

1969

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Recommended Citation

Hammond, E. A. (1969) "Sanibel Island and its Vicinity, 1833, A Document," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 48 : No. 4 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol48/iss4/6>

SANIBEL ISLAND AND ITS VICINITY, 1833, A DOCUMENT

edited by E. A. HAMMOND *

THE GULF COAST lying south of Charlotte Harbor was slow to yield to the advances of the white man's culture. Its contours are irregular, broken by hundreds of indentations and held together by congeries of islands and keys almost too numerous to be charted and labeled. Only in recent years have surveyors and cartographers been able to map the area with reliable accuracy and correct some of the errors resulting from the incomplete observations of the early explorers. A confusion of geographical designation continues to plague the modern historian. Rivers noted by earlier writers appear now to have been mere inlets, while certain keys have lost their Spanish nomenclature or have had their features altered by the hurricanes of the past century and a half. ¹ Historical records are not abundant.

When Florida became an American territory in 1821 the greater part of its southwest coast lay within the bounds of the Alagon grant, the uncertain title to which had been transferred by the Duke of Alagon to Richard S. Hackley, an American consul in Cadiz. ² After Spain regained Florida in 1783, and

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1. The problem may be seen by comparing the map of Florida in John Lee Williams, *The Territory of Florida* (New York, 1837; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1962), with a recent Florida map.
2. Richard S. Hackley, of Richmond, Virginia, was a consul in Spain at the time of the negotiations which led to the cession. The transaction between him and the Duke of Alagon had not been legally concluded when Florida was transferred, a circumstance which beclouded his claim to the grant. See *Titles and Legal Opinions Thereon, of Lands, in East Florida, Belonging to Richard S. Hackley, Esq.* (Brooklyn, 1822). The eastern boundaries of the grant were vaguely set forth, but that of the north was placed at the Amanina River (Withlacoochee) while the southern limit was the Hijuelos River. The latter has ceased to exist, but early maps show it entering the Gulf of Mexico at Pavilion Key, or a few miles south of the modern town of Everglades.

possibly earlier, Spanish fishermen had established *ranchos* at advantageous locations within the grant. With the aid of Indian helpers, they shipped cured fish to Cuba, and engaged in small-scale farming.³ They were about the only inhabitants of the coastal area. When Key West Customs Collector William A. Whitehead inspected these settlements in 1831, he found in the vicinity of Charlotte Harbor four such establishments whose total population he estimated at upwards of 300.⁴ In the meantime, some of the islands and inlets had become haunts and havens for pirates preying on the shipping of the Florida Straits.

In 1831 Richard Hackley, eager for profit from his dubious investment, succeeded in selling an option on an undesignated portion of the grant to a New York group calling itself the Florida Peninsular Land Company.⁵ Ignoring the fact that title to the land was still in question, Colonel George W. Murray, a company representative, left New York on May 18, 1832, charged with the responsibility of exploring the "coast and rivers of the Gulf" and selecting a favorable location for permanent settlement.⁶ He arrived in Key West aboard the brig, *Tallahassee*, on June 8.⁷ Purchasing a sloop, the *Associate*, and accompanied by William R. Hackley (brother of Richard), P. B. Prior, and Captain William Bunce, commander of the *Associate*, and a five-man crew, he set out on June 27 to explore the Gulf coast.⁸

The party moved more or less directly to the vicinity of San Carlos Bay into whose waters the Caloosahatchee River flows. Only brief parts of their journals have survived, but it seems certain that Sanibel Island immediately attracted their attention and that their explorations extended at least to the areas bordering the lower Caloosahatchee. By mid-August the party had

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3. Dorothy Dodd, "Captain Bunce's Tampa Bay Fisheries," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXV (January 1947), 246-56; *House Documents*, 22nd Cong., 1st Sess., No. 220, pp. 1-3.
 4. *Ibid.* Years later, Whitehead, then living in New Jersey, wrote his reminiscences of those early days in Key West. These recollections, prepared with the prompting of long-preserved notes and journals, were published in the Key West *Key of the Gulf* in 1877. See Thelma Peters (ed.), "William Adee Whitehead's Reminiscences of Key West," *Tequesta*, XXV, 3-42.
 5. Williams, *Territory of Florida*, 301.
 6. *Ibid.* 289.
 7. *Ibid.* The *Key West Gazette*, June 13, 1832, records the arrival date as June 9 and lists G. W. Murray of New York as a passenger.
 8. Williams, *Territory of Florida*, 289.

returned to Key West for refitting and fresh supplies. On August 28 they sailed north again to resume their investigations which would take them as far as Tampa Bay by mid-July 1833. Their journals⁹ indicate that in late September (1832) they made a more thorough survey of Sanibel, noting its favorable harbor and its generally healthful appearance. By the end of the year Sanibel Island had been selected as the most promising site for a settlement, plans for a town at the eastern tip of the island had been laid, and a supplemental agricultural operation for the lower Caloosahatchee area was projected. Spanish and Indian laborers were set to work building a cluster of palmetto houses to accommodate the first contingent of settlers expected to arrive in the coming winter.

Dr. Benjamin B. Strobel, a Key West physician and newspaper editor and a man of burning curiosity about all matters relating to Florida, was keenly aware of the Sanibel project. He had ceased publication of the *Key West Gazette* with the September 5, 1832 issue and had returned shortly afterwards to his native Charleston.¹⁰ About November 10 he made a voyage to New York, presumably for the purpose of discussing with the land company officials his interest in their Florida enterprise.¹¹

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9. Only fragments of these journals have survived, and these were the portions which Williams included in his *Territory of Florida*, 289-300. It seems certain that the Gulf coast portions of Williams' map of Florida were produced from drafts provided by Murray and his associates.
 10. In the final issue of the *Key West Gazette*, Strobel published his farewell to the people of Key West. He departed the island about mid-October, arriving in Charleston on October 23 with his wife and two children. *Charleston Courier*, October 24, 1832.
 11. C. L. Bachman and J. B. Haskell, *John Bachman* (Charleston, 1888), 106. A letter, John Bachman to J. J. Audubon, [dated Charleston] November 11, 1832, contains the following: "Dr. Strobel sailed yesterday for New York, where he will remain three weeks and afterwards settle on the Sinebal Island, Florida. He has been industrious in bringing me out a box of birds, skinned by himself." It thus appears that even before Strobel's departure from Key West he was expecting to join the Sanibel settlers. It is of interest also that Strobel had greeted the Murray exploring party upon their first return to Key West from Sanibel in August 1832. In a letter addressed to the editor of the *Charleston Courier*, dated at Key West, September 2, 1832, Strobel provided a description of Sanibel and vicinity from information obtained from the explorers. This was published by the *Courier* on October 19, 1832, and reprinted by newspapers throughout the country. Bachman's letter furnishes the only clue that Strobel actually intended to settle at Sanibel.

He returned to Charleston on Christmas Day.¹² There is preserved in the fragmentary correspondence of Dr. John Bachman, famous Charleston churchman and naturalist, a letter of January 30, 1833 to John J. Audubon. After some remarks on matters of mutual interest, chiefly birds, Bachman wrote: "Dr. Strobel has gone to Sinebal [*sic.*] . . . a portion of Florida where you have never been."¹³ From Strobel's own account he seems to have arrived in Key West about January 10 to await the arrival of the ship transporting the settlers from New York to Sanibel.

It is difficult to determine Strobel's precise expectations with regard to the Sanibel settlement. Perhaps he was employed by the company as consultant, or possibly he intended to settle there as physician to the group. Whatever his plans, he was standing by somewhat impatiently when the schooner *Olythus*, bringing the settlers from New York, arrived in Key West about the first of February. There he joined the group when it left for Sanibel. It is not clear how long he remained on the island, but it was probably no longer than two weeks. He was again in Key West in late March; on March 23 he fought a duel with D. C. Pinkham, who was fatally wounded in the encounter.¹⁴ Possibly this unfortunate event made it necessary for Strobel to abandon the Sanibel settlement to escape prosecution. By mid-April he had returned to Charleston where he resumed his medical practice.¹⁵

Strobel's account of Sanibel and vicinity is the earliest detailed description of the area.¹⁶ He was a tireless explorer and a

12. *Charleston Courier*, December 27, 1832.

13. Bachman and Haskell, *John Bachman*, 125.

14. William A. Whitehead, in his "Reminiscences," has cast a very unfavorable light on Strobel with respect to his role in this duel. This is probably somewhat unfair and is partially explained by the fact that the victim of Strobel's bullet was Whitehead's assistant in the customs office at Key West. He pictures Strobel's departure from Key West aboard the revenue cutter, *Crawford*, as virtually the flight of a criminal, pointing out that Captain Day of the cutter was a close friend of Strobel, standing ready to transport the doctor back to Charleston. See Peters, "William Adee Whitehead's Reminiscences," 27-28. The *Charleston Courier*, April 10, 1833, contains an account of the duel.

15. "Minutes of the Medical Society of South Carolina," July 24, 1833, show Strobel active in the affairs of the Society. The Medical Society minute books are in Library of the Medical Society of South Carolina, Charleston.

16. None of the earlier commentaries - Charles B. Vignoles, James Grant Forbes, and Bernard Romans - makes more than passing mention of Sanibel. John Lee Williams' remarks are more extensive, but they do not provide a full account of the area; furthermore, they were not published until 1837. Although Whitehead made a journey into the

fine amateur naturalist, having learned much through his association with Dr. Bachman and Mr. Audubon. Both animal and plant life fascinated him, as did topography and weather; nor did he overlook agricultural potential. Strobel presented the following document to the *Charleston Evening Post* soon after his return to the city. It was published serially between July 17 and July 23, 1833, each installment bearing only the signature, "S."

SANYBEL ISLAND AND ITS VICINITY ¹⁷

No. I

Mr. Editor - As many inquiries have been made respecting the prospects of a Colony about to be established near Charlotte Harbor, in Florida. I take the liberty of handing you the following account of that place and its prospects.

A company was formed in New York about two years since, for the purpose of making a settlement in the Southern part of Florida. A kind of stock was created, consisting of fifty shares, each share to contain about 1800 acres of land. The shares were originally sold for \$500 each. Mr. Hackley, the proprietor, from whom the land was purchased originally, gave the company the privilege of selecting any location between Cape Romain and Tampa Bay. ¹⁸ An Agent ¹⁹ was sent out by the Company to survey the land, who fixed on Sanybel Island, as the site for a Town and a position on the Sanybel River, ²⁰ as a suitable place for planting. Upon a subsequent inspection the position on the River was not considered to hold out all the advantages which were possessed by other locations, could they be obtained. The original tract of land was therefore abandoned as not coming up to the expectation of all the parties concerned, and permission has been granted by Mr. Hackley to the Company, enabling

Charlotte Harbor area in November 1831, his account omits mention of Sanibel and Captiva. He does describe the fisheries which he inspected and leaves a charming vignette of "old man Caldez," the patriarch of Caldez Island (present-day Useppa), whose hospitality Strobel also enjoyed. See Peters, "Whitehead," 34-38.

17. This title does not appear in the first installment, although it does appear in the four subsequent ones.
18. Cape Romain, or Roman, or possibly Romano, is still a landmark on the Gulf coast. It lies some six miles south of present-day Collier City.
19. Colonel George W. Murray.
20. Caloosahatchee River, frequently designated in earlier times as the Sanibel.

them to fix upon any other part of the main land, which they may hereafter select. I will therefore say nothing in reference to this portion of the Company's grant, until they shall have made their new selection. Should they succeed in obtaining good land, convenient to Sanybel Island, there is no doubt that Sanybel will in a short time become a flourishing town. In order that the public may be in possession of correct information, I proceed at once to a brief narrative of a Voyage to Sanybel Island and its vicinity.

Sometime about the 1st of February last, the schooner Olynthus, from New York, arrived at Key West, with settlers on board for Sanybel Island. I had been for three weeks awaiting her arrival, in order to go over with her. There were twenty or thirty persons on board, and several ladies bound for the settlement. We left Key West at 10 o'clock, A.M. and passed through the North West Passage, with a fine breeze blowing. The sloop Associate, a small vessel purchased by the Company, for exploring, was directed to follow us. After a beautiful run during that day and night, we found ourselves ashore on a bank about 8 miles from Sanybel Island, at 3 o'clock in the morning. This mishap was occasioned by the carelessness of a seaman who gave wrong soundings. There we lay thumping for several hours the sea occasionally sweeping our decks, then the sloop Associate hove in sight, and came to our relief. I will not attempt to describe the confusion of the gentlemen, or the alarm and dismay of the ladies, as the heavy seas came sweeping in through our "stern ports." Nor will I undertake to pourtray [*sic.*] their joy, when the sloop Associate ran down, and anchoring under the lee of the bank on which we had grounded, sent a boat on board of us. As many as could conveniently get on board, embarked at once in the sloop, and started for Sanybel Island, leaving the schooner to await the rising tide, when it was expected she would get off.

We arrived at the Island about 8 o'clock in the morning. On landing we were assailed by immense swarms of flees [*sic.*], whose company we could well have dispensed with. These vile insects were brought to the island by a parcel of Spaniards and Indians, who had been employed by the Company to build several palmetto houses. Our things were got ashore as soon as possible, a fire was kindled on the beach, and a boat dispatched

in search of fish and oysters. About 9 o'clock, the schr. Olynthus (having got off) came into harbor, with all sail set, and colors flying.-By this event we gained a considerable accession to our numbers. The boat sent off, returned in a short time, when having cooked the fish and oysters, and prepared some hot coffee, we sat down in the grass and made a delightful breakfast. Breakfast being finished, which by the by, was a long and hearty meal, we went to work. Most of the day was spent in getting our things ashore, and preparing our lodgings, &c. Five palmetto houses had been erected at the expense of the Company, for our accommodation. About twenty of us, ladies and gentlemen, took quarters in the best house that night, "our lodging was on the cold ground." I spread my Buffalo skin, and lit my segar; the rest of the party having made their beds, we all lay down, and indulged in merriment "at the day's disaster. We were comfortable, cheerful and happy, even in a cottage. We had not, however, lain long, before we heard the distant roll of thunder, which approached us rapidly. In a very short space of time, the heavy cloud which accompanied it, was overhead, and burst upon us in a deluge of rain. Now came the sport! In building our houses, the Indians had neglected to raise the floor above the surrounding grounds; in consequence of which, thirty or forty beautiful little streams of water, came rushing through our lodging, with a delightful murmuring noise. In a few minutes we were all afloat, our bed room being converted into a complete lake. Every man and woman was obliged to "take up his, or her bed and walk," in search of a dry place. In the mean time a small canal was dug through the house, from door to door, so as to drain off the water. The shower did not last long, "the waters subsided," tranquility was restored, we took our former positions, and slept soundly until the following morning.

I rose early, took my gun, and strolled out, to see the Island. I followed a fresh water branch,²¹ which run up the Island, for several miles, and succeeded in bringing home eighteen "blue winged teal." I cannot but smile whenever I think of this days hunt. I had no dog, and was compelled to bring out the ducks

21. Traces of this stream may still be seen, although drainage projects and surface alterations have reduced it to a trickle. Earlier maps show its eastern extremity originating about a mile from the lighthouse at Point Ybel.

myself. There was at this time from 12 to 18 inches water, and several feet of soft mud in the branch. I frequently sunk so deep in the mud, that I was obliged to crawl out on all fours. The last time I went in, I happened to get on top of an old Alligator which was lying on the bottom, he flirted, floundered, and cleared himself. From that day, I gave up playing my own dog, particularly in fresh water, and where I was likely to meet with Alligators.

No. II

Our first week was spent in exploring Sanybel Island. The following is the result of the investigation. The island is from 12 to 15 miles long, and from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 miles broad. ²² On the south side is a beautiful sea beach, extending the whole length of the Island. Great quantities of elegant shells are washed ashore on this beach, by every unusual swell of the sea. It is a beautiful place for children to run about, in the cool of the evening, or for persons to ride upon. The north side of the island is six or eight feet above the level of the bay; the beach being narrow, and a complete wall formed within fifteen or twenty feet of the water's edge, by banks of shell, which have been piled for centuries by the sea. The shore is entirely divested of Mangrove trees, except, very inconsiderable portion of the western extremity of the island. The land is level, and I think sufficiently high, to prevent the sea from rising over it. The island is not well wooded, the growth near the water is the black mangrove, a hard wood, well adapted for boat timber, and excellent fire wood. The centre of the island may be called an immense plain, or prairie, covered with various grasses, some of which are suitable for grazing. The plain is so level that you may stand in a given spot and see for miles, ²³ there being nothing to interrupt the vision, except the cabbage palmetto trees, which are scattered at wide intervals throughout the prairie. [*sic.*] The soil is of two qualities, one suited to the cultivation of sea island cotton, the other to the culture of provisions, fruit, &c. There are a number of ridges running for miles parallel to each other in the longitudi-

22. This is fairly accurate estimate of the dimensions.

23. According to Sam Bailey this is not the case today. Numerous plantings, especially of the Australian pine, over the last seventy-five years have obstructed the view from almost any spot on the island.

nal direction of the island, consisting of a light soil, with an admixture of shell, partially decomposed, which, I think, would grow fine sea island cottons; whilst the vallies lying between these ridges, contain a rich, moist, black alluvial soil, upon which good crops of provisions might be raised, and the tropical fruits successfully cultivated. The soil is based on deposits of shell and a concrete, formed of shell partially decomposed. I have been told, that this is as good a foundation as could be required, equal, if not superior, to any kind of marle.

The next thing which I will consider, is the harbor of Sanybel.²⁴ I have no hesitation in pronouncing it the handsomest bay I have ever seen. It is about three miles across, nearly circular in form, bounded on the north and west by the main land of Florida, and protected on the south, east and west, by the islands of Sanybel, Captive²⁵ and Pine. The entrance or channell way into the harbor, will admit vessels drawing twelve or fourteen feet water; whilst Charlotte harbor proper, with which the harbor of Sanybel is directly connected, may be navigated with steam boats for 40 or 50 miles. Sanybel on the north side may be approached very near, there being a fine cove and bold water.

A few remarks in regard to the climate of Sanybel. We arrived as has already been stated, early in the month of February, our thermometer stood at 70 to 75, most of the time; on one occasion after a north west blow of three days duration, it was down, as low as 50 just before daybreak. It rose, however, to 65, before the sun was an hour high. Perhaps, after all, the best mode of judging of climate, is by observing the condition of plants. In the months of Feb'y and March, I saw the Cotton tree in blossom and in pod; several species of Convolvulus, or Morning glory, and the Mimosa Farnesiana, or Poppinac tree in "full bearing," this latter plant is beyond a doubt indigenous to the island. If these plants, many of which are exceedingly delicate, and incapable of resisting the action of cold, continue in blossom from year to year, and at all seasons, we have but little to apprehend from frost. All the tropical plants may therefore be cultivated without

24. Most visitors would agree with Strobel that the bay and harbor are indeed beautiful. The harbor is that portion of the north side of the island, near the eastern tip. It lies principally on the eastern side of the present-day approach of the bridge to Sanibel. Its depth appears to be little changed since Strobel first saw it.

25. Modern Captiva.

difficulty, and it appears to me, that sea Island Cotton can be planted to great advantage. The Cotton tree of Florida, is not an annual plant, but bears and produces for a succession of years. It is questionable with me, whether the plant may not be several years in attaining perfection, and whether it may not produce better both as to quality and quantity, as the tree acquires age. We read of the Peruvian Cotton being cultivated in orchards and why may not the Sea Islands be treated in the same way? All that is necessary, would be a suitable soil and climate. We have such a soil and climate at Sanybel and its neighboring islands, and I am determined to make the experiment. I am well satisfied from actual observation that the Sea Island Cotton, planted on the Florida Keys will produce for three years, without a deterioration in quality. And may we not infer from analogy that so far from its becoming inferior, it is likely to improve, as the plant grows older and more vigorous. All things have however, their limitations, and the tree after having attained a certain age, must necessarily lose its vigor and power of producing.

“There is a point by nature fixed,
Whence life must downward tend.”

No. III

There is another great advantage possessed by this climate; it is admirably adapted to the constitutions of persons laboring under affections of the lungs. In this respect it is not only unrivalled in the United States, but is an improvement of the West India climate, in as much as it is not so warm at noon, nor will it be liable to the cold winds, which sweep down the mountains of Cuba at night. The Company who have settled this island, contemplate establishing a large hotel, expressly for the accommodation of sick and transient persons. It will be provided with a skilful physician, and all of those little comforts and conveniences which are so necessary to the sick. Good horses will be kept for riding, and abundant opportunities will be afforded for sailing. A fine vessel will trade regularly between New York and Sanybel, and a smaller one to Key West. By either of these conveyances, persons desirous of trying the effects of the climate, will have frequent and cheap opportunities of getting there. These surely, are not inconsiderable advantages. Who would not prefer being in his own country, and among those who speak

his own language to going over the Island of Cuba; where he must of necessity be subjected to many difficulties. It must be borne in mind too, that in a very short time, not only may every thing necessary to comfort be found there, but also all of the tropical fruits and vegetable.²⁶

It is impossible, to speak positively of the health of the climate, but judging from appearances, I should say, that Sanybel Island must be healthy. Can we conceive of the existence of any cause of disease on a fine Sea Island, high and dry, and free from fresh water ponds, or lakes. But fortunately on this subject, we are not left entirely to conjecture. Experience so far, has been highly in its favor; of thirty or forty persons, who have been settled on the island for several months, not a single individual has been sick, and these individuals have undergone every kind of exposure, which would be likely to produce sickness. In the harbor of Sanybel, and within three miles of the Island, is a Spanish settlement, where there are probably forty or fifty persons, by them I have been assured that such a thing as fever, is unknown among them. This settlement has been in existence, for twenty-five or thirty years, the employment of the people is fishing, in the occupation they have of course to endure great exposure.

In a former number, I spoke of several Islands, which bounded the harbor of Sanybel. The first of these Islands, which I shall mention is Punta Rasa.²⁷ This is the place at which the Spanish fishery is established. It is within three miles of Sanybel, in a north and westerly direction. It is probably 5 or 6 miles long and from half a mile, to a mile in width. Some parts of it has been cultivated, the land is very good in some places, good crops of corn having been made. There are several splendid lime trees on this island, growing in great luxuriance; when I saw them they were covered with young limes. Here I also saw several cabbage stalks, which had been planted in a garden, and which

26. This is not unlike the promotional literature of a later era. There is little doubt that the speculators envisioned a well-provisioned and comfortable settlement accessible with a minimum of risk and inconvenience.

27. Punta Rassa is that spit of the mainland jutting out into San Carlos Bay just south of the mouth of the Caloosahatchee. Strobel was in error in assuming that it was an island; his sense of direction sometimes failed him. In this case, for example, Punta Rassa lies to the northeast and not the northwest of Sanibel harbor.

had grown to the height of six feet, and put forth ten or twelve branches, on the end of each of which was a head of greens. Punta Rasa contains 10 to 12 houses, framed of wood, and thatched all over with palmetto leaves. The principal inhabitants are Spaniards, but by far the largest number are Indians. These Indians are employed by the Spaniards; they go out in large canoes and catch fish, on the neighboring shores; they use the seine. When the fishing season is over, they go into the country, or on the neighboring islands, and plant provisions, such as corn, sugar cane, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, &c. The Spaniards have done a great deal towards civilizing these people. They are well fed and clothed, and have been taught many little arts, which are useful; as well as the use of many comforts. Whiskey is dealt out among them very sparingly. One night, having understood that there would be an Indian Ball, and not being able to induce any one to go over with me, I went over in a fishing canoe, with several Indians who were then at Sanibel. Arrived at Punta Rasa, I received great hospitality from a Spaniard the Captain of the fishery. He invited me to his house, and set before me an excellent supper. We had a kind of pilau made of rice and fowl, a couple of wild pigeons broiled, some fried fish and vension, excellent white bread and strong coffee. After supper the Captain presented me with half a dozen splendid Spanish Segars, and we walked out. He now called up all hands for the Ball. Men, women and children soon collected by moonlight, some beat a kind of drum, others sung, and all who did not dance, made some kind of noise. At first they danced in pairs, a figure somewhat resembling the Spanish fandango. They were not very active in the use of their feet, but kept good time, and threw themselves into a number of attitudes and positions, displaying great strength and agility. Afterwards a dance (the name of which I do not recollect) was performed by women alone. Each woman was provided with pieces of leather, or deer skin, to which were appended six or eight box turtle shells, filled with a seed called Indian shot, one of these skins was fastened on to the calf of each leg with straps. After thus preparing themselves, eight or ten of them came out and formed a ring. At a given signal they all started; they went off at first with a slow, and measured pace, throwing their bodies into various attitudes; round and round they went, not a shell was rattled. At length the female, who

appeared to take the lead, struck up and each one in turn; as she reached the same spot commenced rattling. The dance now became more animated, they jumped and capered and frisked, and rattled their shells at a tremendous and deafening rate. Gradually their speed was slackened, the dance became slower, and the rattles ceased; these evolutions were repeated several times. About 11 o'clock, they gave over, and I was conducted by the captain to a storehouse, in which a bed had been made for me. A small fire was burning with a cheerful blaze in the centre of the room. After giving me directions how to fasten the door, the captain bid me "good night," and retired. I threw more wood on the fire, fastened the door, lit my segar, and lay down on a cot. I did not get asleep for some time, my mind being occupied with the things I had seen. Here I lay, alone, unarmed, in the power of six or eight Spaniards, and twenty or thirty Indians, to whom I was an entire stranger. But I felt not the slightest apprehension-I had freely thrown myself into their power, and felt confident that the rights of hospitality would not be violated. Having smoked my segar, I fell asleep, not to dream of robbery and murder, but of "home, sweet home." In the middle of the night, I was awakened by the barking of a watch dog, when finding that my fire had burnt down, I got up, threw on some chips, and went to bed again. The ascending flame soon shed abroad its cheerful light, and I fell asleep lulled by the crackling blaze.

S.

No. IV

I was awakened early in the morning, by the noise of the woman and children. As soon as I got up, some hot coffee was brought me. I walked down to the beach, where the women and children were receiving their days allowance, and the men were busily employed cleaning and salting down the fish, which had been taken on the preceding evening. After the fish had been put away, and the men, women and children had retired, I observed several strange looking birds, in a flock of turkey buzzards, devouring the fish entrails which had been left on the beach. I approached near enough to observe them, when they flew up and lit on a tree. I went up to the Captains house, borrowed his gun, and at one shot, brought down two of them. They were entirely new to me, something "between hawk and

buzzard." I skinned these birds, and brought them on with me, and have since discovered, that they are the new buzzard first discovered in the United States, and described and drawn by Mr. Audubon.²⁸ He only procured one specimen, near St. Augustine. I returned to Sanibel about nine o'clock this day.

The next place which I visited was Captive Island,²⁹ which is separated from Sanibel by a small channell. We were induced to land here in consequence of seeing several wild hogs running along the beach. After a hunt of an hour, or more, in which we were unsuccessful; it being near sundown, we determined to camp for the night. Our tent was pitched, and fires made. We were now joined by another exploring party. We all sat down around our fire, and chatted away very pleasantly until bed time, when we retired. On our expeditions, we always kept our guns loaded for fear of wild beasts, this night they were all placed as usual in the corner of the tent. The fire was left burning, and the cooking utensils around it. A little before day light, I happened to wake and heard a hog, rooting, and turning over our pots and pans. I rose without saying a word to the rest of the party, took up a double barrelled gun, and stepped to the door, there was sufficient light to enable me to see a large hog at about twenty paces, I blazed away, to the great astonishment of my companions who were awakened by the report of the gun; and the grunting of the hog. He did not travel far, we found him 40 or 50 yards from the spot where he stood when I fired. Having no utensil large enough to scald him, we hung him up and skinned him. He must have weighed 150 pounds. While breakfast was preparing, we walked out and examined the Island. We saw considerable quantities of good land, the character of it being similar to that of Sanibel Island. A beautiful little cove or harbor is formed in this island by an indentation of the sea. During our walk, we saw a drove of at least twenty hogs, of all sizes, and discovered a palmetto house, around which was the remnant of a garden, indicated by a few stalks of corn, and several pumpkin vines. This accounts for our finding wild hogs

28. This was the Caracara Eagle, or *Polyborus cheriway auduboni*.

29. Captive Island, or Captiva, a thin strip of land running generally north and south, lies immediately north of Sanibel. It is bounded on the east by Pine Island Sound and on the west by the Gulf of Mexico. It is separated from Sanibel by Blind Pass.

on this island; they were originally brought there by some individual, a former inhabitant.

From Captive, we passed on to several other islands, of which I have not a sufficient recollection, to speak with any degree of certainty.-A number of gentlemen went ashore at Bocca Grande Island,³⁰ and came back with a report, that they had seen some fine land. From Bocca Grande we went to Caldez Island³¹ - another Fishery was established here, under the superintendence of an old Spaniard, by the name of Caldez.³² This man, I am told, is hard upon 90 years of age; he is a hale, hearty, and active man; he informed me, that he had been living here, for nearly fifty years. I went with him to see his trees; among them was a cocoa nut, twenty one or two years old, and several orange trees, twenty five years of age, which he had planted with his own hands.

The establishment here is very similar to the one at Punta Rasa. An Inspector of the Revenue resides on this Island; his house is situated on a high bluff, from 40 to 50 feet above the level of the sea, in a very commanding position. We were well entertained, and remained the best part of a day here; this is a very small Island. S.

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30. There is little doubt that the Boca Grande Island of Strobel's account is La Costa Island of the present-day.
31. Caldez Island appears on the John Lee Williams map of 1837 as Toampe or Caldes Island, but on no maps of later date is it so designated. Its location, as fixed by Strobel, at five miles south of Boca Grande and twenty-five miles from Punta Rasa, makes it almost certain to be present day Useppa. Besides, Strobel's description of its contours and elevation-a high bluff, "from 40 to 50 feet above the level of the sea"-allowing for some erosion in the course of a hundred and thirty-three years, fits Useppa, whose highest elevation is about twenty-seven feet. No other site in the vicinity is quite so high. One other piece of evidence supports this identity: The Christian name of Caldes was Jose (or Hose, as it appears in the 1830 census). When the island appears in the 1870 census it bears the name Guiseppa, the Italian form of Joseph, and one of its two inhabitants was Frank Virgilio, born in Italy. It is likely that Virgilio, aware of its previous occupancy by Jose Caldes, gave it the name Guiseppa, or Joseph's Island, which in time corrupted into Useppa. The legend that the name derives from Josefa Inex de Mayorga, daughter of a viceroy of Mexico, who was murdered by Gasparilla when she resisted his attempts at love making, should perhaps not be totally discounted. See Jack Beater, *Pirates and Buried Treasure on the Florida Islands* (St. Petersburg, 1964), 73.
32. Hose Caldes was one of the notable characters of southwest Florida during these years. He is listed in the 1830 Monroe County census

No. V

I propose now to offer a few remarks on the resources of this Island. There is no doubt that a town will be established here,³³ and in process of time, a port of entry. Sanybel, containing as it does about 10,000 acres of arable land, will, if cultivated, yield a very considerable amount of produce. Gardens and orchards of tropical fruits planted here, will produce a very handsome income to proprietors. There will be no difficulty in finding a market for everything which can be raised. New Orleans, one of the most distant ports to the westward, is not more than three days sail from Sanybel; whilst we have Mobile, St. Marks, Apalachicola, and Pensacola lying still nearer; these places will be able to consume more than Sanybel can export for twenty years to come. By many it has been objected to Sanybel that it is so far from the Atlantic Coast as to render it difficult to get to a market, that objection is at once removed. Let any one who is disposed to satisfy himself, look at any chart of the Gulf of Mexico, and he will discover that Sanybel can never want for a mart. The crops from all of the neighboring islands, from Charlotte Harbor must of necessity pass through this place, and these islands are not inconsiderable, either in respect to their number or the quantity of good land which they contain. But after all, the prospect of Sanybel becoming a town of importance, will materially depend on the success of the settlement of the main land. Let me be distinctly understood. I am well satisfied, that any man who settles on Sanybel or the neighboring Islands, must do well. Nature has been very bountiful to this section of country, in providing the means of living. The waters abound with the finest fish in the world. To give some idea of the profusion, I will barely state, that two large canoe loads is the

in the sixty-seventy age bracket, and could probably not claim the "hard upon 90 years" which Strobel accorded him. He was a person of great interest to William A. Whitehead, who thought that Caldes had visited Charlotte Harbor as early as 1776. Peters, "Reminiscences," 34-38. See also Williams, *Territory of Florida*, 33, 294.

33. The land company lost no time in providing the legal bases for their settlement. Within about two weeks after the arrival of the settlers, the Florida legislature passed an act (February 17, 1833) incorporating the towns of Sanibel and Murray. The latter never materialized. *Acts of the Legislative Council of the Territory of Florida, 1833*, No. 55, 119.

quantity usually taken at every tide, by eight or ten men employed at the Spanish Fishery. I attended one day the hauling of a seine on Sanybel beach. The seine was only 22 fathoms in length, and yet at a single haul we took *one hundred and fifteen sheep head*, and *sixty odd* fish of other kinds. Various doubts arose as to the quantity which we had taken, and in order to be certain of the number, I had them counted as they were thrown ashore. Within three or four miles of Sanybel, are some fine banks of oysters, as good as any I have ever eaten, and a man might in three or four hours supply himself with as many as he could eat in a week. Clams of the finest description and very large are found all along the coast. At proper seasons immense quantities of green turtle come ashore to deposit their eggs on the Keys. A planter by devoting three or four weeks to that object, might take and salt as much fish as would feed his people all the year round, besides which he would enjoy the facility of procuring fresh provisions of various descriptions. Venison, wild ducks and turkeys, curlews, flamingos, etc. may be had with very little trouble. I have bought as fine a haunch of Venison as I ever saw, for *twenty-five cents*, and a whole deer for *one dollar*. A man who possesses these facilities of living must do well, but in order that Sanybel may become a town of importance, the contemplated settlement on the main land, must prove successful. I have already stated, that the company had relinquished their grant on the main bordering on the Sanybel River,³⁴ in hopes of selecting a more favorable location. As far as I have seen of this River, I think they have acted wisely, and will briefly state my reasons for entertaining that opinion. The good land on the banks of the Sanybel River commences in a very narrow belt near the mouth of the river, but it is supposed that the land widens as you progress upwards, and becomes at the head of the river, an immense prairie, the soil of which is good. The conditions on which the company purchased their land, was, that they should take twenty one miles in length, by five in depth on the banks of the river. The selection having been made too near the mouth of the river, would have given to each individual, a very small proportion of good land, as the depth from the river was very inconsiderable. Their present

34. The Caloosahatchee.

object is to move higher up the river, so as to secure a large quantity of good land on the river. Now although the position first chosen, did not (for the reasons stated) exactly suit their purposes, it will answer well for individuals who are desirous of planting on a small scale. I have seen some tracts of very fine land on the Sanybel river low down, but it is of limited extent, any man, however, desirous of purchasing from one to three hundred acres, might select it, to suit himself. And there will be this great advantage in his location; the Company being settled high up the river, and intending to run a steam boat, those low down, who may have but a small quantity of produce will enjoy every facility of transporting their crops to market possessed by the Company; which they would not perhaps have done, had the Company settled lower down, and they be compelled to locate at the head of the river.

There is one other river which I shall mention, the Mayocca.³⁵ This river empties into Charlotte Harbor, about 20 miles from Sanybel. The land is heavily wooded on both sides; the growth consists of live oak, hickory, cypress, cabbage palmetto, &c. Most of the land is low and will require draining. I think that fine rice fields might be made here, and good sugar grown.-The water of these rivers is fresh, and excellent to drink. But little is known, however, in respect to land adjacent to these rivers, the country having never been explored. It is my determination when I return to explore them thoroughly, and whatever may be the result of my observations, I will make them known to the public.

I have thus briefly stated what information I possess in regard to this section of country. It is neither my intention, or desire, to persuade any man to go out there. I have simply laid before the public the little knowledge which I have of what I hope will one day become a highly interesting portion of our

35. Williams' 1837 map indicates three major rivers flowing into Charlotte Harbor. They are, from south to north, the Mecaco, the Tolopchopko or Peace, and the Aternal. The Peace is still so designated today; the Aternal is apparently the Myakka River; but the Mecaco, thought by Williams to originate in Lake Mecaco (now the Okeechobee), does not appear on modern maps, nor is there any stream of major proportions between the Peace and the Caloosahatchee. One must conclude that a marshy area near what is today the boundary between Lee and Charlotte counties was mistaken by early explorers for a river. The mouth of the Myakka is considerably more than twenty miles from Sanibel.

country. I would advise every man who feels disposed to change of residence, before doing so, to go and look at the country for himself. We have heard so many tales, and read so many highly colored accounts of the wonderful resources of new countries, that the public have lost their relish for the plain, substantial, wholesome truth. In order therefore to induce men, to "tempt the main," in search of a new residence, it must be represented as an "El dorado." Such is not the design of this Company, or the gentlemen connected with it. Most of them are going out to settle, themselves, and hope to satisfy the public by their experiments, and the crops which they make, that theirs is not a visionary scheme, or idle speculation. There are 30 or 40 persons now at Sanybel, to whom will be added seventy or eighty more in the course of the fall.

EPILOGUE

The dream of a flourishing Sanibel did not materialize. Its remoteness from other settlements, the rigors of digging a living from its soil, and perhaps the abundance of mosquitoes were factors in its failure. But far more important, the ever-increasing hostility of the vexed and beleaguered Indians, which gradually deteriorated into the Second Seminole War, rendered life on the islands perilous. The early efforts to "make a go of it" were serious and diligent. In December 1833, thirteen citizens of Sanibel petitioned the secretary of the treasury to construct a lighthouse on Sanibel, hoping to make their coast safer and more attractive to shippers plying the Gulf.³⁶ But one hears little more about their venture. John Lee Williams wrote: "A Company from New-York, in the winter of 1833, surveyed a town at the S. E. end of the island. One elegant house was built and several smaller ones, but at this time, 1837, it is nearly deserted."³⁷ A short while earlier, Navy Lieutenant Levin M. Powell and a small exploring party had anchored their craft in Sanibel harbor. His report on the expedition includes the following statement: "All the old 'Ranchos' were visited, but they had been abandoned, and for the most part destroyed during the last season."

36. Clarence E. Carter (ed.), *The Territorial Papers of the United States; Florida Territory*, 26 vols. (Washington, 1956-1962), XXIV, 930.

37. Williams, *Territory of Florida*, 32.

The time was November 29, 1836.³⁸ The census-taker overlooked Sanibel completely in 1840, 1850, and 1860. In 1870 he found "On Sinnabel" two inhabitants, William S. Allen, aged forty-seven, assistant marshal and farmer, Connecticut-born; and his son, George, aged sixteen, born in Florida, with the occupation, farm laborer. The slow revival had begun.

38. Levin M. Powell to Thomas Crabb, commanding U. S. S. *Vandalia*, December 8, 1836, printed in *Army and Navy Chronicle*, New Series, IV (January-June 1837), 298-99.