was established in colonial America through the efforts of Samuel Hol-
Vignoles Map of Florida, 1823. He labelled today's Hillsboro Canal as the Potomac River and its inlet as the "Hillsboro, or Middle River Inlet."
land. Subsequently, the continent was divided into northern and southern districts and a surveyor general was appointed to each. German surveyor and cartographer William Gerard DeBrahm, esquire, was appointed surveyor general of the Southern District in 1764.

In addition to surveying, DeBrahm had studied such sciences as engineering, botany, astronomy and meteorology. He was an alchemist, a sociologist, an historian, a mystical philosopher, and a student of the oceans' currents. While employed in the services of King George III, DeBrahm was not content to just survey the land. He was forever searching for broad patterns in nature and studying and recording notes on the flora, fauna, soils, climate and land use of the southeast. DeBrahm was a natural choice for the office. Eventually, his work resulted in the "first scientific (land) survey," which included the territory of East Florida. This work was presented to King George III in the early 1770s.

After his arrival in Florida in 1765, DeBrahm established his office at St. Augustine. For six years, while he and his deputy surveyors were mapping the coast of Florida between this base and Cape Florida, Surveyor General DeBrahm sent notes and diagrams to England. In his references to the Hillsboro Outlet, or Rio Nuevo, DeBrahm described the condition of that inlet as suitable only for boats; that is, larger vessels could not find harbor within because of the shallow water. DeBrahm referred to the Hillsboro as the Sharks-tail and he recorded that a few live-oaks could be found near the head of that river. In a later reference DeBrahm wrote that hickory, live-oak, mulberry and smooth-bark yellow pine could be found along the river. It is notable that, in order to conduct the inland surveys of the rivers, DeBrahm's crews had to use two boats from their schooner and two large canoes.

Before DeBrahm had completed his survey of the coast, he encountered much criticism. The greatest controversy erupted between him and James Grant, Florida's colonial governor. The source of their friction was the appointment of a deputy surveyor who was commissioned to map some forty land interests within the interior of the territory. DeBrahm was suspended by the governor and, in 1771, had to answer to charges in London. Following the lengthy trans-Atlantic journey, DeBrahm was well received in Britain. When Governor James Grant never appeared to press charges, the German-born cartographer was reinstated. Although DeBrahm did not return to North America until 1775, he was able to complete his report on the survey of East Florida while he was living in England.

Bernard Romans, "... a draughtsman, mathematician and navigator," was appointed by DeBrahm in 1769 to be the principal deputy surveyor for the Southern District. During his lifetime Romans was considered to be "... a remarkable man ..." and a "universal genius ..." Romans, in turn, characterized DeBrahm as a "profound and speculative philosopher" and a "Bedlamite" whose surveys had "turned water into land, and land into water ..."

Romans worked for Surveyor General DeBrahm for less than two years and, in time, their business relationship became stale. Notably, Bernard Romans' surveys resulted in accurate maps and the publication A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida. Romans began his references to Florida around the year 1763 and initiated the surveys for his best known map, Part of the Province of East Florida, in 1766.

In his descriptive references to southeast Florida, Bernard Romans indicated that the coast is all "double land, or narrow necks between the sea." Because he had characterized his maps as charts, many of his subscribers were mariners. Subsequently, Romans provided detailed descriptions of the coastline and indicated that the Rio Seco, Spanish River Inlet, was closed, "having a narrow bar of dry sand before it..." Romans continued: "... 5 miles to the south of Rio Seco is another point of rocks, and south of it, a small bite, and half a mile further is the mouth of Rio Nuevo, which is about 1/4 of a mile wide and generally open but shallow, here jewfish are very abundant both within and without the river..."

In addition to these notes, the remarkable Romans indicated a landmark that would enable mariners to locate this inlet. Thus, he wrote: "... 2-1/4 miles south of this river's mouth are five tall cabbage trees on the pine land..."

In the early 1820s Charles Vignoles, a civil and topographical engineer, recorded a descriptive survey of the peninsula. His writings were the first to expound upon the territory of the Hillsboro River. With the intention of honoring the Earl of Hillsborough, Vignoles designated Hillsboro as the name for the inlet. Yet, he did call the river the Potomac.

Because two other such named bodies of water were recorded on maps of that era, it is fortunate that the name of the inlet was shortened to Hillsboro. For example, the Saver and Bennett map of Florida and Georgia, published in London, England, in 1776, depicted a few bodies of water north of the Rio Seco which bore the name Hillsborough. That map referred to Tampa Bay as both Spiritu Santo and Hillsborough Bay.

In addition, an estuary on the east coast of Florida, north of present-day Fort Pierce Inlet, was labelled as both the Hillsborough Stream and the Hillsborough Inlet. DeBrahm also had used these names for that estuary.

When indicating the Potomac River in later years, early 19th century cartographers did not agree entirely upon the labels applied by their predecessors. The 1831 Mitch-
ell map referred to the Hillsboro as the Sharkstail River; and the Baldwin and Craddock map of 1834 referred to the upper reaches of the stream as the Potomac River and to the lower estuary as the Rio Seco. 29

It should be noted that Vignoles had labelled this estuary, which flowed south behind the sea bluff and below the mouth of the Potomac, as the Middle River. So, on his map the inlet was called the "Hillsboro, or Middle River Inlet." Vignoles also mentioned a swift creek that flowed south from Lake Boca Raton and into Middle River at a point just above the mouth of the Potomac. He did not apply a name to this estuary. 30

Long before Vignoles had defined the coastal topography, mid 16th century explorers considered that nameless estuary and the Potomac River as part of the Rio Seco, or Spanish River. 21 The Rio Seco once was a continuous channel that flowed behind the beach ridge. The channel originated at the present town of Highland Beach; meandered south through lakes Rogers and Wyman; and emptied into the Atlantic Ocean, after passing through an inlet at Lake Boca Raton. Various maps indicated that the inlet had two names, Dry Inlet and Barracuda Inlet. In his book, Observations Upon The Floridas, Vignoles described the topography after that inlet had closed.

"... Boca Ratone sound receives also from the south another creek, heading in large marsh flats, but with deep water; the whole of which together with that from the Rio Seco, unable to discharge itself over the dry inlet, has forced itself by a natural canal through a neck of high land into the Middle river at the place where a stream called the Potomac runs into it; the rush of water through this narrow channel is very great, the current driving with a velocity capable of giving motion to the largest wheels, and upon it several saw-mills might work with advantage, should the Florida pitch pine which is abundantly supplied by the adjacent woods, ever become in sufficient demand as lumber. The Potomac river, as the few occasional visitors here have named it, is merely the head of Middle river, its course is through a pine country of good quality, heading in swamps and savannas, and connected with the Great Glade." 22

During most of the 18th century Spain, which had possession of Florida, could not control the various tribes of hostile Indians. Yet, during the two decades of British possession the "broken-off" Creek Indians lived a relatively peaceful and secure life and often traded with the Europeans. These Creeks also were known as the Seminoles, a people who had migrated to Florida. They supported the British not only during the American Revolution but even after Britain had ceded the territory back to Spain in 1783. 23

After the Revolution many Americans believed that Florida belonged to the United States and numerous settlers moved into the territory. Over the years many clashes regarding cattle thefts and runaway slaves occurred between these settlers and the Indians. In 1818, during the First Seminole War, General Andrew Jackson marched his army into Florida, pursued the Indians and burned their towns. 24 Meanwhile, the southern territory, which encompassed the Hillsboro River region, remained dormant.

Following this invasion of north Florida, Jackson marched his army west and captured the Spanish towns of St. Marks and Pensacola, much to the chagrin of President James Monroe. General Edmund Gaines simultaneously pressed into St. Augustine. Because the president did not recognize these unauthorized campaigns against the Spanish, possession of the communities was relinquished. 25 Jackson's maneuvers, however, did alert the federal government to the territory's vulnerability. This resulted in the United States' acquisition of the Florida territory in 1821 for five million dollars. Jackson became Florida's first territorial governor and many more settlers entered the peninsula. 26

In the years that followed the acquisition, and especially after 1830, numerous violent incidents between the settlers and the Indians occurred in the northern part of the territory. After this disturbance grew out of control, the military entered Florida in order to remove the Seminoles to a western reservation in the United States. Unfortunately, a full scale war erupted after Major Francis Dade's command was ambushed on the road between Fort Brooke, Tampa, and Fort King, Ocala. 27 Shortly afterwards, settlers in south Florida also suffered from the conflict.

On January 6, 1836, while William Cooley was preparing to salvage a foundered vessel near the Hillsboro Inlet, a band of marauding Creek Indians fell upon his settlement on New River. Cooley's wife, his three children and their tutor were killed in the massacre. The settlement, which had been founded about thirteen years earlier, was abandoned at once. The vessel up at the inlet was left to be claimed by a storm. 28

As the war raged, the Seminoles were pushed deep within south Florida. The military soon followed. On January 24, 1838, a battle ensued on the banks of the Loxahatchee River. The Indians dispersed and the army marched to Jupiter River to await supplies. 29

There, fifty miles north of the Hillsboro River, the army was left immobilized. Mounted Tennessee Volunteers and friendly Indians, who had accompanied the force on their southern campaign, scouted the surrounding territory. 30

On February 2, 1838, Major General Thomas S. Jesup wrote to Colonel Zachary Taylor from Fort Jupiter. Jesup indicated that the scouts had searched as far as twenty miles in advance and to the west. He also
expressed his regrets that he was not yet supplied to follow because, in his opinion, the Indians were between Lake Okeechobee and the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{31}

The Tennesseans eventually scouted south along the eastern side of Lake Okeechobee to the Hillsboro River, then eastward to the inlet. After participating in these operations in the marshy wilderness, the Volunteers broke out with fever. The sick were transported from Fort Jupiter to the general army hospital in St. Augustine.

Some days later the supply train reached Jesup's army. The soldiers quickly prepared to continue their march. In his diary Nathan Jarvis, a surgeon who had accompanied the army on its southeastern campaign, recorded that "We follow a ridge leading south as far as the Potomac where it is expected the Indians will make a stand." Major General Jesup could only hope that Jarvis and the soldiers were correct. Jesup had claimed that the war would be over by April if the Seminoles could be prevented from escaping to the north.\textsuperscript{33}

Soon after the army continued its march, the Indians were found about thirty miles southwest of Fort Jupiter. Rather than attack the enemy, a truce was called. At the ensuing conference, Jesup proposed asking the government to allow the Indians to remain in Florida on a reservation. In turn, the Seminoles accepted an invitation to camp near Fort Jupiter.\textsuperscript{34}

For the time being the Indians and their leaders, Tuskegee and Halleck Hadjo, were pacified. Yet, somewhere to the south were Sam Jones and his band of Miccosukee Seminoles. Because they were one of the most defiant tribes to resist Indian removal, the army continued its push.

Navy Lieutenant Levin M. Powell and Captain Lucian B. Webster were ordered from Fort Jupiter to Key Biscayne.\textsuperscript{35} By late February one post was established on that key and another on the main-
land, at the mouth of the Miami River. During a series of scouts from the latter position, a prisoner was captured who informed the army that Sam Jones' band was on the Coontehatchee River, which also was referred to as New River.\textsuperscript{36}

On March 2, 1838, Major William Lauderdale's Tennesseans and Lieutenant Robert Anderson's detachment of 3rd Artillery Regiment were ordered to that river to verify reports and to take a defensive position. Their route from Fort Jupiter followed the same pine ridge as the one described by Nathan Jarvis. As the command proceeded southward, they blazed trees to mark their way. That route would serve as the military trail for years to come.
Lieutenant Frederick Searles, Topographical Engineer for the detachment of the 3rd Artillery Regiment, accompanied the expedition. His own detailed map of the route indicated that they had crossed the Hillsboro River on March 5th and had arrived at the Coontehatchee that same day. In December 1840 Naval Lieutenant John McLaughlin led an expedition across the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee and through the Hillsboro territory. They travelled in dugout canoes and were the first to traverse the Pai-hai-okee while in the military service of the United States. This party set out from Fort Dallas on the Miami River and crossed to the west coast of Florida. On their return journey they navigated Lake Okeechobee in an attempt to locate an outlet to the Loxahatchee River. The impenetrable swamps and McLaughlin's severe fever forced the flotilla to abandon its search. In order to return, the

In 1857 the soldiers who conducted reconnaissances through the Hillsboro territory followed the same natural ridge that had been traversed by the army during the Second Seminole War. This map of the military route between Fort McRae and Middle River marks a temporary camp on the south branch of the Hillsboro River. National Archives, Record Group 393.

The campaigns were suspended in the spring of 1838 until the more favorable winter. Therefore, on May 7th, the military establishment of Fort Lauderdale was abandoned and Colonel Harney led his command across the Hillsboro, toward Fort Jupiter. In 1839, a position was occupied on New River, east of the first blockhouse. Eventually, the military detachment moved to a more permanent fort that was constructed on the beach. At that time water transportation was necessary to move troops and supplies. Nonetheless, military expeditions still contrived to search the interior for Seminoles.
expedition marched from Fort McRae, on the east shore of the lake, to the Loxahatchee River. The men then journeyed south along Lauderdale's route and arrived at their departure point in mid January 1841.42

Three months after his gruelling journey across the Pai-hai-okee, Lieutenant McLaughlin returned to the vicinity of the Hillsboro during a coastal expedition with the Flirt and the Wave which were a schooner and a yacht, respectively. A scouting party, set ashore at the inlet, discovered evidence of the Indians; but two days of tracking in a southerly direction yielded no significant results. Although McLaughlin and his men did find Indian fields at the head of Snake River, it seemed as though the enemy had, once again, eluded its pursuers.

Five months later another military expedition conducted a thorough examination of the Hillsboro territory.43

Captain Richard D. Wade, 3rd Artillery Regiment, departed Fort Lauderdale on September 30, 1841, with orders to examine the country in the vicinity of the Hillsboro River. The expedition consisted of sixty regulars who were led by Wade and his subordinates, lieutenants Wyse and Thomas, and were accompanied by Assistant Surgeon Russell. All travelled in boats. Wade referred to the estuary that flowed from Lake Boca Raton to the mouth of the Hillsboro River as the “Little Hillsborough” and, apparently, his exploration went as far as the head of the Spanish River.

With Lieutenant Wyse in the advance, the expedition proceeded by sea and then journed five miles upriver over a winding route. From that point they travelled northeast for four miles through the pine barren. In a report to Major Thomas Childs, Commander of the South Atlantic District which was headquartered at Fort Pierce, Captain Wade indicated that “Lt. Wyse visited the shores, frequently, by ascending trees and discovered that Indians had been there, but not recently. . . .” Because obstructions in the river were hampering their progress, they headed westerly for about ten miles. Wade added that here “. . . the river separated into small channels. One of the channels opened to a large space of clear water where [they] halted for the night.”

The next morning the expedition continued on a northwest and, then, northerly course, with Lieutenant Thomas in the advance. Again, the river separated into several channels which were characterized by deep and rapid currents. Captain Wade wrote that “after proceeding up a channel for one hour, [we] came to a large marsh which appeared to supply the river . . . .” where “. . . the pine barren surrounded us.”

Captain Wade’s men continued in a northerly direction and, occasionally, dragged their boats. Another hours of travel brought them to deeper water and several ponds. These were interspersed with small islands that featured long-abandoned Indian camps. Wade added that, from there, the expedition “continued north for another hour until we fairly got to the head of the river and spent the night at an old Indian encampment.”

On the next morning the expedition returned to the mouth of the river. After a day’s delay, due to inclement weather and heavy surf, the party journeyed seven miles by sea to the “Little Hillsborough Bar.” Immediately after they crossed this obstruction, they discovered fresh signs of activity. However, the Indians could not be tracked. The soldiers then travelled ten miles upstream until the waters became shallow. Although the country was scouted in all directions, no navigable passage could be found. Subsequently, the expedition returned to the Little Hillsboro Bar and encamped for the night. On October 4th, Wade’s men found an island passage to the Big Hillsboro and, from there, they returned to Fort Lauderdale.

Soon after their arrival at the post, Wade sent his report, regarding the results of the expedition, to the 3rd Artillery Regiment headquarters at Fort Pierce. In this correspondence dated October 10, 1841, Wade indicated his belief that there was communication between Lake Okeechobee and the Little Hillsboro lagoon, but that a lack of navigable water had prevented them from continuing their explorations. In conclusion, Wade reported to Major Childs that “no Indians at present live on or near the coast.”44

About one month later Wade organized a second expedition out of Fort Lauderdale. This one resulted in the death, destruction and capture of the enemy. The expedition again travelled up the Hillsboro River. There the men captured an Indian who led them northward to a few villages. Nine warriors, fifteen women and twenty-four children were apprehended and, during the melee, eight Indians were killed, thirteen rifles were confiscated and twenty canoes were destroyed. Approximately ten Indians escaped during the siege.45

Following Wade’s success, the Seminoles who remained in the territory concealed themselves in the swamps and avoided contact with the soldiers. During the second week of November 1841, Childs moved his headquarters from Indian River to Fort Lauderdale.46 Although he was stationed closer to the Everglades, it became impossible to fight an enemy that could not be found. The war became long and drawn out. And, although there was never a conclusive treaty, Colonel William J. Worth, commander of the Florida troops, declared the Second Seminole Indian War at an end on August 14, 1842.

No longer was the military necessary in Florida. The Seminoles were subdued and the settlers, encouraged by the Armed Occupation Act of 1842, had learned to rely on their own resources to
squelch any invasions of property. Hence, forts in southeast Florida were abandoned and the outposts left to regress to their natural state. Coastal estuaries remained primitive. Occasionally, these were visited by the silent hunter who had survived the conflicts.48

In 1855 renewed violence between the United States and the Seminole Indians resulted in a third conflict in south Florida.49

Eight hundred federal troops, 260 state troops in federal service and 400 state troops in state service were mobilized to quell an estimated one hundred Seminole warriors. Military posts were established at key positions, some of which had been occupied during the second conflict. Those posts nearest the Hillsboro River were Fort Dallas, Fort McRae and Fort Jupiter. As it had been during the Second Seminole War, Fort Dallas was a major point for army operations into the Everglades; the other two were occupied as "depots of exploration."50

During this period, initial references to the Hillsboro River dealt with a just measure on the part of a few Indians. Lieutenant George L. Hartstuff's party of nine soldiers had been attacked in southwest Florida on December 20, 1855.51 Less than three months later, on January 6, 1856, three settlers were killed in southeast Florida. Captain Bennett J. Hill, commander of Fort Dallas, immediately sent barges six miles to the south and evacuated the remaining settlers. The next day a man named Cobb, who had been living at the Hillsboro Inlet, reached Fort Dallas. Cobb reported that three Indian friends told him that there would be war with the whites and urged him to leave.52 Other than the atrocities that were committed against the settlers during this conflict, it is significant that no major skirmishes involving the army occurred east of Lake Okeechobee. However, the United States government did send army patrols into this territory which encompassed the Hillsboro region.

Early in 1857 breveted Brigadier General William S. Harney ordered an expedition to cross the peninsula and continue into south Florida. The original plan called for supply wagons to convey the subsistence and tents. But no such transportation was available when it came time to leave. Captain John C. Pemberton, Company E, 4th Artillery Regiment, commanded the expedition. Rather than delay the journey, Pemberton decided to move his troops with only ten days' rations in their packs. Thus, they departed Fort Kissimmee on February 5, 1857.

After five days of marching in the heat, the soldiers' provisions were lost or wasted. Pemberton then improvised a diet that, in the main, was dependent on the land. Presumably, it was no easy task to provision the three companies of the 4th Artillery Regiment, which numbered well over one hundred. Captain G.W. Getty and Lieutenant Stephen Dill Lee each commanded about sixty men in Companies E and F, respectively. Company K was commanded by Sergeant E.M.K. Hudson. The soldiers survived dur-
ing the remainder of the journey by eating a few cabbage palms, an officer's horse and an alligator's tail.

The expedition arrived at Fort McRae on February 11, 1857. There it joined two companies of Florida Militia Volunteers, who were led by captains John McNeil and Francis M. Durrence. The Volunteers were ordered to separate and scout, first to the northwest and then to the south, along the Jupiter River. The three artillery companies separated and scouted to the east and to the south, towards New River.¹³

The roads and trails which Pemberton's battalion followed across the peninsula had been traversed during the Second Seminole War. And, even though these were key routes, only a limited variety of maps was available in 1857 to guide the soldiers. Many of the maps were inaccurate and/or difficult to follow. Although George McKay's map of 1845 depicted many roads and strategic positions in north and south Florida, it lacked detail. Moreover, some of the compilations had been copied from earlier inaccurate versions.¹⁴ Even in 1853 a section map of Florida was published that did not indicate many important roads or such geographic landmarks as the Hillsboro River.¹⁵

During the third war, the United States Army was fortunate to have the gifted cartographer Captain Abner Doubleday, 1st Artillery Regiment. Doubleday did an exceptionally fine job of detailing the topography while scouting out of Fort Dallas. Among his final results were accurate sketches of the territory to the south of his post, a map of the road between Fort Dallas and New River, and a map of the territory between Fort Dallas and the Loxahatchee River.¹⁶

Prior to Doubleday's output, Pemberton could have referred to other sources when he marched south from the Loxahatchee. He could have been guided by Searle's sketch of Lauderdale's route or, perhaps, by a map that had been supplied by Lieutenant J. C. Ives, United States Topographical Engineer.

In 1856 Ives compiled and documented many reports and sketches from the Second Seminole War that related to the south Florida territory. His work resulted in the publication of a manual and a military map, the most accurate of its time. In his description of the terrain south of Lake Worth, Ives relied upon Captain Wade's correspondence of 1841.

Ives, however, interpolated the labels for the water course and the terrain in the section that pertained to the Hillsboro region. The entire estuary that flowed south from the mouth of the Hillsboro River, behind the beach ridge and into the ocean, was referred to as the Hillsboro Inlet. And the swift creek that flowed from Lake Boca Raton and into the inlet, just above the mouth of the Hillsboro River, was labelled the Little Hillsboro.

"For two miles from the haulover the Little Hillsborough winds through the prairie; the width of the stream increasing gradually from seven to fifty feet. To the east grows Palmetto, mangroves and wild figs, and [to] the west there is a pine barren with Palmettos and occasional thickets. A belt of mangroves, one hundred feet broad, with openings to the pine country behind, then skirts the western bank for five miles. The river opens twice into small lakes, and increases in width to one hundred feet, when it joins Boca Ratones. . . ."

After he described the creek from Lake Boca Raton, Ives covered the Hillsboro River and the Inlet.

". . . the Hillsboro, a stream fifty feet broad, lined with mangroves, and increasing in size to its mouth, five miles distance, where it is about a quarter of a mile in width. Hillsboro Inlet runs south for a mile, leaving a ridge of sand three hundred feet wide, between it and the Ocean. It narrows very much towards the entrance, affording a passage for row-boats only. The depth of water on the bar at low tide is about two feet. Five hundred yards from the bar the river can generally be forded; the water being three feet in depth . . ."¹⁶³

In the early spring of 1857, only two weeks after Pemberton reported to Fort Dallas, the United States Army reconnoitered the territory from the Miami River to the Loxahatchee. On March 12th, companies B and E, 1st Artillery Regiment, and companies F and K, 4th Artillery Regiment, departed Fort Dallas to accompany a supply train that was destined for Fort McRae. As they proceeded north, the companies explored the surrounding territory. Each company comprised approximately fifty-four men. In order to effect a successful reconnaissance, the companies dispersed, but they continued to coordinate their efforts to seek the enemy.¹⁸

Brevetted Colonel Justin Dimick was the commander of the 1st Regiment and the ranking officer on the expedition. After his battalion departed New River on March 15th, they scouted Lauderdale's route. Two companies were kept out daily, on each side of the road. Dimick described the road as "generally very heavy even in a dry season, and many places were boggy -- the train passed over them without much difficulty. 1800 [lbs.] including Forage was the heaviest load the best team had when we commenced our march. In the wet season the road would be impassable with a loaded team -- without great labor expended upon it."¹⁸³

One of Dimick's subordinate officers, Lieutenant S. Lee of Company F, 4th Artillery Regiment, reported that "the road was found to be good and having the direction indicated by the map -- except after crossing the two branches of the Hillsboro where the crossings are laid down too far E. [east] and the road making E. instead of W.
for several miles after leaving the branches."

Regardless of its condition, Lee most likely had welcomed the opportunity to travel the road. On his previous journey to the south with Captain Pemberton, the lieutenant had to wade through one large cypress swamp and one large, flooded sawgrass plain. The latter morass was north of the Hillsboro River, between the southern extremities of Lake Worth and "Hillsborough Lake."

In addition to scouting along the road, Lee and a detached party of seven men reconnoitered the north and south branches of Snook Creek. The lieutenant’s report from Fort McRae, dated March 21, 1857, specified that neither branch of this creek was represented on maps.

Yet, those creeks constituted the greatest obstacle for wagons between New River and Fort Jupiter, although the Hillsboro required less effort to cross. The New River, too wide and too deep, could not be bridged. In order to cross it on the northern journey, the wagons had to be unloaded and then pulled across by a team of animals situated on the opposite bank. Thus, the supplies were ferried in smaller volumes.

Some of Dimick’s other field officers for this reconnaissance were captains Doubleday and Pemberton of companies E and F, respectively; lieutenants Frederick L. Childs and Richard C. Duryea of Company B; and Sergeant E. M. K. Hudson of Company K.

In a letter dated March 20th Captain Pemberton reported that, on the 16th, his company had left a camp on the Hillsboro River to scout the country between the Everglades and Lauderdale’s route. "The general course taken was WNW thru the Cypress Swamp, wet and dry pine barrens and grass ponds for 3.5 or 4 miles when reached the wide cypress swamp which borders the Everglades, which was crossed nearly W. clearing the last cypress about a mile from the edge of the pine barren, and reached the everglades in their extent as far as the eye could reach. "Towards the cypress swamp the everglades was bordered by sawgrass as far to the N. and S. as could be seen. There was much less water in the Everglades than in the bordering Cypress Swamp -- a good deal of mud in both -- about 8 inches in depth..."62

Sergeant Hudson’s company scouted in coordination with Pemberton’s. This detail similarly followed the wagon road from Middle River to the north and sent forth an occasional reconnaissance party. Simultaneously, Company B was reconnoitering east of the road.

In his official report, Duryea recorded that they left the camp and train, travelled in a northeast direction and examined the country approaching the Hillsboro Inlet. From there they journeyed to the crossing but did not find any signs of Indians. On March 16th, the company continued north with the train and, on their return journey from Fort McRae on the 30th, accompanied the train through the Hillsboro territory.54

Captain Doubleday reported that after departing from the New River camp on March 5th, his command explored the territory between Middle River and the sources of the Hillsboro. They followed a westerly course, reached the sawgrass ponds that skirted the cypress swamp and then entered the area. Doubleday described and illustrated that part of the territory which extends toward the mainland in spurs and connects with the Everglades. Accordingly, the men of Company E had to wade through marshes where they passed an occasional island of pine trees. However, they did not discover any Indians. Doubleday’s men joined the column and encamped near some ponds.65

Almost six months after the army’s visit to the region, Lieutenant Childs led a detachment on another exploration of the Hillsboro. On August 2nd they left camp and proceeded in an east-by-northeast direction, crossed the Hillsboro one half mile from its mouth and followed it to the sea. From camp the next day, the detachment proceeded in an easterly direction and succeeded in reaching a ridge which was east of the broad sawgrass marsh and north of the Hillsboro River. According to Lieutenant Childs, they "... crossed the ridge in a N.E. direction and struck the Little Hillsborough, followed up the river five or six miles. On the 4th -- crossed the river in a westerly direction one mile turned south and proceeded by the shortest line to camp on Alligator Pond..."66

Captain Doubleday saw the Hillsboro River for the last time on his journey out of South Florida. Colonel Gustavus Loomis, who had been appointed on April 27th to command the Florida troops, ordered Company E to march to Fort Capron, 120 miles to the north. In turn, breveted Captain Truman Seymour and his men in Company H, 1st Artillery Regiment, were ordered from Fort Capron to the Miami River. In October 1857 Doubleday led his company and its eighty animals and some wagons north from their post. The first twenty-five miles were easy to travel. However, Doubleday reported that, further northward, they "... had to make [their] way with a train of 12 wagons across large rivers, great swamps and an area of the sea."67

During reconnaissances between Fort Dallas and the Loxahatchee, old and abandoned Seminole camps often were discovered. But, these expeditions did not reveal evidence of recent occupation. Nevertheless, the Hillsboro River probably was explored more at this time than ever before. These forays subsequently familiarized the United States military with previously unknown regions of the territory and eventually opened the area to settlement. But settlement did not occur until hostilities in the north had long diminished.68

36 BROWARD LEGACY
After the Third Seminole War two years of peace blanketed Florida. No information was recorded about the Hillsboro River at this time and only a few references emerged during the Civil War because much of the region remained primitive. On March 8, 1863, the United States gunboat Sagamore captured a small sloop off the coast of Hillsboro, Florida. The Sagamore had several missions. These included blockading the coast and sending ashore occasional landing parties to search for and destroy Confederate saltworks and other enterprises. However, the seamen did not go ashore at Hillsboro.69

At that time New River was experiencing another phase of settlement. A Union sympathizer was living there, 17.5 miles south of the Hillsboro, for the duration of the Civil War in order to avoid those with adverse political beliefs. And in 1870 Washington Jenkins and his brothers were farming the banks of that river. Although settlers were beginning to take an interest in the country, the Hillsboro remained untamed.

In 1876 the federal government established houses of refuge along the Florida coast in order to protect shipwreck survivors from the elements. The Hillsboro Inlet was located between two of these. House of Refuge No. 3 was located at Orange Grove Haulover, about ten miles north of the inlet. Washington Jenkins was keeper at Fort Lauderdale House of Refuge No. 4. It was situated on Fort Lauderdale beach, about twelve miles to the south of the Hillsboro Inlet.70

In 1876 Billie Addison, the son of a Gulf coast rancher, travelled throughout the Hillsboro country and along the east coast in order to locate a grazing range suitable for cattle ranching. Addison believed that there might be one in the woods, far to the west; but no one had any idea about how to get there. Regardless, in December Addison led Dexter Hubel and Frank Andrews, who were Lake Worth pioneers, into that area. Hubel and Anderson were able to borrow a boat from the Pierce family of Lake Worth.

The expedition sailed one mile up the Hillsboro Inlet and prepared a base camp. From there the party hiked west through the woods. Each one carried his own bedding and enough food to last from three to four days. By no means was the trek pleasant, but it was typical for pioneers of that era. It was necessary to traverse small swamps and wade across numerous ponds. Occasionally, they found dry ground on the spruce pine ridges. A dense cypress swamp that extended north and south eventually ended that westward trek.

Addison's expedition established a camp on the border of this immense obstruction. On the next day they continued south. That night they camped on the edge of a deep pond that was nearly surrounded by palmetto thickets. And they kept a fire burning because they could hear a distant panther. An eastward hike at dawn for one hour brought them to a pine barren with oak scrub and saw palmetto. They soon encountered a ridge covered with tall pines and then a large hammock extending north and south. Because the beach was visible from their position, the party returned north, through the hammock, to their base camp. Despite their efforts, no suitable range could be found. The weary travellers sailed out of the inlet and headed
south to Miami for a well deserved rest.71

On a sailing excursion in 1879 from Lake Worth to Miami, young Charles Pierce, his father and his friend stopped overnight at the Hillsboro Inlet "... where the great Florida reef comes to land!" It was Pierce's first visit to that area, and he was impressed with the landfall.

Across the 200 foot wide, shallow inlet were coconut palms. Their fruit supplied the travellers with fresh liquid to drink. Pierce noted that the inlet turned north behind the beach and was lined with low, dense mangroves, cocoplums and seagrape trees and that a lagoon continued for about a half mile south of the inlet.

When the tide changed, the water in the inlet would change hues. This intriguing phenomenon provoked Charles to seek an explanation.

"Across the inlet to the northwest we could see the mouth of a creek about fifty feet wide, and as the tide turned, a heavy flood of dark colored fresh water came pouring out of it...72"

Poor sailing weather on the next day prevented the travellers from continuing their journey. Pierce's father proceeded to walk down the beach and visit the keeper at the Fort Lauderdale House of Refuge. With more favorable seas, young Pierce and his friend were able to sail the Creole to that location.73 Although Charles Pierce's father, occasional hunters and other travellers would establish camps, it was not until 1884 that any sizable group would visit the area. It was then that a United States Coastal and Geodetic Survey party, intent on mapping the coastline, established a camp at the Hillsboro Inlet.74

In the latter part of the 1880s, additional settlement in south Florida necessitated a more dependable and efficient means of mail delivery. In the past, letters and news came by sea and were dependent upon prevailing weather conditions. In response, overland mail carriers were contracted with to deliver mail that had been forwarded to Lake Worth's post office. The mail carriers hiked along the beach and, usually, did not wear shoes. Hence, they were called the barefoot mailmen.75

Three years after the United States Coastal and Geodetic Survey party had camped at Hillsboro Inlet, a tragedy beset one of the mail carriers there. In October 1887 Ed Hamilton disappeared along his route between Lake Worth and the Fort Lauderdale House of Refuge. During a subsequent search, his clothing was found lying on the north side of the inlet and his mail haversack was found hanging from the limb of a seagrape tree. The cause of his disappearance was evident.

In order to cross the inlet, it was necessary for all the mail carriers to keep a small boat secluded nearby. It is believed that hunters, who had found and borrowed the boat, had left it on the south bank of the inlet. Thus, Hamilton had to swim across the inlet in order to reach his craft.

The theories regarding Hamilton's demise varied. Some presumed that he had drowned or had been attacked by sharks. But Charles Pierce believed otherwise. He knew that the thirty-six year old mail carrier was a strong swimmer and that sharks rarely came close to shore. After Hamilton's disappearance, Pierce visited the Hillsboro Inlet where he observed the presence of a large number of alligators.

"They were being swept out on the ebb tide and they would cross the beach back to the lagoon." In fact, as Charles walked along the bank, one 'gator approached and followed him, but it remained a short distance offshore.

Although additional investigation into Hamilton's disappearance did not reveal any other clues, Pierce believed that alligators were the culprits. A number of years later a jawbone that held a gold tooth was found in the area. Although it could not be determined if the human remains were those of the missing mail carrier, the discovery added substance to Pierce's assumption.

Over the years the responsibility of delivering the mail in this fashion changed hands several times. Charles Pierce knew the route because he was a barefoot mailman. Although he usually made the journey alone, it was not uncommon for travellers to accompany the carrier on his route. After all, for some time it was the only feasible land route. The final carrier was Henry John Burkhardt, who resigned in the early 1890s.76 The mail then was delivered from Lantana to Miami by a hack line along the rugged, but adequate Bay Biscayne road which, more importantly, provided a practical land route for new settlers who were entering the region.77

When these pioneers first approached the Hillsboro, they probably could not help but notice the majestic trees that bordered the river. There were lofty pines, enormous banyans, gray cypress and red mangroves. While the territory seemed discouraging, it provided many challenges.78

Before and after the close of the 19th century, the economic life of the state was dependent upon agriculture and an extensive, winter tourist business. Because the climate was mild and the land was fertile and affordable, most residents became farmers. Of course, it was laborious to clear and plant the soil. Consequently, jobs were available on the larger farms. After the harvest, the produce was shipped to the northern markets from such southern ports as Key West and Miami.79

In 1890, when farmers such as Blackwelder began tilling the banks of the Hillsboro, pineapple was considered the staple crop. Successful harvests fueled economic growth and attracted more settlers. In effect, agricultural products not only sustained pioneer families but, when placed in northern markets, advertised the region to land
speculators and prospective settlers. Thus, a settlement came into existence along the Hillsboro River.

The small, nameless settlement was located along the south side of the river, a little more than a mile west of the beach. In 1890 there were six families in and occasional visitors to the area. The land was productive and game and fish were plentiful.

A few years later the Bay Biscayne road was constructed from Lemon City, which was north of Miami, to Juno, where the Dade County courthouse was re-located. Once the road opened, travelers no longer had to depend on the coastal and ocean routes. Edmund Lindsay White, the contractor, was also a Dade County Commissioner. He and Commissioner James L. Nugent of Coconut Grove welcomed the new road. They no longer had to walk the beach and canoe across the Hillsboro Inlet in order to attend meetings in Juno.

Although practical, the road was merely a graded trail that followed the ridge. North of the Hillsboro River it ran west of the Florida East Coast Railway tracks.

By the mid 1890s the settlement along the Hillsboro River housed a handful of farmers who toiled in small produce fields among palmetto scrub and pine woods.

In 1896 the Florida East Coast Railway reached south to the Hillsboro River. Through the efforts of Julia Tuttle in Miami, Henry Flagler was convinced to extend his railroad to her town. Not only was the transportation a boon to Miami, but to all the other towns along the line. The existence of the railroad stimulated growth in the population and productivity of the settlement along the Hillsboro River; and it became an effective means of transporting produce to the markets.

Soon after the advent of the railroad C.E. Hunt, a civil engineer for the Florida East Coast Railway, ventured to the settlement and platted twelve acres of land along the river, near the tracks. He appropriately referred to the unnamed settlement as Hillsborough.

One year later, in 1898, twenty settlers petitioned Washington for the establishment of a post office. By June 1898 their wishes were granted. John B. Thomas was appointed as the first postmaster. This station was the only one between Miami and Delray Beach.

At the same time the town had two small stores and two hotels. One establishment, which also housed the post office, was owned by E.A. Thomas. The other was owned in partnership by W.L. Sweat and W.S. Gaskin. The hotels were named the Pioneer and the Australian. At that time the hub of the produce center was along today's Dixie Highway, near present-day Hillsboro Beach Boulevard.

After the turn of the century, Hillsborough continued to prosper as a small community. But the surrounding land was still to be tamed. The beaches were a pine and sand wilderness that were visited only for picnicking and fishing. Even in 1903 the closest out-of-town shopping was in Miami, forty miles to the south. The closest doctor was in Delray Beach, ten miles to the north.

A few years later the business district, located at the present-day intersection of Hillsboro Beach Boulevard and Federal Highway U.S. 1, grew to four or five stores, one post office and two hotels. Productive fields yielded beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, eggplants and squash; and pineapple was the major crop. But night-foraging deer caused great damage, especially in the outlying areas. In fact, the presence of those pesky, ubiquitous animals encouraged the town to change its name in 1907 from Hillsborough to Deerfield. However, even as early as 1900, some residents had referred to the settlement as Deerfield.

On February 12, 1901, an act was approved by the United States Senate to establish a "first-order light at or near Hillsboro Point, FL." Bids for the construction of the lighthouse were accepted on August 1, 1905. The 136 foot iron structure was installed in March 1907.

In 1909 a school was established in Deerfield and, in 1910, church services were held in the home of M.A. Robinson. By 1913 the community had established a Baptist church. Although the young town had a foothold in the ensuing growth, its agriculture market had a decisive control over its economy.

In 1910 the pineapple industry in south Florida collapsed. Better fields and cheaper labor in Cuba were the major contributing factors. Although the remaining produce industry continued to thrive, and although the Florida East Coast Railway depot remained the shipping center for regional produce, the extent of the area's agricultural productivity was limited. However, that would soon change. The enormous transformation of south Florida would begin to be accomplished in the second decade of the twentieth century.

FOOTNOTES
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5. DeVorssey, 10.
6. Ibid., 3.
7. Ibid., 3, 50.
8. Ibid., 33, 34, 36.
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14. Ibid., 44.
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21. Austin, 27.

22. Vignoles, 49.


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51. Buxer, 133.


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