

# Napoleon B. Broward: Life And Times Of A Florida Governor

## Story Of Broward County's Namesake

(This is an edited version of a talk Judge James R. Knott delivered to the Fort Lauderdale Rotary Club in 1974).

Judge Knott retired in 1977 as senior Circuit Judge in Palm Beach County, after serving more than twenty-one years. He has always been deeply inter-

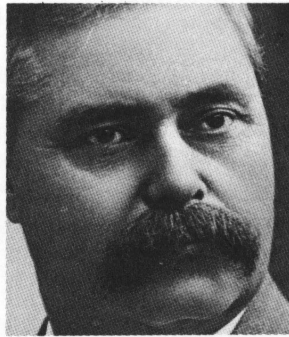
ested in Florida history and now serves as Vice-Chairman of the Landmarks Preservation Commission of Palm Beach County. Judge Knott served two terms as president of the Florida Historical Society, and is president emeritus of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County, and among other activities is engaged in writing county history.

By James R. Knott

Riverboat captain on the St. Johns River, Sheriff of Duval County, gun-runner and successful businessman, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward served as a state representative who later won election to the United States Senate. As a progressive governor of Florida he pushed to drain and reclaim the Everglades. Able to trace his New World roots to the American Revolutionary era, this man for whom Broward County was named had many titles, each as distinctive as the French general and emperor for whom he and his father had been named.

His French Huguenot greatgrandfather, Francis Broward, came to South Carolina in the 1760's, married a Charleston woman, and served under Count Casimir Pulaski during the American Revolution. Francis Broward received a Spanish land grant of 300 acres at Doctor's Island near the Nassau River in East Florida and, in 1800, brought his family there to live in the wilds. It was the future grandson of his five-year-old son John who would become governor of Florida 105 years later.

In 1816 Florida's Spanish government granted John Broward 16,000 acres on the St. Johns River for saw-mill and timber operations. This was a huge domain, even for an ambitious entrepreneur. John wed Margaret Tucker of Florida and they had ten children including Pulaski, Washington, Florida, and Napoleon, who was



(Broward County Historical Commission)

the governor's father. Commissioned as a colonel in the East Florida Regiment by territorial Governor William P. Duval, John later represented Duval County in the first state senate in 1845.

Colonel John Broward's son Napoleon, born on the family homestead in 1829, became a large landholder and cattle owner in Duval County. Napoleon Bonaparte Broward married a New Hampshire woman named Parsons, whose family had moved in 1840 to Mayport, Florida. Their children were Montcalm, Osceola, California and future governor Napoleon, who was born on April 19, 1857. When Civil War hostilities touched the Jacksonville-Fernandina area in 1862, the Broward women and children moved inland to their summer cottage at White Springs, Florida, near the Suwannee River. There they remained until the war had ended.

The Broward's were financially devastated by the war. When they

returned to Duval County after the Civil War they discovered that their slaves had departed and that their home, cattle, stables and other belongings had been burned, destroyed or stolen. In addition to being desperately poverty-stricken, their Confederate money was worthless. Unable to pay their taxes, they lost the majority of their vast landholdings. Thus, the future governor began his boyhood under the most adverse conditions.

Far from despairing, however, young Napoleon and his brother Montcalm helped their father erect a log house and plant a vegetable garden. Following the deaths of their mother and father in 1869 and 1870, respectively, their aunts took their four sisters to live in Jacksonville. Now on their own, Napoleon and Montcalm did odd jobs and attended school when able. During the ensuing years Napoleon worked aboard various boats, mostly on the St. Johns River, and acquired expertise in seamanship and ship handling.

Napoleon's lifestyle altered in 1887 when he married New Yorker Annie Douglass, who was residing in Jacksonville. He was commissioned as a pilot of the St. Johns River Bar, a lucrative post due to the multitude of vessels crossing the bar. At that time there were few railroads; therefore, the St. Johns was the principal artery of transport for expanding freight and passenger trade in that part of Florida. Captain Broward be-



**Governor and Mrs. Napoleon B. Broward and their family of eight girls pose on the porch of the governor's mansion. (Broward County Historical Commission).**

came known as skipper and part owner of the newest and fastest vessel on the river. Jacksonville was then a resort center with 60,000 tourists during the winter seasons of the mid-1880's.

Well-liked, Broward's years on the river made him a familiar figure to Duval County residents. In 1888 the county sheriff was removed by Governor Edward A. Perry for negligence in allowing a notorious prisoner to escape. Appointed as sheriff to fill this position, the popular Broward earned a reputation for courage and integrity which derived from his assaults on local gambling interests.

Disease, public confusion, and embargoes soon tested the courage and stamina of Sheriff Broward. During the spring of 1888, yellow fever erupted in Jacksonville and rapidly became an epidemic, accompanied by panic and disorder. In the hope that the shots would destroy germs, cannons were fired in the public squares. Many people, including most public officials, fled from the city. Sheriff Broward remained and placed his office at the disposal of the health authorities. Instituting a quarantine against Jacksonville's people and their goods, other cities would not let them enter. St. Augus-

tine even returned the mail, although it had been fumigated. When citizens of Waycross, Georgia, learned that a train carrying Jacksonville refugees was going to pass through their town, they threatened to tear up the railroad tracks even though the occupants were in locked cars which would pass through town at a high speed.

Because most white voters had departed in order to escape the epidemic, Sheriff Broward lost the election in the fall of 1888 to a Republican. But, in March 1889, when the newly elected sheriff had been disqualified on a technicality, Broward again became sheriff by appointment. Although he won the office on his own in the election of 1892, he was removed by Governor Henry L. Mitchell because his excessive zeal in supervising an election was deemed interference. Against the express instructions of Governor Mitchell, Broward has placed special deputies in the polling places. However, in 1896 Broward again won election as sheriff after being drafted to run.

A famous prizefight, held in Jacksonville in 1894, illustrates the attitude regarding public morality of Broward and many other Floridians at that time. In November 1893 some

Jacksonville sportsmen and businessmen had organized the Duval Athletic Club with the purpose of promoting a heavyweight championship fight between titleholder James J. Corbett and Charles Mitchell, his British challenger. Governor Mitchell and Sheriff Broward considered the fight "immoral" and were determined to prevent its occurrence by calling out the state militia, if necessary. Only a court order forbidding such interference enabled the fight to be held as scheduled in the afternoon of January 25 near the present site of the Gator Bowl. As soon as the fight was over, however, deputies arrested both fighters on charges of assault and battery. A jury subsequently acquitted Corbett, who had won in the third round, and the case against Charles Mitchell was dropped.

A man of strong, independent character, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward was always interested in public affairs; but, he never considered the holding of political office as the sole means of support for himself and his large family. In addition to his political career, Broward simultaneously operated private business ventures in order to supplement his earnings. While governor, his annual salary rose from \$3500 to \$5000. Politically,



**Napoleon B. Broward, Jr. (then 27), looking south across the mouth of the St. Johns River toward the village of Mayport. He stands in front of his home, the old Broward summer house, holding one of his three children. Picture taken by Judge Knott in 1937. (Courtesy of Judge Knott).**

he invariably was opposed to the monied interests and, therefore, could never approach them for financial support. In 1887 he purchased a small lumberyard and gristmill in Jacksonville where many city people came to grind their feed and corn. A hired man ran this business while Broward continued to pilot tugs on the river.

In subsequent years he earned a large amount of money in a business venture that resorted to running guns during the 1895-1898 Cuban War for Independence. Although he was indicted for violating international neutrality laws, the charge was dismissed after the conflict grew into the Spanish-American War of 1898. Ironically, he was then regarded as a cavalier, courageous hero.

In 1895 Napoleon, his brother Montcalm, and George Decottes built a powerful sea-going tug at a cost of \$40,000. Designed by the future governor principally for towing, wrecking, and carrying passengers and freight between Jacksonville and the island of Nassau, THE THREE FRIENDS embarked on her maiden voyage. Under the leadership of Jose' Marti', the Cuban War for Independence had erupted in 1895; consequently, the tug's owners found themselves in the lucrative if risky business of running guns to the Cuban rebels in violation of Presi-

dent Grover Cleveland's insistence upon strict neutrality.

In order to run arms, men, and supplies to the Cuban rebels, THE THREE FRIENDS had to outmaneuver and outrun both United States Revenue cutters and ships of the Spanish crown which patrolled the Cuban coastline. Had Broward and THE THREE FRIENDS been apprehended by United States ships, he would have been subject to fine, imprisonment, and forfeiture of the tug. If captured by a ship of the Spanish navy, he would have faced a Spanish firing squad.

After one successful run, Broward became sufficiently confident to continue as a filibuster. Guns and ammunition were openly loaded aboard THE THREE FRIENDS at her Jacksonville dock in crates marked "groceries" or "ship's stores." Broward either told newspapers and port authorities that their destination was Key West or that he and his crew were salvaging off the South Florida coast. Floridians, meanwhile, watched with bemused interest and applauded with gusto as Broward outwitted the port authorities, the Spanish consul, the Coast Guard, and the King's patrol. After his swash-buckling exploits had been reported in the newspapers, his illegal activities transformed him into a public hero.

These war exploits afforded him national publicity. Years later when governor, he accompanied President Theodore Roosevelt on a trip down the Mississippi River to inspect various drainage projects. One afternoon in Memphis the conversation turned to the Spanish-American War and the events which anticipated the conflict. Roosevelt asked Broward, "Governor, have you still got THE THREE FRIENDS?" "Yes," Broward replied.

"Well," said Roosevelt, "you ought to be mighty proud of her. If it had not been for THE THREE FRIENDS, you would not be Governor now."

"You ought to be proud of her yourself," Broward retorted, "because if it had not been for her you would not be President of the United States now."

Broward's statement was not without basis. Roosevelt's Spanish-American activities, including the famous Rough Riders' charge at San Juan Hill, had played a strong role in his progress toward achieving the presidency. Had it not been for THE THREE FRIENDS the Cuban insurrection might well have collapsed before there was any American intervention at all.

In 1900 Broward won a seat in the Florida state legislature and, in the session of 1901, further established himself as an anti-railroad, anti-big business liberal. He voted in favor of state liquor control and the controversial Flagler divorce law, which made insanity a basis for divorce. He convinced his supporters that he had voted for the divorce bill on its merits rather than for the Flagler railroad money or political support. Certainly, all evidence indicates that he never received either, despite charges leveled by some of his opponents. As governor, however, he signed a bill in 1905 which repealed the law under which Flagler had divorced his second wife.

Following the legislative session, Broward became active in the Jacksonville Towing and Wrecking Company. Between February 1902 and August 1903 he moved his family to Key West where the company was operating and enrolled his daughters in a Key West convent school. He later returned to Jacksonville and, soon after, discussed the



idea of running for governor with his family. One morning at the breakfast table his wife realized that his decision was made.

"Do you think you can win, Napoleon?" she asked. "The forces fighting you will be great. The cities, Flagler's papers, railroad money — all will be thrown in the race against you." Broward answered calmly, "I don't intend to go after the cities . . . I'm going to stump every crossroads village between Fernandina and Pensacola and talk to the farmers and the crackers and make 'em sit up and think."

Thus began one of the most heated, bitter gubernatorial campaigns in Florida's history. The 1904 campaign issues had been evolving for many years and finally were defined during the administrations of Governors William D. Bloxham and William S. Jennings. Jennings' middle-of-the-road liberalism had set the stage during his term from 1901-1905. Napoleon Broward's role was an all-important one in Florida's Progressive movement and he gave it direction, leadership, and a name; THE BROWARD ERA.

At first, Broward dallied about publicly announcing his candidacy although, in his speeches, he sounded like a candidate. By December 1903 Congressman Robert W. Davis, C. M. Brown, and D. H. Mays had entered the contest. In a statement to the press on January 4, 1904, Broward officially threw his hat into the ring.

Broward's physique, demeanor, and dress were eye-catching. At the beginning of the campaign he was forty-six years old, but appeared younger. Well over six feet tall, he had developed into a striking, powerful figure. His dark face was full and free of lines and wrinkles; he sported a fashionable walrus moustache and had traces of gray at the temples and glints of red in his hair. In summer he usually wore a white linen suit with a small black tie and a wide-brimmed slouch hat, in the classic style of the Southern gentleman.

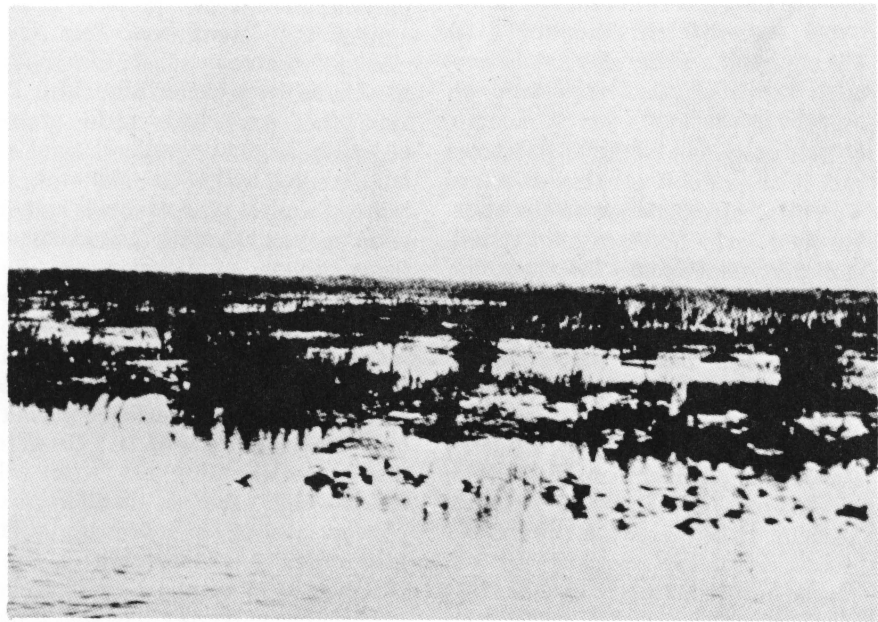
Broward had a firm political base in Duval County where he had been the leader of the faction which pushed for Populist-Progressive reforms directed principally against railroads and other corporate interests. His close associates were men of the same stamp across the state.

Among them were John N. C. Stockton, William James Bryan, Nathan P. Bryan, Stephen P. Mallory, Jr., John M. Barrs, Frank Pope, William S. Jennings, and Wilkinson Call. In 1903 Stockton had announced as a candidate for the United States Senate and Barrs for the House of Representatives. Incumbent Governor Jennings provided Broward with the nucleus of a statewide organization. Broward continued his support of the railroad commission, the direct primary, and demands for regulation of the trusts. He championed Everglades' drainage, reclamation, and settlement and thus, crusaded to preserve the public lands for the people rather than for the railroads and corporations.

His principal rival for the Democratic party nomination was Robert W. Davis, a Jacksonville lawyer who had served four terms in Congress. During the campaign, Broward published his AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH which pictured him as a self-made man, a "cracker" of humble origin. The conservatives immediately recognized the easy reading pamphlet as a shrewd political device aimed at securing the backwoods' vote. In his speeches, Davis panned Broward's description of the hard times that he and his family had suffered after the Civil War.

Broward supported a positive, dynamic program. He favored the drainage program which had been initiated by his predecessor, Governor Jennings, and incorporated it into his campaign as a major issue. The railroad and canal companies opposed the drainage of the Everglades and viewed the project as a threat to their established interests. But, Broward envisioned great public benefit from the development of the hitherto almost useless area. Although his leading opponent Congressman "Bob" Davis was an experienced politician who appealed to the conservative element, Broward made a strong impression in the small towns and rural sections.

Broward was no mean campaigner. Downtown Jacksonville was the scene of an immense, noisy, nocturnal political rally prior to the first primary. Many of the bands played and thousands of people attended. Leading his parade to the meeting, Broward arrived in the first carriage. Attired in a cream-colored, linen suit and a wide-brimmed hat, Broward addressed the throng. When Davis started to speak, in turn, his voice was drowned out in the raucous whistle of a riverboat which just happened to be THE THREE FRIENDS. The meeting eventually disbanded in pandemonium.



Governor Broward began the drainage and reclamation of Everglades in 1905. This is a scene of the open "Glades" in about 1910 along the North New River Canal. This is now part of the City of Plantation. (Broward County Historical Commission).





When Governor Broward began to reclaim the Everglades it was mostly an intractable wasteland. In 1915 about nine-tenths of Broward County lay in the Everglades. This is a stand of the heavy saw grass which impeded development of the Glades. (Broward County Historical Commission).

Broward led Davis by a small margin in the voting the next day; thus, the two leaders swung into the second primary. Their loud, mutual denunciations echoed in all the newspapers. Davis and his supporters accused Broward of actively advocating the "insanity divorce bill" which had enabled Flagler to divorce his wife. Further charges were leveled to the effect that this legislation had been bought by Flagler for \$20,000. In another move to discredit Broward, one newspaper reported that Broward dyed his moustache every day, while another claimed that he was an Apache Indian.

Ultimately, out of the 45,244 votes cast in the run-off election, Broward won by a narrow margin of 714 votes. He then easily defeated his Republican party opponent. On the other hand, Broward's longtime associate, John Stockton, was defeated in his race for the United States Senate by James Taliaferro, a defender of the railroad interests.

Shortly after his election, the large Broward family had to make the transition from Jacksonville to Tallahassee. In 1905 there was no official residence for the governor; so, they moved into a former convent which was the only available place large enough to house them. Broward's elderly aunts, Maggie and Florida, refused to come to the state capital for the inauguration because they had

been humiliated by his AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH. Purposely exaggerated for political capital, the SKETCH implied that the members of the Broward family were "piney-woods crackers." The sensitive aunts believed that Tallahassee society might look down upon them. When the original governor's mansion was completed in 1907, the Browards became its first occupants.

As governor, Broward immediately pushed for his pet project, drainage of the Everglades. This area was a "vast region" of which few Floridians were knowledgeable. By 1905 the state had made grants of nearly seventeen million acres of land, almost half of its total area, to railroad and land companies and, in addition, was litigating their claims to three million additional acres. Because Lake Okeechobee was 20.4 feet above the level of the Gulf of Mexico, the plan was to dredge canals in order to convert some of the state's remaining "overflowed lands" into productive "lowlands." Broward was fond of declaring that "water will run downhill" and he, therefore, expended most of his gubernatorial efforts on drainage problems.

Projected to be the largest drainage venture in the world at that time, the problem was how to finance this vast scheme which many people considered visionary. In 1905 the legislature enacted a bill which estab-

lished drainage districts and provided for a maximum annual tax of ten cents per acre. With Governor Broward in attendance, dredging began on July 4, 1906 at New River in Fort Lauderdale. Ultimately, much of the work was financed by large land sales where property could be purchased for as little as two dollars per acre.

Although bereft of formal schooling, Broward was vitally interested in all levels of education, particularly higher education, a field in which Florida lagged far behind the rest of the nation. Consequently, Broward valiantly promoted the passage of the Buckman Act of 1905 which accomplished a major re-organization of higher education by consolidating the seven, state-supported colleges into just four. Supervised by a board of control, one school served only white men; another accommodated white women; a third was set aside for blacks; and a fourth was for the deaf, dumb, and blind. From these institutions grew the modern University of Florida at Gainesville, which was all male until 1947; Florida State University at Tallahassee, which had been the Florida State College for Women until 1947; and Florida A. and M. University of Tallahassee.

During Broward's tenure, appropriations were made for buildings, supplies, and salaries for the hospital for the insane at Chattahoochee, where

investigation had revealed scandalous inadequacies. Child labor in factories, mines, and beer gardens was terminated. A pure food law was enacted. The first automotive speed laws were written. These required that automobile drivers would stop at the request of a person riding a horse and also limited the maximum speed to four miles per hour when approaching bridges or curves. The need for these laws arose from the increase in the number of automobiles in Florida. While almost three hundred were registered there in 1906, that number had grown to 733 by 1908.

After he left the governor's office in 1909, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward's career was brief. He entered the race for the United States Senate seat which had been vacated in 1907 by the death of Stephen R. Mallory, Jr. Broward had appointed William James Bryan to the post. Other than Henry Clay of Kentucky, Bryan was the youngest man ever to sit in the senate; but, he died in March 1908. Broward then appointed William Milton of Marianna, who was a grandson of Florida's Civil War governor. Milton did not run for a full term and left the way open for Broward to seek the office. When Broward lost the senate race to Duncan U. Fletcher, it seemed to prove the old saw that the governorship was a political deadend. Two years later, however, Broward won Taliaferro's former senate seat in a contest against newspaper editor Claude L'Engle. But, Broward was never to sit in the United States Senate.

During Broward's last illness, after his election to the senate, it was said that he had suffered a heart attack near Palatka, Florida, while enroute by train to Jacksonville. At his own request, Broward was removed from the train in order to obtain treatment from his friend, Dr. E. W. Warren of Palatka. Eventually, however, it was determined that Broward died from a gallstone attack caused by jaundice.

Outgoing and attractive, Broward's daughters married well and went to live in the north and far west. While Dorcas and Josephine Broward remained in Florida, daughter Florida went to the state of Alabama. The governor's only son Napoleon Bonaparte, youngest of the nine child-



Summer home of the Broward Family, built 1870 on north side of the St. Johns River near the Atlantic Ocean, adjacent to present ferry landing from village of Mayport. Present home of Napoleon B. Broward, Jr., the youngest of Governor Broward's nine children. Picture taken in 1975 by Judge Lamar Warren. (Courtesy of Judge Knott).

ren, still resides in the family's century-old summer house near the mouth of the St. John's River. Here, the governor's wife died in 1953 at the age of eighty-six. Two of the governor's grandchildren live today in Palm Beach County. Broward, himself, visited Fort Lauderdale many times during his term as chief executive. While running contraband to Cuba during his younger years, Broward would bring his boat up the New River and stay with Frank Stranahan, founder of modern Fort Lauderdale.

Of course, since he died in 1910, Governor Broward did not live to see the creation of the Florida county named in his honor. It was forged in 1915 from portions of Palm Beach and Dade counties. Initially, proponents of the new county wanted to name it "Everglade," but succumbed to the overwhelming argument that, without

the fulfillment of Governor Broward's drainage and reclamation program, the new county could never amount to much more than a watery wasteland, fringed with small coastal settlements.

As Broward's biographer, Dr. Samuel Proctor, observed: "Napoleon Broward had the good fortune to fit the needs of his generation . . . He left to subsequent generations an example of courage and truth — the rarest elements in the political life of modern democracies."

What is Governor Broward's place in history? Florida historian Professor Charlton W. Tebeau assessed Broward as the most constructive governor that Florida has ever had. The BROWARD ERA referred to the individual and his two succeeding administrations when his philosophies prevailed and his programs dominated the course of development in Florida.