Notes: Everglades [Florida]

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http://hdl.handle.net/10456/39425

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NOTES – EVERGLADES.

Through Mr. Shutts I was able to arrange to visit Mr. Graham, the representative and manager of the Pennsylvania Sugar Company, which lies in the Everglades on the canal some eighteen miles from Miami. Mrs. Graham drove me out. The road runs out through Hialeah, a new development, and the seal of the races; of Jai-Alai; of the greyhound coursing and games, which extract sporting people and on which a great deal of gambling – some of it pretty heavy – goes on. The excavation for the canal is piled in high, white, rough banks, excellent protection against overflow from that quarter. Of course, on the road along the canal you skirt several miles of garden tracts, convincing demonstrations of what can be done on Everglade land in spite of the floods and frosts from which they suffer. On small tracts these gardeners grow all kinds of vegetables. They will give you anything in the way of vegetables from December on, and of a first-class quality. Many of these men, particularly foreign peasants, used to working on the land, are making incomes of from five to fifteen thousand dollars a
on the land, are making incomes of from five to fifteen thousand dollars a
year off their little tracts, but they have serious handicaps. Twice in
this last season their land has been so flooded out that it was entirely under
water. There have been three frosts which cut down their vegetables, but
one crop frozen, a new one is put in in the morning, and in five or six weeks
you have your stuff ready for market.

Mr. Graham was sent here some years ago to develop a hundred thousand or
so of Everglades land that the Pennsylvania Sugar Company had bought. He
has had a good many thousand acres in cane. They put up a most modern and
permanent type of sugar mill; put several thousand acres into cane. They
have raised cane, made sugar, but in spite of their own and the Government
canals they have been flooded out season after season. The destruction of
their crops has been such that they have decided not to give up raising sugar
on Everglade land, but to wait until State and Nation will properly aid them
in drainage. In the meantime, Graham is trying potatoes, with great success.
The Frost has got them, but not at any time all, and they had a new crop going
in the next morning. He is experimenting with pumping water from a flat
field. He is experimenting with laying canals in such a way that its tempera-
ture, always warm, will modify the air, a thing that has succeeded in other
places.
Notes - Everglades.

He is experimenting in gardening; that is, this Company and its Manager here have taken the attitude that the way to develop the Everglades is to develop them, using your land as an experimental station, forever studying, laughing at failures, laughing at the insurmountable, never giving up. It is about as fine a sporting spirit as you often come across, this of the Pennsylvania Sugar Company. They have been helped out somewhat by the boom. The boom brought the developers into their territory. Tracts that they did not need were sold. "I sold land for $300.00 an acre" Mr. Graham laughs, "which years ago gentlemen were put in gaol for selling for $15.00 an acre." One quite understands the feeling of men who, like Graham, are giving their lives to fight floods and frosts and sword-grass, in order to make gardens where people can raise things; If some of the money that is being spent in (?) for the selling of town lots up and down these coasts might be spent in experimenting with the Everglades, in the long run it would be the safest investment for the future of the coast cities which could be had. It is the back lands of this district that need developing. "Think what $25,000, the price of one fiesta, would do for us," he said.

At Palm Beach I met Capt. and Mrs. J. J. O'Brien, who spent several years on the South-East corner of the Everglades. (Look him up in Tallahassee) They went in in boats, put up a tremendous fight, but the lack of State and Federal Government to give what they feel is the necessary cooperation in drainage, made them give it up, but their belief in the Everglades is unshaken. They were able to do much themselves. O'Brien just now is interested in the idea of using the bogs for fuel. He and Mrs. O'Brien went over to Russia this last year to see what the Soviet Government is doing with peat. They have got a peat factory, and are lighting and heating the city of Moscow with their results. This is the notion of the man Ransom, whose letter I have, but O'Brien says he is clean crazy; doesn't understand the process for preparing the peat, though he has the faith without the "know how."
building for $345,000.00. They went out a considerable distance then, 1923, not far now, 1926 — and bought two acres on the Bay Shore Drive. They have put up a $250,000 club house. It is quite fitting that they should make the library, to which the members have given consistent attention, a memorial to Mr. Flagler. Indeed, they were obliged to do something for Mr. Flagler; they had promised him when he gave them this land that they would show their gratitude by erecting a bronze memorial tablet to him. It was a good many years before this was done. Now they seem to have discharged their full gratitude. There is another memorial, however, that the Miami Woman’s Club ought not to neglect, and that is a tablet to the memory of the woman who persuaded Henry Flagler to come into Miami to stay — Julia Tuttle. Not only to Julia Tuttle, but to all that fine band of pioneer women who are so fundamental in preparing a state for such a growth as Florida is now experiencing, and who get so little credit for what they have done. They have had a fine history on this Coast. They should be remembered, for without them the Miami Woman’s Club would not have its palatial house.

The result of all this activity, this buying and selling, this frenzy
The result of all this activity, this buying and selling, this frenzy of construction, this train of people coming and staying, was inevitable. There is a large body of wiley gentlemen, and some ladies, in this country who always attach themselves to get-rich-quick movements. Where there is speculation in values, sound or unsound, it is immaterial to them, they are on hand. And early in 1925 they began to flock into all the centers of Florida, the Tampa and Miami districts particularly, where fever for development, which I have been sketching, had broken out. They did not bring money. They may or may not have had any, but their business was to take money from those that had it. Their favorite procedure was simple. They dealt in town lots. Town lots anywhere. As a rule they never saw their properties. "Come out and look at the land" an acquaintance of mine told one of this band. "Look at it" he said. "I don't want to see it, I want to sell it." Their whole stock-in-trade, as far as anyone could make out, was a blueprint. They went to a buyer who had bought a lot in good faith in one or another development, or to someone who perhaps had long held a lot in a quiet community, who had paid $3,000 for it. "I will give you $40,000 for your property" the new-comer says. "I will pay you $8,000 down and the rest in paper." He could not afford to resist such an offer. He took the money and the paper, and then
While the credit was bad here, the stage was set for another mighty actor. The headlines of the newspapers declared that Daily life was to be taken care of and that Florida was about to become the greatest money-making center in the United States. The stock market was at its peak. World-wide interest centered in Florida. People who had never been there before were buying property for prices that seemed too good to be true. The Florida boom was in full swing.

The country people began to get word from friends in Florida of lots, perhaps just bought, perhaps long held, that had been sold for twenty, thirty or more times the original cost. By the winter of 1924 and by 1925 you could fill the magazine with stories of those quick turn-overs. The result was inevitable. There joined the movement a great horde of those wily gentlemen who are always on hand when opportunities to speculate appear. In almost every city through the North they took charge of the selling of lots in this or that development, and they flooded Tampa and Miami and other points where the development fever had begun to appear. They bought and sold, usually with very little money.

You had a piece of property, and the ingratiating gentleman comes and offers for it $100,000.00 — five times as much as you had ever dreamed of its being worth, even since the boom began. As a binder he gives you $500.00. Then he goes out to his work but doesn’t try to sell you his property. He tries to make it turn over on the binder. He sells it for $500,000. (?) ________, for ____________ (?) and the one that buys it sells it through speculating in your binder and not in your property, and by the time they get through and disappear from the scene you have to spend $500.00 and more to get the matter cleaned up. Plenty of that thing now began to go on in the speculative centers of Florida.

A frequent happening was for one of the Gentry to go to someone who had bought in good faith a lot in one or another development, hoping eventually to have probably a home. He had paid, we will say, $8,000.00 for it. “I will give you $40,000.00” says the newcomer. “Pay you $8,000.00 down, and the rest in paper.” $40,000.00 is too good to be resisted. You took your money and
in paper." $40,000.00 is too good to be resisted. You took your money and your paper, and then the speculation begins, and it isn't long before, as one victim told me, you haven't anything and nobody has anything. No one ever knows really what becomes of the lot. It looked very much by the summer of 1925 as if the Florida boom had fallen on evil days. But how about these speculations? How about these developments? So spectacular. This growth was unbelievable. In five years since it had started it had brought over 40,000 people to Miami. That is a growth in five years of 141 per cent. It had brought almost as large a growth to Orlando and Lakeland and only a little less to Miami's neighbor, West Palm Beach. Indeed all over Florida a most amazing growth had gone on in these five boom years. It had brought wealth, amazing building activities and then people began to say it was all a speculation. They are wrong. Look at some of the things that the speculation has been built on. These sudden growths.
show place at Palm Beach for $800,000.00. It cost him $75,000.00. All over the country people began to get word from friends in Florida of lots, perhaps just bought, perhaps long held, that had been sold for twenty, thirty or more times the original cost. By the winter of 1924 and by 1925 you could fill the magazine with stories of those quick turn-overs. The result was inevitable. There joined the movement a great horde of those wiley gentlemen who are always on hand when opportunities to speculate appear. In almost every city through the North they took charge of the selling of lots in this or that development, and they flooded Tampa and Miami and other points where the development fever had begun to appear. They bought and sold, usually with very little money. You had a piece of property, and the ingratingiatiing gentleman comes and offers for it $100,000.00 - five times as much as you had ever dreamed of its being worth, even since the boom began. As a binder he gives you $500.00. Then he goes out to his work but doesn't try to sell you his property. He tries to make it turn over on the binder. He sells it for $500,000.00, for ________, for ________ and the one that buys it sells it through speculating in your binder and not in your property, and by the time they get through and disappear from the scene you have to spend $500.00 and more to get the matter cleaned up. Plenty of that thing now began to go on in the speculative centers of Florida.
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Please ask me about your music project.

Richard