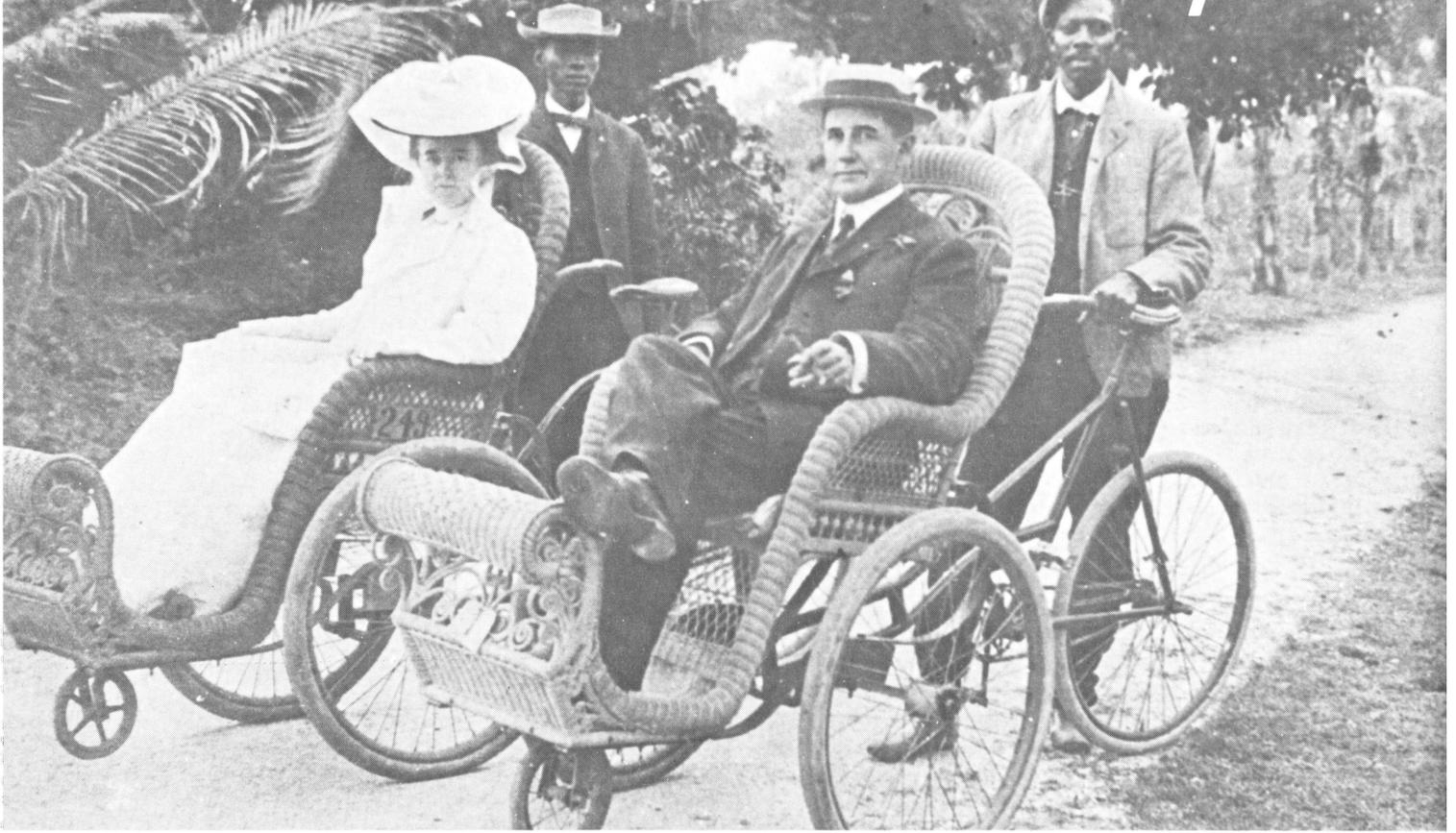


Mrs. Stranahan's Own Story



Mr. and Mrs. Frank Stranahan in Palm Beach, enjoying a ride in the popular "Wheel Chairs." (Fort Lauderdale Historical Society)

I, Ivy Julia Cromartie Stranahan, was born in White Springs, Florida. My mother, also a native Floridian, was Sarah Elizabeth Driver who married Augustus Whitfield Cromartie, a native of North Carolina. For a number of years he taught school in central Florida. As the southern tier of the state began to develop, however, my father kept pushing further south by horse and wagon. Thus, we eventually homesteaded some fifteen miles from Arcadia on the Peace River near Owens, a small settlement of orange growers and cattle owners. Hammock or prairie, those lowlands were beautiful in the spring when covered with tiger lilies, blue flags, and white and blue violets.

By the time we were living near Owens, I had three brothers and one sister. One brother and I were old enough to attend school. Although we had to walk five miles each way, we did not mind it because everyone else walked.

My father built a palmetto thatched hut, similar to those in which the Indians live today. To cover our earthen floor, we brought buckets of white sand from the Peace River. And, it was on this white sand that we learned to write. We had plenty of fruit such as oranges, guavas, lemons, grapefruit, wild berries, and palm cabbage. We grew such vegetables as eggplant, tomatoes, collards, cabbage, turnips,

sweet potatoes, and corn. I never saw a white potato until I was an older teenager. We bought our flour by the barrel and the grits and corn meal in fifty pound sacks. The only soft drink we children had was called "soda water," made from the juice of large rough lemons and water, sweetened with cane syrup. Into this we stirred a pinch of baking soda to see it fizz. Five miles away lived our closest neighbors: the Garners, Leniers, and Bolshaws. Whenever we visited these families we always "spent the day" because we would have to walk there, too.

Fortunately, we were a healthy group of children; no doctors were available. Our medicines were herbs

found in the woods. Our spring tonic, Sasparilla, was made from the root bark of a small tree called "Queen's Delight." To treat injuries, mother made poultices from the thick, juicy, Indian collard leaves which grew in the lowlands. After holding the leaves by the fire to wilt them, the poultice could be made for the wound.

Father crossed from the west coast to the east. The railroad had been extended to Juno, where we lived for several years. Prior to 1895, Juno was the county seat of Dade County. By 1899 we were living in Lemon City where I finished my education in the Lemon City School. My teacher tutored me through the summer in prepara-

tion for the state teachers' examination. My assignment was to teach in the first school in Fort Lauderdale.

Early one October morning I boarded the Florida East Coast northbound train. At the Fort Lauderdale station I was greeted by Mr. Ed King, a local school trustee. He led the way to the railroad dock on New River where his "pop-boat" was moored. A pop-boat was a small craft, much like a row boat, with a gasoline engine installed in the center. With no mufflers on these boats, the rapid loud explosions were the only sounds to break the silence on New River in those early days. Mr. King steered down the river and up Tarpon Creek to his home, which stood on a high ridge where Evergreen Cemetery is today. Greeted by Mrs. King, a charming hostess, I was to live with the King family during the ensuing months.

Because the new school building was not completed, there were a few days of waiting. The Dade County School Board, which included Broward and Palm Beach Counties, shipped enough pine to erect a small school room, about 20 by 30 feet, as well as a dozen used chairs and desks for the students and me. Built in the wild woods of scrub palmetto and pines, this school was located at what is today South Andrews Avenue and Southwest Fifth Street, the former site of the County Health Department. Construction of the building was undertaken by volunteer labor. After the trustees installed a pitcher pump for water and "grubbed out" palmetto and grass from around the building, we were ready for the opening day of school.

Only six families lived here in 1899. They were the Kings, Marshalls, Powers, Joyces, Bellamys, and Frombergers. Parents brought their children by boat on that first day and waited for their children to be assigned to a grade from the first through the eighth. The first nine pupils were Frank, Mack, Sally and Lula Marshall; Bird, Louise, and Wallace King; and Minnie and Edgar Bellamy. Later they were joined by Leone Bass, who lived with the Joyces, and Cora, Vasco and William Powers. Although parents took all the students home again, school in Fort Lauderdale had had its beginning. Patrons soon cleared pathways from their homes to the school. The path from the King home to the school was about a mile and a half. Every morning or afternoon we would see several coveys of quail, wild turkeys or doves strutting down our sand trail. Of-

ten, a wild cat, rabbit or gopher would scramble into the bushes to hide while we passed. If we were out at night, we always carried a lantern because all animals are afraid of fire. We did not need to spend much of our school time studying wild life or physical education because a three mile hike each day gave us ample opportunity for nature study and exercise. In addition to many singing games, we played others such as dare base, town ball, and hide and seek.

Frank Stranahan established his trading post, Stranahan Camp, in 1893. The Seminoles from the Everglades came to the trading post and brought their skins and furs, as well as their families and most of their worldly possessions. Camping for nearly two weeks, the surrounding area would be blanketed by Indians, chickens, pigs, and dogs. Not hostile, but shy of strangers, the Seminoles far outnumbered the whites.

Mr. Stranahan acquired the Overland Mail Route contract shortly after the Barefoot Mailman stopped carrying the mail along the beach. The route stretched from Lantana to the Peacock Inn, which was just south of Cocoanut Grove. Stranahan Camp also was used as a convenient, evening stop-over for the weary traveler journeying between these points.

In 1901 Stranahan Camp, with its paper houses and tents, was replaced by Pioneer House, which is my home today. The broad porches upstairs and downstairs were used by the In-

dians for sleeping quarters. The interior was sealed with Dade County pine, which is as durable as mahogany. Today it still has its original finish, one coat of varnish.

Soon after I arrived in Fort Lauderdale I met the postmaster, Frank Stranahan. Frank also operated the ferry across New River, opposite Pioneer House. If I thought I had mail, I would ring the "ferry bell" and someone would come in a rowboat or canoe to take me to the post office. If I did have mail but did not call for it, Mr. Stranahan would come across in his pop boat with his lantern to deliver it; this set everyone to wondering. Although I was indeed grateful, I could not understand all the excitement over such a simple kindness. He also would come to the school at dismissal time and, together, we would go fresh water fishing up New River. This ride was beautiful; ferns and lilies grew all along the banks. The "crystal clear" water was like an aquarium; we could see trout and snapper or bream hidden under the ferns and lilies. In order to catch these fish we had to be very quiet; often we would catch enough fish for supper.

The gathering place for parties and picnics was the House of Refuge, now in the vicinity of the public picnic grounds on the beach. The Frombergers, who were the keepers of the House of Refuge, always welcomed us. Mr. Fromberger was an old seaman, fat, jolly and entertaining. It took every man, woman and child to create



Mrs. Stranahan and friend in 1960 examine a handbook in the presence of a model of the first schoolhouse built in Broward County.

a crowd at these parties and everyone did his best to contribute toward a complete and happy gathering.

Mr. and Mrs. King, Mr. Stranahan, and I occasionally would ride the train to West Palm Beach. Once there, we would go over to Palm Beach where we had a lot of fun riding around the streets in two-seater "wheel chairs" which were pedaled by giant "negroes." Tired and happy after a full day of city life, we would return by train that evening.

All too soon, the school term was over and I returned to my home in Lemon City. Happily, I had promised Mr. Stranahan that we would be married in August 1900. Our wedding trip would take us to Asheville, North Carolina, Niagara Falls, and then out to visit his former home in Ohio and my grandparents in North Carolina. After our wedding trip I would make my home, forever, in Fort Lauderdale.

Reared in a large family amidst accompanying social events, my young married life might have been a little lonely had it not been for the Indians who came to my husband's trading post. Always a friend, Mr. Stranahan was very popular with them because of his fair dealings. As his young bride, I was closely observed. The Seminoles, particularly the children, were curious to know what my attitude would be toward them. I would notice two or three groups of children standing some distance away, waiting for a glimpse of me. Anxious to know how they were going to accept me, I would go out on the porch, smile, and invite them to come into the house. At first, they were shy and reserved and would respond only with a faint smile. Not knowing a word of Seminole, I wondered how I would ever gain their friendship. What I did not know was that these children knew many words of English, enough to understand what I was saying.

In a short time they accepted my invitation to enter the house. What fun and excitement they had exploring the different rooms, trying on my hats and clothes, and admiring themselves in the mirror. Viewing themselves in the white man's clothes, these stoic, silent little visitors would break out in spontaneous laughter. I soon realized that, although they had been taught to be shy of the white man, they were like other children. My motto was "patience and perseverance." As time went by, the children became friendly and gathered in great numbers at my door upon their return from hunting

trips. I always would be prepared with new pictures and objects of interest to them. All this time, I looked upon them with great pity and regret because they abhorred our government, rejected our education, and scorned Christianity. These topics just were not mentioned because of the hostile feelings of their parents. I deeply regretted the negative attitudes that were being instilled in these beautiful boys and girls.

Thus, I was compelled to devise some plan by which I could acquaint them with our civilization without offending their parents. My task was simplified by their love of pictures and music and their curiosity to learn about new objects. I taught them all the kindergarten songs as well as the pronunciation and meaning of the many words beneath the colored pictures. They often would ask me to pronounce their words. When I could not, they would be convulsed with laughter at my ineptitude. These incidents detracted from the seriousness of the occasion and they did not realize what was transpiring. When the Presbyterians later learned of their interest, they furnished me with richly colored Bible pictures for beginners. Encouraging the children to spell and pronounce the titles on the Bible cards was one way to initiate their education and introduction to Christianity. They learned the alphabet and isolated words without creating any prejudices. Early in my work I was convinced that they needed to replace the Great Spirit with Christ.

In 1924, Fort Lauderdale was "settling up" fast. The day came when I received a letter from Dean Spencer, Special Indian Commissioner of Fort Myers, Florida. Relaying the news that the Indians would have to move to the reservation because they were only squatters and that sanitary conditions would have to be enforced, Spencer closed his letter by inquiring, "would I help the government get the Indians on the reservation?" My husband believed that "that is your job, (the Indians) will never go on the reservation" because they had always refused to remain on any federal land.

After a weekend of considerable deliberation and prayer, I loaded my car with grub hoes, axes, and picks and early that Tuesday morning in June 1924, I drove to their camp near the Seminole Postal Annex on the west edge of our city. I entered their enclosure, found them in conference, greeted them cheerfully and, in accord-

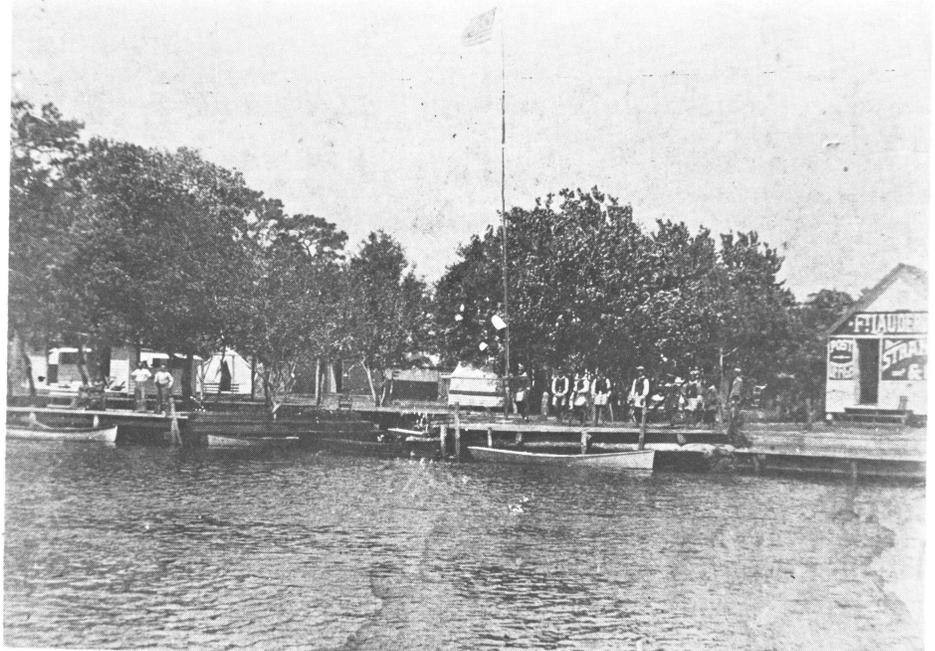
ance with Indian custom, received no recognition. With as much diplomacy as I could muster, I explained my mission. I described the beautiful tract of land that would be theirs and explained that this land they were now on was someone else's and that "some day he come and Indian have to move. The reservation is Indian's land. Commissioner tells me to tell you if you will move on reservation and make camp, you will never have to move again." I told them to talk it over and advised them that I would wait for them outside in my car if they wanted to see their new land. After some twenty minutes or more I saw Annie Tommie, her grey-haired bachelor brother Willie Jumper, and her grandson Jack Huff and his sister Pocahontas Muff coming toward my car for the nine mile journey. Fearful that I might disturb the atmosphere and change their minds, I opened the car door as gently as possible. They closed the door behind them and we drove off at full speed. We never did speak even one word until we reached the Dania Reservation, which President William McKinley had established in 1898. Upon our arrival I declared, "here we are on the reservation; throw out the grub hoes and axes and let's go to work! Mr. Spencer says he will pay you a dollar and a half a day to clear the reservation and make camp." The men showed their pleasure by picking up the tools and going to work. I promised that I would return for them at five o'clock. After making a general survey of the location, Annie and Pocahontas climbed back into the car and we returned to the Fort Lauderdale camp.

When I drove back to the reservation in the afternoon, I found the men tired but seemingly happy. I told them to get as many extra men as possible and advised them that I would pick them up in the morning. This procedure continued until Friday. I wired the Indian Commissioner at Fort Myers that the Indians were on the reservation but the transportation problem was becoming too burdensome for me. After Mr. Spencer's Saturday arrival, he went to Miami and ordered the lumber required to begin the structures on the new site. By the end of the year 1924, several homes, an administration building, and a school had been completed. An American flag was mounted on a tall pole in front of the school. Content and happy, the Indians now were established on the reservation.

Within ten years, however, the government broke its promise and prepared to transfer the Indians to the Brighton Reservation west of Lake Okeechobee. The Dania Reservation was to be abolished and the local school moved to Brighton. Arrangements were made for those children who would consent to leave home to attend the Cherokee Indian School in North Carolina. More and more children resented going so far from home and appealed to their white friends that they be allowed to attend the white schools. Due to the effective work of a local group which cooperated with the Seminoles, this transfer order was revoked. Successful arrangements were made for their entry into the public schools in Dania; thus, the education of the Seminole youth was assured. Now there are many Indian high school and college students who are preparing to take their places in our state and nation. Commissioner Glen L. Emmons of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, whose administration closed in 1960, has said publicly that the Florida Seminole Indians demonstrate the finest attitude of any Indians in the United States.

A Seminole youth of this generation knows that "we are not trying to make a white man of him, that we want him to be proud of his race and remain an Indian." We want him to be capable of enjoying the conveniences and advantages of the present civilization and still be able to protect himself from the evils which civilization brings.

In the beginning we who took an interest in them instructed the children from the running board of our car or on a log near their camp. All this was done very cautiously. We believed that to educate these children without incorporating Christianity as a protection would be a detriment to their progress and a danger to the white man. Therefore, Sunday school and church services eventually were held in the reservation school building. Occasionally, a music leader assisted. One of the churches gave us a piano. We silently hoped that, one day, an Indian missionary would come and verify our teachings to these people. This wish was fulfilled in the early 1930's when a group of Baptist Seminoles and Creeks from Oklahoma journeyed to the Dania Reservation where they were cordially received and assured cooperation. Consequently, a small mission was built on land adjoining the reservation and the Southern Baptist Conference assigned



STRANAHAN TRADING POST and camp located on New River. Although the exact date on which the picture was taken is not known, it is one of the earliest views of the permanent camp and was taken prior to the addition of porches on the trading post building. Research indicates that "in the late fall of 1895, a severe hurricane blew away the 'paper camp houses' which necessitated the building of more permanent structures." Probable date of the photograph is between 1895-1897. (Fort Lauderdale Historical Society).

several ministers to the church. Creek Baptist minister Willie King and his wife gave the most faithful and lasting assistance. Thus, the Protestant Christian faith was advanced in our three-point program among the Indians in the areas of education, friendliness toward our government, and religion. Seminole church leaders today are Baptist Reverend Billy Osceola and his cousin Bill Osceola, who is also a pastor.

The Seminoles made a strong beginning in our democratic way of life. They live under the same county and federal law enforcement as other American citizens. They register and vote with a higher percentage of participation than the white citizens. Their deputy, Jack Willie, serves by appointment from the county sheriff's office. Community affairs and a business corporation are managed by a tribal council headed by Billy Osceola. In addition to craft shops managed and operated by a Seminole staff, many of these Indians have modern homes which feature picture windows. Mr. Virgil L. Harrington, government supervisor from Oklahoma, has a full staff of efficient assistants who are advisers to their present progress. The new Council and federal office buildings are a credit

to Seminole desires and vision and to the local architect who planned them.

The Seminoles hold valuable grazing lands in the Everglades and the Big Cypress and Brighton Reservations. Cattle-raising began there in the early thirties when the Indians were loaned 500 heads of cattle by the government. These cattle were imported from the "dust bowl" of the mid-west and unloaded in Hollywood, Florida. Now, thousands of these fine Brahmans, Black Angus, and "wire grass" native breed are owned by the tribe or its individuals. The Indians lease land to agricultural corporations which grow winter vegetables, plant other crops, and improve these areas. Eventually, the companies replant the lands in all kinds of pasture grasses and return them to the Indians.

The Dania Seminoles have been wonderful ambassadors of our civilization to their brothers in the deep Everglades. It is indeed gratifying to know that, in the changing tide of South Florida history, the Seminoles still own the beautiful, valuable Dania Reservation and cattle lands in the Everglades that are the envy of many "big" cattle ranchers.