

BOOKS

NOTICES OF EAST FLORIDA

By William H. Simmons

Edited, with an introduction, by George E. Baker. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1973. Pp. XXIX, 97.)

Notices of East Florida chronicles William H. Simmons' trip through the interior of central Florida in 1821. Of special interest is his account of the Seminole Indian culture in the period shortly after the United States purchased the territory.

The first three chapters of Simmons' book are very slow moving, dealing with a geographic description of Florida. Over half the first chapter digresses into a comparison of the yellow fever theories of Dr. Hosack of South Carolina and Dr. Irvine of New York, whose ideas he used during the epidemic of 1821.

The latter half of the book recounts Simmons' journey from St. Augustine to the Alachua prairie. This section recounts his meetings with the blacks who lived among the Indians. By far the most interesting and important feature of *Notices of East Florida* is Simmons' comments on the Seminole Indian and his culture. In an organized essay enriched by personal observation and conversations, the author relates the origins and life of the Seminole from the Creek intrusion on the Yemassee Indians to the contemporary Indian concepts of justice, family, values and philosophy of life. Dr. Simmons expounds the belief that the cultural heritage of the Seminole is worthy of study rather than destruction or perversion at the hand of "civilized" society. He even assumes the position, unpopular at the time, that the savagery of the Indian was a reaction and response according to Seminole philosophy and not innate cruelty.

Seen in its entirety, this short book is worth the time necessary to read it. Simmons writes in the romantic prose associated with a man educated in the waning years of the eighteenth century. He often dwells on trivia and dry description, but it must be remembered that the events and items of which he wrote were new and strange to the Americans of the 1820s. It is his insight and powers of observation in the final chapter which justifies its reprinting.

James Moses

STRANAHAN'S PEOPLE.

Edited by Boyd Ogle and Wally Korb. (Fort Lauderdale: Stranahan Graphics, 1975. Pp. 142.)

Though it is unlikely to become a classic in local history, *Stranahan's People* is a remarkable little book.

To begin with, it is the product of high school students who obviously invested a great deal of time, effort, and talent in its creation. The book, a collection of nearly two dozen essays written by twenty students under the direction of Boyd Ogle and Wally Korb, is highly readable and possesses a kind of charm which is often missing from more professional efforts.

Secondly, the young authors are apparently unintimidated by past strictures, for they explore several formerly taboo subjects in Fort Lauderdale history. In Marie Studiale's chapter, "A Good Man, Frank Stranahan," there is an account of the pioneer leader's death, one of the very few available in print today. Ellyn Ferguson deals with another topic, the black experience, which has consistently failed to receive serious attention.

Thirdly, *Stranahan's People* is largely based upon personal interviews, rather than on documentary evidence. While this approach weakens the scholarly authority of the book, it adds immeasurably to its narrative quality. Many of the chapters read as if the authors had recorded discussions among long-time residents of the area. The pages are filled with fine anecdotes which are well strung together into clear presentations of early Fort Lauderdale life.

Finally, the book abandons the conventional chronological treatment of history for the far more interesting topical approach. Each chapter is allowed to explore its particular subject without the dictates of what comes before and after. There should have been, however, some organizational themes imposed on the arrangement of chapters.

Most of the criticisms of *Stranahan's People* are relatively minor. The piece on Stranahan High School lacks the narrative quality spoken of earlier and is unlikely to arouse the interest of many readers. The failure to cover the history of Fort Lauderdale before 1893 is understandable, but remains a frustration to those who recognize the importance of events one and two hundred years ago on the New River.

Yes, a remarkable little book; one which deserves a wide readership.

Ralph J. Megna