

Behind the Scenes - continued . . .

Without a doubt, the most legendary characters in Broward County history are Charles and Frankee Lewis, the area's first permanent non-Indian settlers. Fragmentary records indicate that this family settled on New River in 1783, the year when the American Revolutionary War ended. Charles, also known as Surla, died in 1819. His widow Frankee received a land grant of 640 acres along New River from the United States government in 1824. She sold her grant for \$400 in 1830 to Richard Fitzpatrick. While little is known about Frankee, several writers have described her and her mode of life on Miami River in the early 1830's. The United States Census of 1830 notes that she was born between 1740 and 1750; thus, she was a contemporary of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. She died at an advanced age in the early part of 1835.

What puzzled the Spanish and later inquirers was what motivated the Lewis family to settle in a watery, snake infested land in South Florida. From other sources and from the Spanish documents published in this issue, it seems certain that the Lewis family was in cohorts with William Augustus Bowles in the latter's efforts to expel the Spanish from Florida or, at least, to curb Spanish influence with the Florida Indians. Recent research has identified Joseph Robbins as Bowles' cavalry commander, which would indicate that the Lewis family had close ties with Bowles himself. In addition, the Spanish documents describe Robbins as being in charge of five horses on New River "which a certain Bowles" had given to Charles Lewis. When the Spanish ship arrived on New River in 1793 during Lewis' absence, Robbins apparently had assumed command of Lewis' possessions there.

It will be noted from the map which accompanies the article that the Lewis plantation was located near the forks of New River. The location of the Lewis plantation there was the first in a series of events which make the river forks the most important historical location in Broward County prior to 1900. In 1824 William Cooley established his ill-fated plantation near the forks and in 1830 Richard Fitzpatrick established his plantation in the vicinity of the forks. Finally, in 1838 Major William Lauderdale built an army fort on the north side of the river forks which his army commander ordered to be named Fort Lauderdale.