

# FLORIDA POSTAL HISTORY JOURNAL

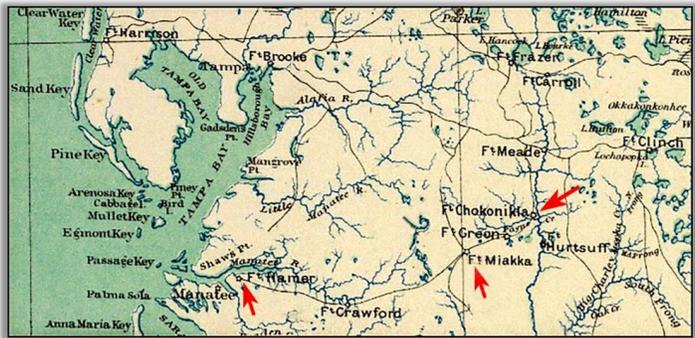


Promoting Philately in the Sunshine State

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## Fort Myakka and the Seminole War That Never Happened

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE



RPO Manuscript Marking



St. Marks Florida Ship 8 1/4 Rate



Lake Helen Cover Stories



Revenue Stamps



Ripley's Believe It or Not!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Fort Myakka and the Seminole War That Never Happened

by Deane R. Briggs, M.D. .... 4-10

### State Revenue Stamps of Florida: Food Products

by Richard Lomax ..... 10-13

### St. Marks, Florida Ship 8¼ Rate Cover

by Phil Eschbach ..... 13-15

### Stories Discovered Behind a Florida Cover

by Christine C. Sanders ..... 15-19

### Ripley's Believe It or Not! Philately

by Juan L. Riera ..... 19-21

### Florida RPO Manuscript Marking

by Thomas Lera and Alex Hall ..... 22-23

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## Fort Myakka and the Seminole War That Never Happened

By Deane R. Briggs, M.D.

This article is the fourth in the *Florida Postal History Journal* series on Florida Seminole War forts. It will discuss Fort Myakka, a short lived 1849-1850 fort, located near the headwaters of the Myakka River in Manatee County. Fort Myakka (Indian word meaning “big waters”) was hastily constructed in late 1849, in anticipation of a Seminole War that never happened, and was then quickly abandoned less than six months later. Before we go into a war that did not happen, I will summarize what led up to and actually happened between the Second and Third Seminole Wars.

### First Seminole War: 1817-1818

The First Seminole war was begun November 20, 1817, with General Edmund Gaines attacking a Seminole village of Fowltown, just above the Spanish Florida - Georgia line, which forced the remaining tribe to flee into Florida for refuge.<sup>1</sup> On November 30, the Indians retaliated with a sabotage of a small U.S. army supply vessel ascending the Apalachicola River, heading for Fort Scott in Georgia. A mile below the Georgia border at a bend in the river, a few hundred Seminoles, Mikasuki, and Creek Indians attacked, killing most of the soldiers. Six soldiers managed to swim to the opposite side of the river to save themselves, but the remainder of the soldiers and dependents were slain. A soldier’s wife, Elizabeth Stuart, was taken prisoner.

In response, the War Department sent General Andrew Jackson to invade Spanish Florida. Jackson entered Florida in March 1818, with 3,000 troops and drove the Seminoles below the Suwannee River. He also captured Fort St. Marks and the Spanish capital at Pensacola, which led to the eventual transfer of Spanish Florida to the United States with the Adams-Onis Treaty of February 22, 1819.

### Second Seminole War: 1835-1842

The 1818-1835 period was relatively peaceful with several negotiations with the Seminoles regarding relocation options. The Second Seminole War began on December 28, 1835, following the ambush and massacre of Major Francis Dade and over 100 soldiers on the military road from Fort Brooke (Tampa) to Fort King (Ocala).<sup>2</sup>

Prior to that, the military was trying to enforce the 1823 Treaty of Moultrie Creek obligating the Seminoles to move to a reservation of four million acres in south Florida below the Caloosahatchee River, with the U.S. government providing money and supplies to help with the relocation. Neither side observed the terms of the treaty and in 1832 the Treaty of Payne’s Landing was negotiated requiring the Seminoles to move within three years to lands assigned to Creek Indians west of the Mississippi River.

A delegation of Seminoles visited the Creek lands, and finding them acceptable were coerced into signing the Treaty of Fort Gibson, affirming the terms of the earlier treaty. Chief Osceola and other Seminoles denied ever agreeing to being removed, especially after President Andrew Jackson informed them in 1834 that General Wiley Thompson was assigned to remove them by force if necessary. The same day as the Dade Massacre, Osceola also killed General Thompson. Thus began the Second Seminole War.

Throughout 1836, Seminoles attacked white settlements, outposts, and supply lines in an effort to prevent their forced removal. In October 1837, General Thomas Jesup set up a false truce and captured Osceola and a number of his major followers. The Battle of Lake Okechobee in December 1837, and a final major Battle of Loxahatchee River in January 1838, led to 3,000-4,000 of the Seminoles relocating west to the Creek reservation by 1842.

The Second Seminole War was declared over on August 14, 1842. As many as 2,000 U.S. soldiers were killed or died of disease. An estimated \$40,000,000 to \$60,000,000 in today's currency was spent by the U.S. government trying to remove the Seminoles from Florida.

### 1842-1855

During the Second Seminole War, a number of Seminoles, reluctant to emigrate, moved to lands originally offered them by the Treaty of Moultrie Creek and lived in the area around Big Cypress Swamp and in the Everglades. Aware of Seminoles still residing in Florida, Colonel William Worth announced at Fort Brooke in July 1842, the boundaries of lands recently authorized by the President of the United States "Relative to Indians Remaining in Florida".<sup>3</sup>

"From the mouth of Peace Creek, up the left bank of that stream to the fork of the southern branch, and following that branch to the head, or northern edge of Lake Istakata; thence down the eastern margin of that lake to the stream which empties from it, into the Kissimmee River, following the left bank of said stream and river to where the latter empties into Lake Okeechobee; thence due south through said lake, and the Everglades to Shark river, following the right bank of that river to the Gulf; thence along the Gulf-shore to the place of beginning, excluding all islands lying between Punta Rassa and the head of Charlotte harbor."

This offered a new reservation for the remaining Seminoles but did allow for U.S. settlers to enter this area to capture runaway slaves seeking safety in the Seminole lands. In May 1845, an additional twenty-mile perimeter was added to the Seminole reservation boundaries.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after the Seminoles learned of this agreement, they moved from the swampy recesses of the Everglades and established small villages on the banks of the Caloosahatchee River. By the mid-1840s, most of them had settled near the Lake Okeechobee side of the river. Captain John Sprague, an Indian agent, estimated that there were 360 Indians living on the reservation in 1847, of which only 120 were adult males. They were led by Billy Bowlegs, who had been elected their chief in 1842.

During this period of relative peace, white settlers began to move into central Florida, spurred by the Armed Occupation Act of August 4, 1842.<sup>5</sup> This Act, spearheaded by Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton, authorized 160 acres to any adult male head of family who could prove that they had cultivated at least five acres and lived in a house fit for habitation for five consecutive years.

Claimants must "bear arms" and be willing to join militias to fight Seminoles if necessary. Most settlers would obviously want to live close to Army forts, but the goal of the act was to spread out settlers and it therefore prohibited settlements within two miles of forts.

While a majority of settlers established claims in north central Florida, a number did settle in the Manatee and Hillsborough County regions of Florida. Robert Gamble and Joseph Braden established huge plantations on the Manatee River following the Union Bank of Tallahassee failure.

Within a short period of time, some settlers established homesites near the boundaries of the reservation. Spanish fishermen would regularly anchor in Charlotte Harbor to trade with the Seminoles and they were allowed access to the reservation to exchange whiskey for furs and supplies.

In an effort to eliminate this unauthorized trade, the government authorized its own store for trade in or near the reservation. In late 1845, Captain John Sprague had completed a survey of the area around Charlotte Harbor and by the end of the year had erected a trading post on the north bank of the Caloosahatchee River a few miles from the Gulf of Mexico.

Thomas Pugh Kennedy, a sutler at Fort Brooke, was appointed in January 1846 to operate the trading post and bring Indian goods to Tampa. This would also eliminate the need for Seminoles to travel from their reservation to trade at Tampa in an effort to minimize interaction with whites.

General William J. Worth notified the Seminoles that they would no longer be permitted “to resort to Tampa for trade or other purposes, nor to approach the settlements.” Business went very well for Kennedy and he subsequently obtained a partner, John Darling, a former Army officer during the Second Seminole War, who had a thirty-two-ton sloop, the *Rosella*, to transport goods to Tampa. All went well until a fire destroyed the trading post in late 1848.<sup>6</sup>



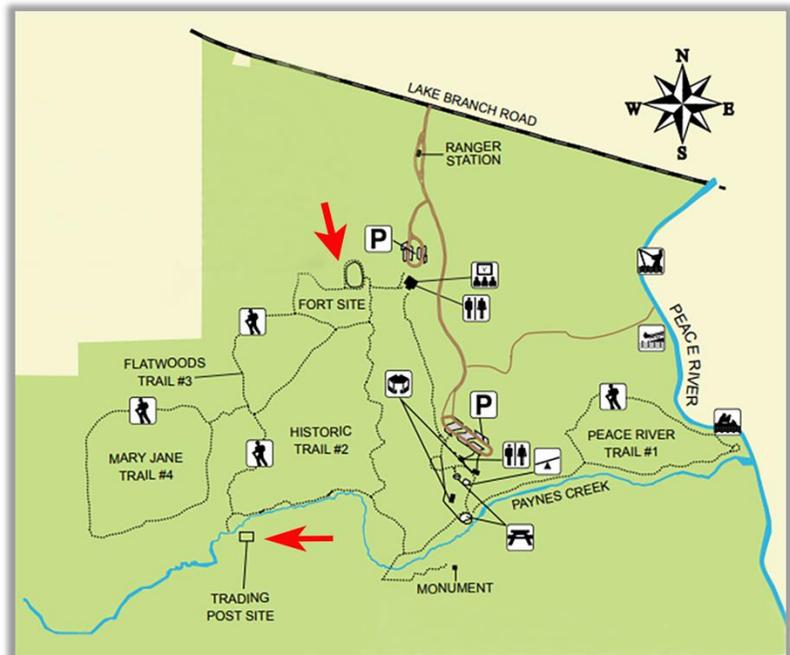
Kennedy and Darling met with government officials after this disaster and mutually agreed to reopen a store closer to Tampa on a tributary of the Peace River near the north-western boundary of the reservation. In March 1849, Major William W. Morris, the Indian agent, “granted Messrs. Kennedy and Darling permission, under restrictions, to open an establishment for the purpose of trading with the Indians” (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 1. Kennedy-Darling Trading post reconstructed at Paynes Creek State Park.**

The firm erected its own buildings including a large two-story structure to store merchandise and to be used as a dwelling for people living on the site. A wharf on Payne Creek was constructed as well as a narrow wooden bridge. Figure 2 shows Paynes Creek State Park with locations of the original Kennedy and Darling trading post and the site of Fork Chockonikla.

The first few months were peaceful, and the Seminoles came regularly to trade.<sup>8</sup> But by summer, events would occur that would bring rekindle settler’s anti-Seminole resentment.

A group of four Indians, including a Red Stick Creek named Echo Emathla, who had recently attacked a settlement near Fort Pierce, arrived at the Kennedy and Darling trading post in the early evening of July 17, 1849.<sup>9</sup> They mentioned to the store employees, Captain George S. Payne, Dempsey Whiddon, and William McCollough, that they had furs to trade in the morning and asked if they could get whiskey. This was denied and they bided their time for a few hours.



**Figure 2. Paynes Creek State Park with locations of the original Kennedy and Darling trading post and the site of Fork Chockonikla.**

As the store residents were about to eat dinner, the Seminoles opened fire on them, killing Captain Payne and Dempsey Whiddon. William McCollough was wounded in the left shoulder but escaped with his wife and child and hid in the woods, eventually finding safety three days later at a nearby settlement near the Alafia River. The Indians destroyed the trading post after taking guns and munitions. These atrocities caused many settlers throughout central Florida to agitate for Indian removal and look with apprehension for another Seminole War.

### **An Attempt to Prevent the Seminole War That Never Happened**

General David Twiggs, a veteran of the previous Seminole Wars, was assigned to negotiate an Indian removal without force, but, if necessary, “forcible removal from Florida, or what may be more disagreeable their partial or entire extermination.”<sup>10</sup>

General Twiggs was able to arrange a meeting with Billy Bowlegs on September 18 near the site of the first trading post in Charlotte Harbor. Bowlegs, desirous of peace and not wanting to start another Seminole war, brought with him three of the murderous Indians and the severed hand of another who was killed trying to escape.

Bowlegs told Twiggs that the Seminole “nation had nothing to complain of on the part of the whites, were desirous of peace, and determined not to allow peaceful relations to be disturbed by the acts of individuals.” Twiggs reminded Bowlegs and sub-chief Sam Jones that “beyond the Mississippi, hunting grounds awaited them, and there the far greater portion of their people were anxious to receive them.” Nothing definitive was decided and Twiggs began for a likely war campaign.

In October, Twiggs proposed “a line of posts crossing the state from the Manatee (River) to (the) Indian River, passing between (the) Kissimee (sic) on the south, and Cypress Lake on the North, effectively isolating the Seminole reservation from contact with white settlers. On this line of 200 miles, posts of two companies each, ten miles apart, would be required.” Twiggs estimated that 4,150 soldiers, or nearly half of the entire United States army, would be required.

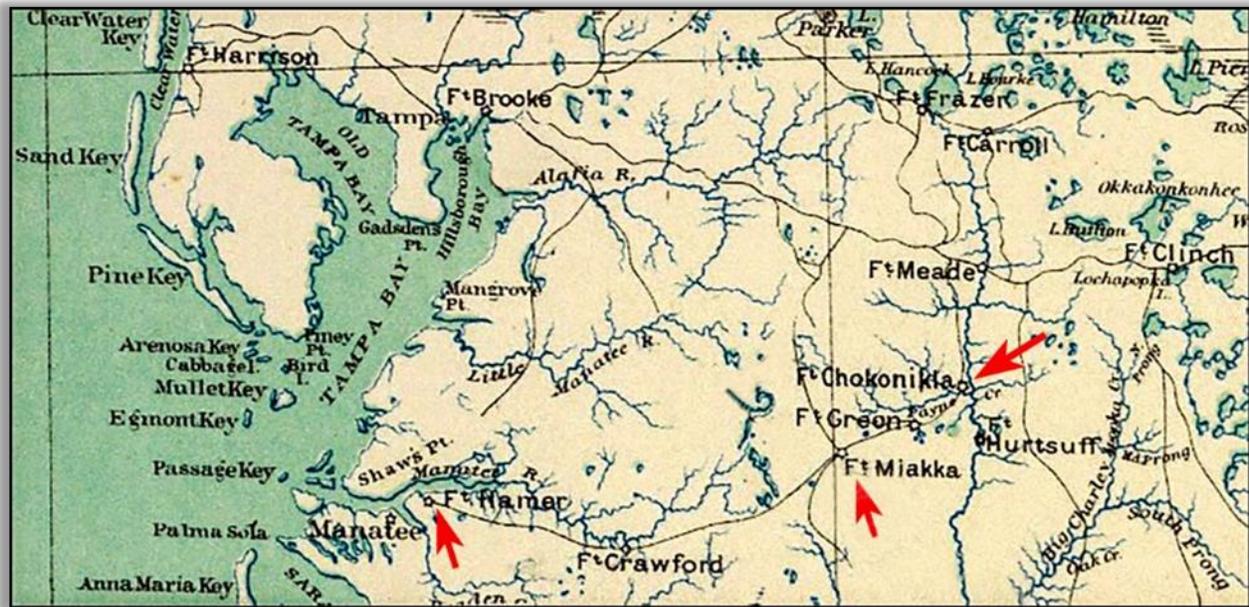
Twiggs began a series of forts, starting with a large one at the location of the ransacked Kennedy and Darling store, named Fort Chokonikla (Indian word meaning “burned house”). One hundred and two men completed the fort which consisted of a square shaped palisade with blockhouses at opposing ends with storehouses, and a bridge with guard blockhouse outside the fort. When completed on November 10, it had a garrison of 166 troops.<sup>11</sup>

A fortified supply depot on the Manatee River “near the head of steamboat navigation” was also completed in early November which Twiggs named Fort Hamer after General Thomas L. Hamer.

Twiggs also let it be known that he intended to place the entire garrison of Fort Brooke there.<sup>12</sup> Fort Hamer was to be the main mail and supply distribution point for all the forts along the soon to be cleared road to Fort Chokonikla.<sup>13</sup> Fort Crawford, ten miles east of Fort Hamer, was completed in late October. Major Gabriel Rains of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment from Fort Brooke was assigned to construct the route from Fort Chokonikla to Fort Hamer. Rains was accompanied by Lieut. George Meade, a topographical engineer, to assist and survey the country between the two forts.<sup>14</sup>

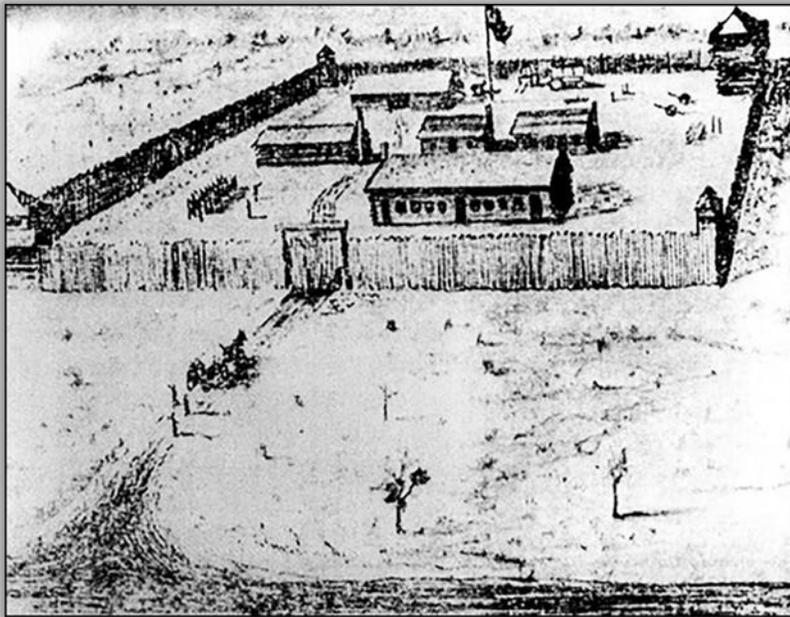
### **Fort Myakka**

A narrow path into the forested interior was established and at Myakka Creek Major Rains built the first of many bridges. A primitive log stockade, designated Fort Myakka, was erected on the east bank of the creek to guard the bridge against a possible Indian attack. Work on the road continued into December with just the section between Fort Myakka and Fort Crawford requiring eleven bridges and two causeways. By the end of the month, Rains reported completion of the entire route between Fort Hamer and Fort Chokonikla (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. Map showing route from Fort Chokonikla to Fort Hamer with Fort Miakka(sic) and Fort Crawford. (Courtesy David Rumsey Historic Map Collection, Gen. Map XI.)**

On November 16, 1849, Fort Myakka was completed as the last of the forts connecting Fort Hamer and Fort Chokonikla. It was built like many of these outposts.



**Figure 4. Drawing by James C. Buchanan of a typical Seminole War fort, possibly Fort Fraser, just north of Bartow. <sup>16</sup>**

“To build such a fort (Figure 4), you simply obtain a few hundred trees, cut them in 18-foot lengths, and split them up the middle. Then you set them into the ground side by side like a fence, fasten them together with timbers, cut loopholes eight feet from the ground and build firing steps under the loopholes for the riflemen. Outside you dig a ditch that served as a kind of moat. You hung a strong gate, and your fort is practically finished.”<sup>15</sup>

The long, split poles were sharpened to a point and placed such that they were ten to fourteen feet above the level of the ground.

In January 1850, Twiggs and Bowlegs met again to discuss emigration, and for the following three months a number of the Seminoles did emigrate. Forty-eight arrived in Tampa in late January, sixty arrived at Fort Arbuckle in early February with twenty-four more to arrive shortly, and seventy-four left Tampa in early March. However, on April 11, Bowlegs met at Fort Myers with Captain Casey and informed him that “he could not go west, nor could he induce his people to go.”<sup>17</sup>

When General Twiggs was notified of this, he wrote his superiors that “all hopes for the peaceful emigration of the Indians are at an end, and it is folly to talk with them any longer on the subject.” At this point, Twiggs relinquished his command, and in a final report suggested that if the government wished to keep any troops in Florida, that one company should be stationed at Fort Chokonikla.

Twiggs’ plan of a line of forts was never completely implemented and Fort Crawford was closed on April 25. Fort Myakka had been abandoned by March 22, not lasting even six months.

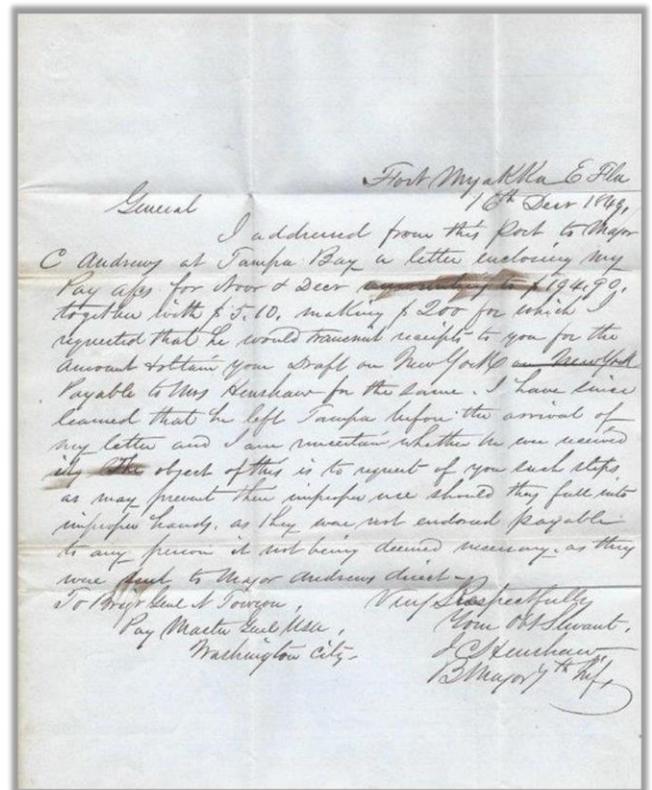
There are no remains of the Fort Myakka and its exact location is lost forever in an uninhabitable wetland forest. By early summer, many of the troops at Fort Chokonikla had become sick with yellow fever, and by July 1, 1850, that fort was also abandoned and all remaining troops were transferred to Fort Meade, located a few miles to the north on the Peace River.

The Seminole war that never happened was a failure in its goal of the total emigration of the Seminole people. But peace did exist for the next five years before the onset of the Third Seminole War in 1855.

From a postal history side of the story of Fort Myakka, to my knowledge there is only one cover in private hands. That cover (Figure 5) is from Major J.C. Henshaw of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry. He was likely involved with the construction of the fort as it was written on December 16, 1849, after the fort was completed.



**Figure 5. TAMPA / Flor. DEC 18 (1849) postmark with FREE rating “on official Business” docketed cover to Genl N Towson, Pay Master Genl USA, Washington City, D.C.**



**Figure 6. Major J.C. Henshaw letter datelined “Fort Myakka E Fla, 16<sup>th</sup> Decr 1849.”**

The enclosure (Figure 6) is a second request for pay for the months of November and December in the amount of \$194.90. He requested that it be paid as a draft in New York to his wife plus \$5.10 which he enclosed in an earlier letter to make the payment an even \$200. The cover entered the mails at Tampa on December 18, only two days after leaving Fort Myakka, most likely carried to Fort Hamer and then by steamer to Tampa. It is docketed, as received on December 31, 1849, and authorized payment in New York.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *Florida Seminole Wars Heritage Trail*, Florida Department of State, 2015, pp.3-4, 16.
- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Second-Seminole-War>.
- <sup>3</sup> Schene, Michael G., "Not a Shot Fired: Fort Chokonikla and the "Indian War" of 1849-1850", Tequesta, 1977. <http://digitalcollections.fiu.edu>. (Well-referenced article.)
- <sup>4</sup> Schene, footnote 3, p.32.
- <sup>5</sup> [www.floridahistorynetwork.com/aug-4-1842-us-gives-free-florida-land-to-stttlers-willing-to-fight-seminoles.html](http://www.floridahistorynetwork.com/aug-4-1842-us-gives-free-florida-land-to-stttlers-willing-to-fight-seminoles.html).
- <sup>6</sup> Schene, p.21.
- <sup>7</sup> Brown, Jr., Canter, *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, University Presses of Florida, 1991, p.79.
- <sup>8</sup> Schene, p. 21.
- <sup>9</sup> Brown, Jr., Canter, *In the Midst of All That Make Life Worth Living: Polk County, Florida, to 1940*, Sentry Press, Tallahassee, Florida 2001, p.42-44.
- <sup>10</sup> Schene, pp. 23-25.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 27.
- <sup>12</sup> Brown ref.7, p.87.
- <sup>13</sup> Knetsch, Dr. Joe, "The Hardships and Inconveniences: The Manatee River Forts during the Seminole Wars," Sunland Tribune: Vol. 25, Article 7, 1999.
- <sup>14</sup> Schene, p. 27-28.
- <sup>15</sup> Knetsch, p.4.
- <sup>16</sup> Brown ref. 7, p. 58, also from his personal collection.
- <sup>17</sup> Schene, pp. 29-30.

## State Revenue Stamps of Florida: Food Products

By Richard Lomax

*Editor's Note: This is the second in a series of six articles exploring the state revenue stamps of Florida.*

The initial article in this series was an introduction to the state revenue stamps of Florida (*Florida Postal History Journal*, May 2022). We learned of the definitive catalog of state revenue stamps and materials edited by Dave Wrisley (*The State Revenue Catalog: Revenue Stamps and Related Materials of the States of the United States of America*, 2013, State Revenue Society). If you have an interest in state revenue stamps for any state, this is the reference book that you need to have on your shelf.

We then moved to an overview of the categories of stamps that Florida produced: (1) Documentary; (2) Agriculture; (3) Alcoholic Products; (4) Food Products; (5) General Inspection & Excise; and (6) Tobacco Products.

In this second article, we focus on the category of Food Products, which other than tourism, is historically the largest revenue generator in the state of Florida.

As listed in Wrisley, the Food Product stamps are: (a) Citrus Fruit, Inspection; (b) Citrus Fruit, Advertising; (c) Citrus Fruit, Prorating Control; (d) Grapefruit, Advertising; (e) Limes, Advertising; (f) Oranges, Advertising; (g) Tangerines, Advertising; (h) Eggs, Carton, Inspection; and (i) Eggs, Case, Inspection. Let us take a look at the specifics of each product, including example stamps from my collection.

The first subcategory is Citrus Fruit, Inspection. These stamps were used from 1925 through circa 1945, required in 1925 and becoming optional in 1945. A key purpose of the inspection of citrus is to determine if the fruit was mature. This protects the consumer against immature or less than ripe fruit. During that period of time, thirty-nine stamps are listed, not including minor variations.



**Figure 1. Citrus Fruit, Inspection, CF20.**

The numbering system used is CF, short for Citrus Fruit. Thus, stamps are numbered from CF1 to CF39, although CF17 has not been confirmed or seen.

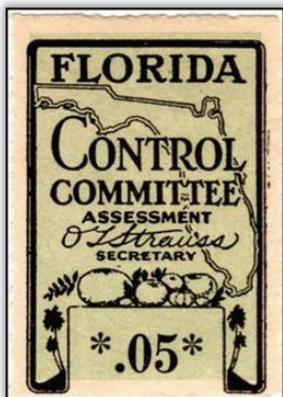
All of these stamps are printed with either “Mature Tax” or “Maturity” across the different series. Each series was valid during a particular time period with multiple denominations, much like postage stamps. Figure 1 shows CF20 from the 1932 series.

Next is Citrus Fruit, Advertising. Until 1943, there were different citrus advertising stamps for the different citrus fruits (e.g., oranges, tangerines, etc.). These were replaced in 1943 by generic advertising issues, which became optional in 1945.

During this short period of time, only two series were produced, for a total of 17 stamps (denoted by CFA), although CFA6 has not been confirmed or seen. Figure 2 is CFA16 from the second series, circa 1945.



**Figure 2. Citrus Fruit, Advertising, CFA16.**

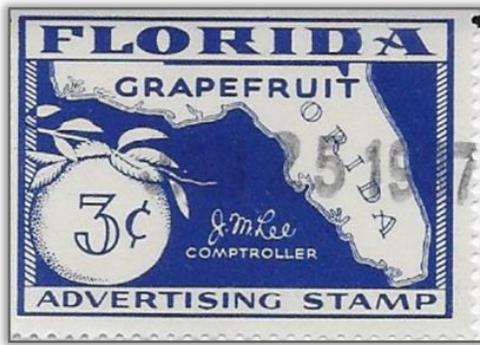


**Figure 3. Citrus Fruit, Prorating Control, CFP2.**

The third subcategory of Florida food products is Citrus Fruit, Prorating Control. These stamps were under the auspices of the Florida Control Committee, whose purpose was to regulate, or prorate, the supply of Florida citrus products outside of the state of Florida. Thus, these stamps had a different purpose than the advertising or inspection stamps.

A total of five stamps are known from just a single series, during the 1933-1935 timeframe, although denoted by CFP1-4 and CFP7. These stamps are rather rare and very expensive. Figure 3 is CFP2, courtesy of Stephen Strobel.

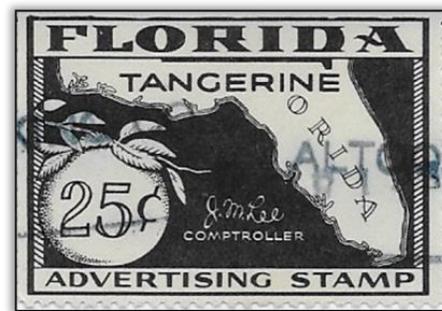
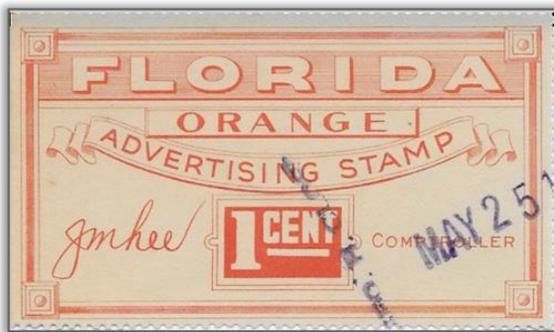
We now turn to the subcategories for the specific fruits. For Grapefruit, Advertising there were three series of grapefruit stamps, which were in force from 1935 to 1943. This resulted in a total of 18 stamps, GR1 – GR18, plus one variation. Figure 4 shows GR7 from the second series.



**Figure 4. Grapefruit, Advertising, GR7.      Figure 5. Limes, Advertising, LE1.**

The fifth subcategory is Limes, Advertising. There was only one series in use from 1941-1943, with a total of four stamps, LE1 – LE4. Likely due to the time frame of World War II, these stamps are very rare. LE1 is shown in Figure 5, courtesy of Stephen Strobel.

Oranges, Advertising is the sixth subcategory. Three series were utilized from 1935 to 1943, with six stamps of different denominations for each series. Thus, the oranges stamps are numbered from OR1 to OR18. Figure 6 shows OR1 from the first series.



**Figure 6. Oranges, Advertising, OR1.      Figure 7. Tangerines, Advertising, TA8.**

Subcategory 7 is Tangerines, Advertising. Here there are also three series in use from 1935 to 1943. There were a total of twenty stamps denoted by TA1 to TA20, but TA18 has not been confirmed or seen. Figure 7 includes an example from the second series (TA8). That completes the Citrus Fruit stamps. Note that by 1945, no citrus stamps of any type were required by law.

This brings us to eggs, which has two subcategories: Eggs Carton, Inspection (for cartons of eggs) and Eggs Case, Inspection (for cases of eggs). Both were in force from 1933 to 1969.

Subcategory 8 is for 1-dozen egg carton labels. There were a total of seventy-seven stamps, denoted by E1-E77, as well as some variations. Note that E4, 16, 17, 32, and 57 have not been confirmed or seen.

The numbering system is organized into the following classes of eggs: Florida Eggs, Cold Storage Eggs, Shipped Eggs, Processed Eggs, and Unclassified Eggs. The final subcategory is for Eggs Case Inspection labels, numbered from E78 to E146. Note that there are several variations, two specimens, missing numbers (E117, 125, 127, 129), and several not confirmed or seen (E98, 103, 104, 107, 109, 110, 118, 140).

Examples of egg stamps are shown in Figure 8 (eggs carton: E1) and Figure 9 (eggs case: E83).



Figure 8. Eggs Carton, Inspection, E1.

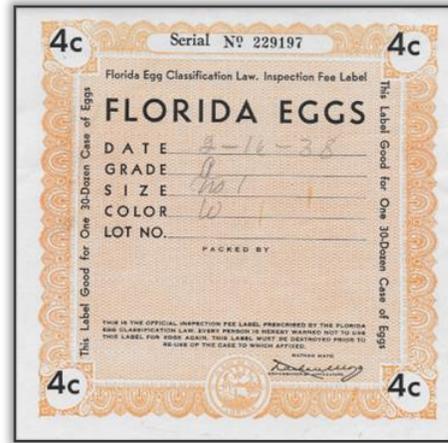


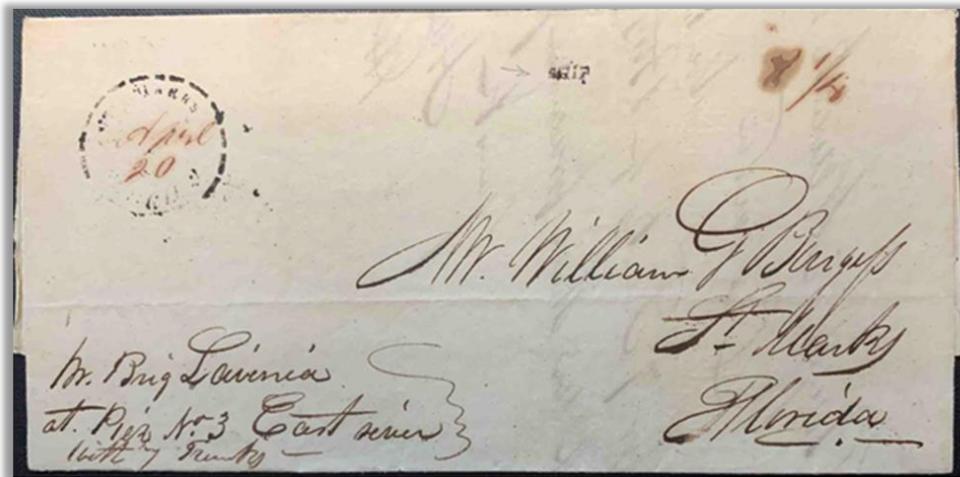
Figure 9. Eggs Case, Inspection, E83.

As you have seen, the food stamps are beautiful having different shapes, sizes and colors. This is what initially attracted me to this category.

The next article on Florida revenue stamps will feature alcoholic products.

## St. Marks, Florida Ship 8¼ Rate Cover By Phil Eschbach

Here is a rare, folded letter with an interesting backstory. The letter was penned by David Woodruff, an accountant in Newark, New Jersey on March 13, 1833. He was writing on behalf of his client, Halsey & Utter, a “Boots & Shoes” business in Newark.

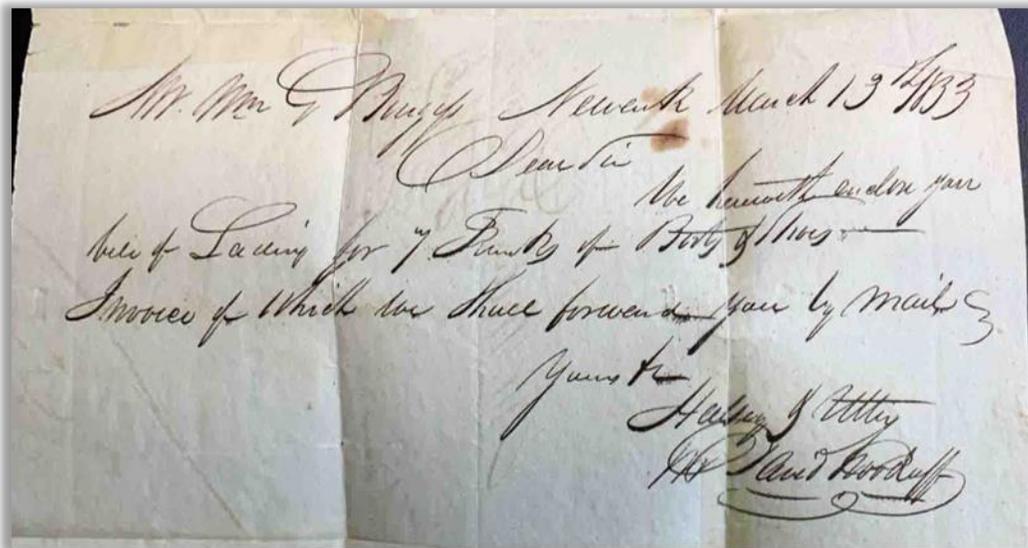


They had sent seven trunks of boots and shoes to William G. Burgess in St. Marks, Florida via the brig *Lavinia*.

The *Lavinia* left from Pier #3 on the East River in New York, as docketed at the lower left on the cover (Figure 1).

Figure 1. ST. MARKS / FLORIDA April 20 (1833) type V serrated postmark with SHIP 8¼ type rate on cover from New York carried by private ship to St. Marks.

The enclosure (Figure 2) states: “We herewith enclose your bill of Lading for 7 trunks of Boots & Shoes — Invoice of which we shall forward you by mail.”



**Figure 2. Enclosure dated March 13<sup>th</sup> 1833.**

Tim Crist, of the Newark Historical Society, informs me that Halsey and Woodruff were common names in Newark in the 1830s and that the production of shoes was an important industry as well.

Since there is no Newark postal notations on the cover, it was privately carried by the captain to St. Marks, where it was placed in the postal system on April 20, 1833, with a Type Va cancel<sup>1</sup> and a charge of 8¼ cents (6¼ cents for the under 30-mile rate plus two cents for the ship). There are only two known covers with these markings, this one, courtesy William H. Johnson, D.D.S.

Apparently, the ship was also carrying the seven trunks of boots and shoes to be delivered to William Burgess and this is the accompanying letter. It took five weeks to arrive at St. Marks from Newark, probably making several stops along the way and having to navigate around the tip of Florida.

William Gaither Burgess (1800-1866) lived in Tallahassee and had businesses in Thomasville and Tallahassee, as well as the Burgess Mercantile Company, a commissary in nearby Drifton, Florida. In 1831, he married Mary Ann Chaires, the oldest daughter of Benjamin Chaires, the wealthiest man in Florida at the time.

However, Chaires disliked Burgess who was a well-known heavy drinker and con artist. Burgess was indebted to many prominent men of Tallahassee, including Chaires, who had loaned him \$4,000 for which he had to sue Burgess for repayment. Mary Ann separated from him in 1834 after the birth of two boys and moved to New Orleans briefly. In 1840, Joseph, one of Chaires' sons, went to court on his sister's behalf to prevent Burgess from further "molesting" her.<sup>2</sup>

When Chaires died in 1838, he did not want to exclude his daughter from his will but also did not want Burgess to get anything, so he wrote in his will that she was to get \$10,000 but only "...whenever her husband...shall die, and not before...It being my express desire that said William Burgess shall not have any part of the same or enjoy benefit whatsoever."<sup>3</sup>

Mary Ann died before her husband, so her inheritance went to her son William Burgess, Jr., bypassing his father, as intended by Chaires. William Jr. as well as his mother Mary Ann are both buried in the Chaires cemetery.

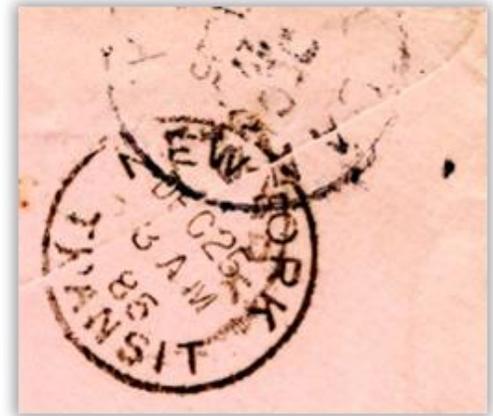
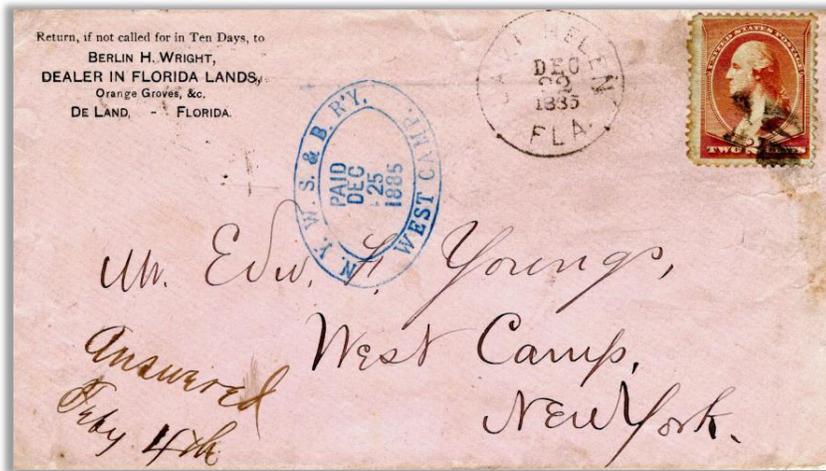
Many thanks to Deane Briggs for editorial comments and information on the ship rate, Tim Crist for information on Newark, and Waring McCrady for transcribing the letter's difficult handwriting.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *Florida Postal History 1763-1821*, 2018, ed. By Deane R. Briggs, Francis Ferguson, Thomas M. Lera, pg. 374.
- <sup>2</sup> Shields, Sharyn, *Whispers from Verdura*, Sentry Press, Tallahassee, 2016.
- <sup>3</sup> Hering, Julia, "Plantation Economy in Leon County, 1830-1840," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, July 1954.

## Stories Discovered Behind a Florida Cover By Christine C. Sanders

Many interesting stories were discovered during research of the cover shown in Figure 1. This commercial cover was mailed from Lake Helen, Florida on December 22, 1885. It is addressed to Mr. Edw. F. Youngs in West Camp, New York.



**Figure 1. 1885 cover mailed from Lake Helen, Florida.**

**Figure 2. Postal markings on cover's reverse.**

On the front of the cover is a blue double oval Station Agent Postmark for the New York, West Shore and Buffalo Railway, dated December 25, 1885, for the West Camp office. The cover is from Berlin H. Wright, a "Dealer in Florida Lands" located in DeLand, FL.

On the reverse is one legible transit mark for New York, dated December 25 3AM 1885 (Figure 2).

### Postal Markings

Research concerning the postal markings revealed that the cover entered the mail stream at Lake Helen and traveled the short distance to DeLand (the very hard to discern postmark on the reverse of the cover, Figure 2).

The post office in Lake Helen was established in 1884. The office in DeLand was established in 1877. There are no other markings on the cover until it reached New York on December 25. It is possible that the cover was taken by closed mail from DeLand to the DeLand Landing on the St. Johns River as this line of the Orange Ridge, DeLand and Atlantic Railroad was completed by Eber W. Bond in 1884.

The line had a narrow track gauge and consisted of one engine, two flats, three boxcars, and a passenger coach. There is no indication on the cover as to how it progressed from the river to New York, although businesses like the Clyde Steamship Company provided mail service between this area of Florida and New York City during this period.

After arrival in New York City, it was put on the New York, West Shore and Buffalo Railway. It arrived at its destination of West Camp, New York on the same day, December 25, 1885. Thus, the Station Agent Postmark served as a “received” marking. It was not uncommon in this era for railroad Station Agent marks to be used in this fashion as the railroad depot and post office were often located in the same building and, in some instances, the Station Agent was also the Postmaster.



The New York, West Shore and Buffalo Railroad was formed in 1882 and built a line from Weehawken, New Jersey to Buffalo, New York that was completed in 1884 (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Map of the NYWS&B Railway. Approximate location of West Camp shown by green “X”.**

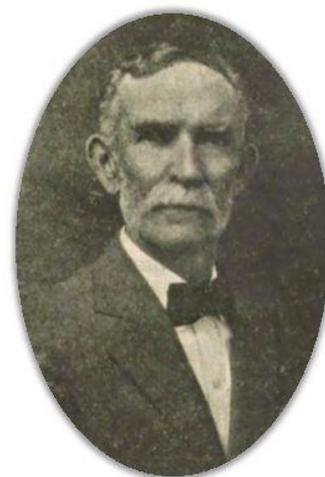
Not large enough to compete with the New York Central Railroad, the NYWS&B went bankrupt and was officially reorganized as the West Shore Railroad on December 5, 1885, a subsidiary of the New York Central. Thus, the Station Agent postmark, twenty days after the reorganization, still bore the name of the original line.

### The Sender

Berlin H. Wright (Figure 4) was the sender of this cover who described himself as a dealer in Florida lands, including orange groves.

It is most likely that the contents of this cover contained communications concerning the purchase of land in Lake Helen as the 1880s were a time of land boom in Florida following the expiration of the homesteading period. Wright’s story is closely linked to that of Henry A. DeLand, founder of DeLand, Florida.

Wright was a man of many talents and occupations. Born in 1851 in Dundee, New York, he was a teacher at the Penn Yan Academy. He married Loretta Fidelia Mills in 1874 and in 1875 took over his father’s almanac business. He became proficient in calculating weather conditions for nations the world over.



**Figure 4. Berlin H. Wright (from *Story of DeLand and Lake Helen Florida*. See references).**

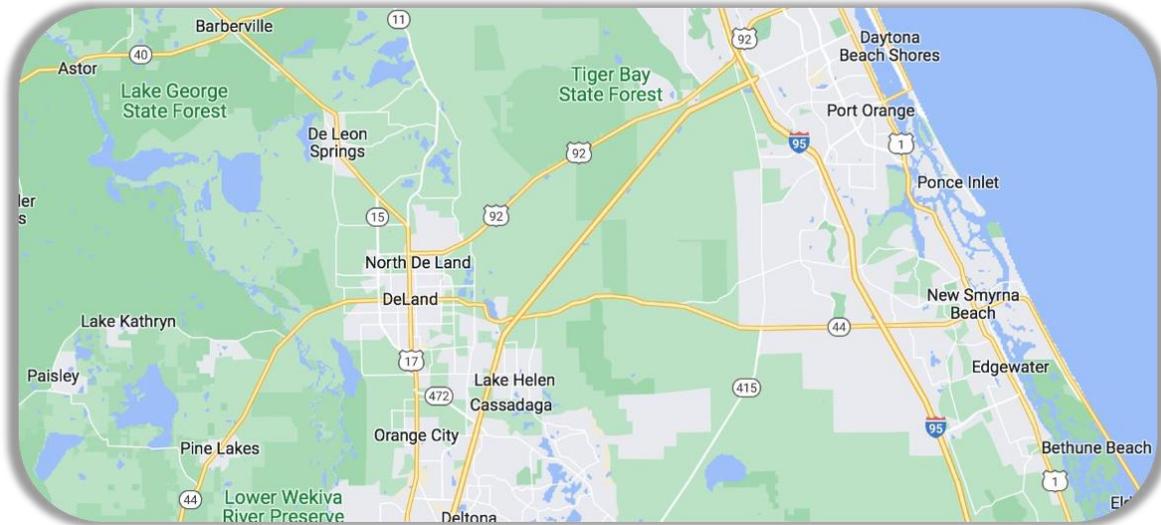
In 1882, Wright was invited to visit DeLand in Florida where he was happy to find a location more palliative to his severe rheumatism than Penn Yan in upstate New York. He moved his family to DeLand where he became a land agent and was instrumental in developing nearby Lake Helen.

In 1884, he and DeLand surveyed the area that DeLand had purchased from acreage in the estate of Judge James H. Prevatt and others. They prepared a map of the new town, named Lake Helen after DeLand's daughter. The town was around one square mile at the time. Wright's home was one of the first buildings erected in the town along with that of his father-in-law, Dr. John C. Mills. When the town was incorporated in 1889, Wright was elected as an Alderman. He was also one of the first trustees of the Congregational Church. Thus, this cover was mailed by Wright after he had moved into his home in Lake Helen and was actively developing the northern end of the town. DeLand developed the southern end of the town.

In 1889, Wright purchased a double lot at Coronado Beach (now New Smyrna Beach) and built a cottage there. His last move in Florida was to Lakeland, but he continued to spend summers in Penn Yan. He died in 1940 in his home in New York.

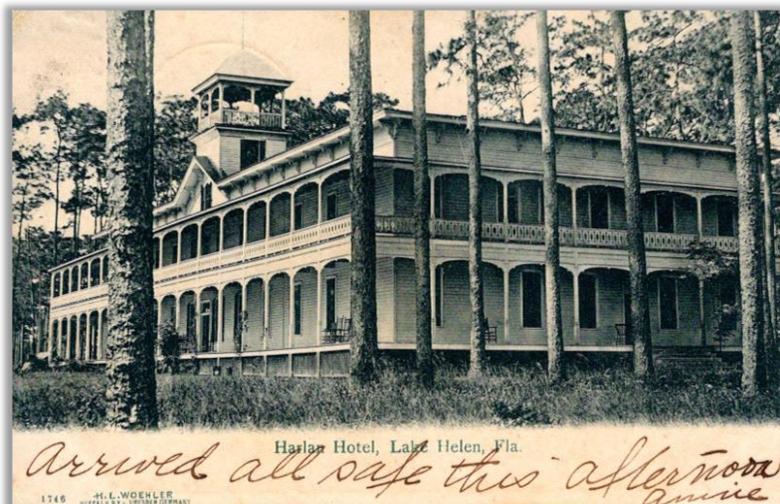
### Lake Helen

Lake Helen was incorporated in August 1888. Its location today relative to DeLand and New Smyrna Beach is shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5. Map of area containing DeLand, Lake Helen, Camp Cassadaga, and New Smyrna Beach.**

The first building in town was the Harlan Hotel built by DeLand and opened on Thanksgiving Eve, 1884 (Figure 6).



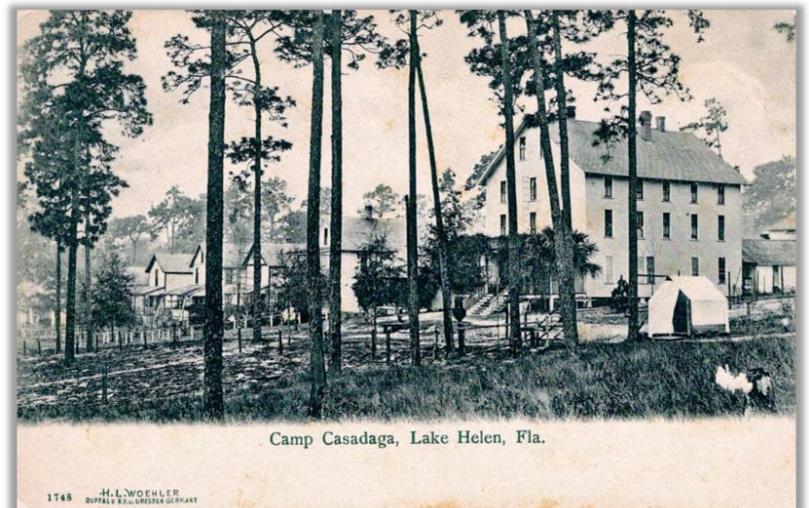
**Figure 6. 1907 postcard showing the Harlan Hotel.**



**Figure 7. Postcard of lakefront in the early 1900s.**

Another early arrival in Lake Helen was Cassadaga, a Spiritualist Camp founded by George P. Colby and T.D. Giddings. Colby had homesteaded the land in 1875 and the Southern Cassadaga Spiritualist Camp Meeting Association was formed in 1894. An early 1900s postcard of the camp is shown in Figure 8.

Note the misspelling of the name that was derived from Cassadaga, NY. The camp exists to this day as shown on the map in Figure 5.



**Figure 8. 1907 postcard view of Camp Cassadaga.**



**Figure 9. Postcard (circa 1910) view of the Bond sawmill.**

The hotel attracted both visitors and land buyers to Lake Helen. It was located on Lakeview Avenue and was separated from the lake by a large park. The top of the Harlan Hotel can be seen through the trees in the background of the postcard shown in Figure 7.

The hotel had wide verandas on three sides and additional wings were added to the south and north in 1886 and 1887 respectively.

Sawmills were essential to building early towns in Florida as trees were plentiful for making lumber. A number of sawmills were built in Lake Helen, the largest of which was that built by Eber W. Bond in 1888.

After building the railroad that ran from DeLand to the DeLand Landing on the St. Johns River in 1884, Bond established the E. W. Bond Company and, with his sons, built a sawmill and brick factory in Lake Helen. The sawmill is shown in Figure 9.

It had its own railroad spur and used the Florida East Coast railroad track to ship its products. At one time, it employed over 350 men in the mill and out in the woods.

Prospects for growth for Lake Helen were booming after the end of World War I. A postcard mailed from Lake Helen in 1919 reflects the times (Figure 10).

Although the early 1920s were a boom time for Lake Helen, they were not without problems. The message on the card said: “Arrived here Oct 18 coming by train on account of strike in NJ which keep boats from sailing.”

In 1922 the Harlan Hotel was destroyed by fire, never to be rebuilt. In 1926 the Bond sawmill burned down as well. The Crash of 1929 caused the Bank of Lake Helen to close.

However, the pioneer spirit of Lake Helen begun by Henry DeLand and Berlin Wright guaranteed that the town would survive these disasters. Its future held new stories to be told at a later time, probably by another interesting cover.



**Figure 10. Scene on postcard mailed October 27, 1919, from Lake Helen.**

### References

Deland, Helen Parce, *Story of DeLand and Lake Helen Florida* (1928). Text materials of Central Florida. 139. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/cfm-texts/139>.

Schneider, Dorothy and Blackman, Ed, *Lake Helen, The Gem of Florida, The First 100 Years*, Second Edition, (2022), A Centennial Project of the Lake Helen League for Better Living, 80pp.

## Ripley's Believe It or Not! Philately

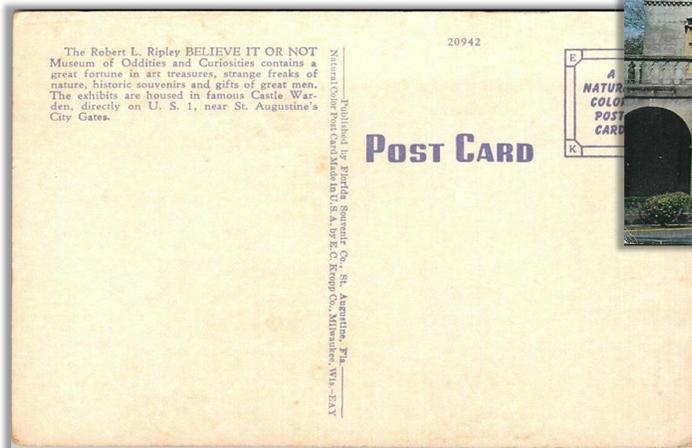
### By Juan L. Riera

**R**obert LeRoy Ripley (February 22, 1890 – May 27, 1949) is considered a cartoonist, entrepreneur, and amateur anthropologist. But few people know that he began by writing a sports column in a newspaper. Confronted with a horrible snowstorm during a holiday season, Ripley did not have any sports news to meet his deadline. Instead, he submitted a few sports cartoons with interesting and amazing information that changed his life and created a cultural phenomenon.

The Post Office Department once estimated that Ripley received as much mail as the entire town of Coral Gables, Florida. I found this amazing as the city currently has a population of 50,000, but I would venture to guess that this estimate dates back to the early 1940s when Coral Gables had a population probably just shy of 20,000.

In 1887, William G. Warden of Philadelphia built Castle Warden in St. Augustine, Florida as a residence for his family. He was a partner of Henry Flagler and John D. Rockefeller in Standard Oil and was attracted to the area of northeast Florida by Flagler. In 1941, wealthy hotelier Norton Baskin and his wife, Pulitzer Prize winning author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, purchased the home and converted it into upscale hotel accommodations. Robert Ripley stayed there a number of times and expressed his interest in purchasing the hotel to store his collection of oddities.

In 1950, Ripley's family bought the property and shortly thereafter it opened as the first Ripley's Believe It or Not! Museum, or Odditorium (Figure 1 postcard). Currently, there are in the neighborhood of 300 Ripley's Believe It or Not! Attractions worldwide.



**Figure 1. Ripley's Believe It or Not! Museum, St. Augustine, Florida.**

Among the oddities in the museum's collection are several with a philatelic focus. For example, in July 1988 Ripley's publicized what it called a "Bananagram," a banana that was properly addressed, stamped, and delivered to Mrs. Rachel Collona at St. Raphael's Hospital in Italy. The banana was sent by her niece with the words "I Love You" in Italian. If you were wondering, it required two stamps and was eaten and enjoyed. The exact date given for this event was July 19, 1988.

In 1989, Cornel Bierens of the Netherlands was commissioned by the Netherlands Bureau of Tourism to create something artistic for a 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Van Gogh. He created the Van Gogh Self Portrait made of 3,000 Van Gogh art postcards that measured twenty-five feet tall and twenty feet wide (Figure 2). It was later acquired by Ripley's and became their largest exhibit.



**Figure 2. Artist Cornel Bierens constructing Van Gogh portrait made of 3,000 Van Gogh art postcards.**

Ripley's Believe It or Not! has frequently offered numerous postcards of oddities. For example, Alfred Langview of Detroit, Michigan, could blow up balloons, smoke a cigarette, and play a recorder-through his eye! He was featured in a 1930 Believe It or Not! cartoon, appeared at Ripley's Odditorium from 1933 to 1940, and in a 1931 compendium and on a postcard.

Figure 3's "Official Post Card of Ripley's" shows Tommy King (left) who plays tunes on auto accessories such as a tire pump. Pierce Knox (right), although blind, plays the xylophone "very expertly."

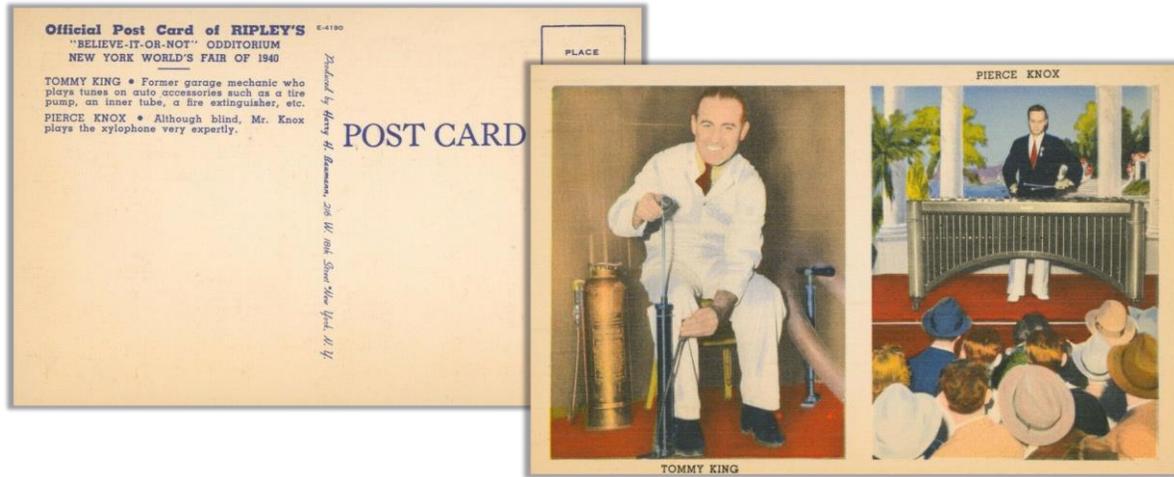


Figure 3. Official Ripley's postcard showcasing two attractions of the Ripley's Odditorium.

"Skeets" Hubbard pulls a 160-pound wagon and rider across a stage with a chain attached to his lower eyelids seen in the Figure 4 Ripley's postcard.

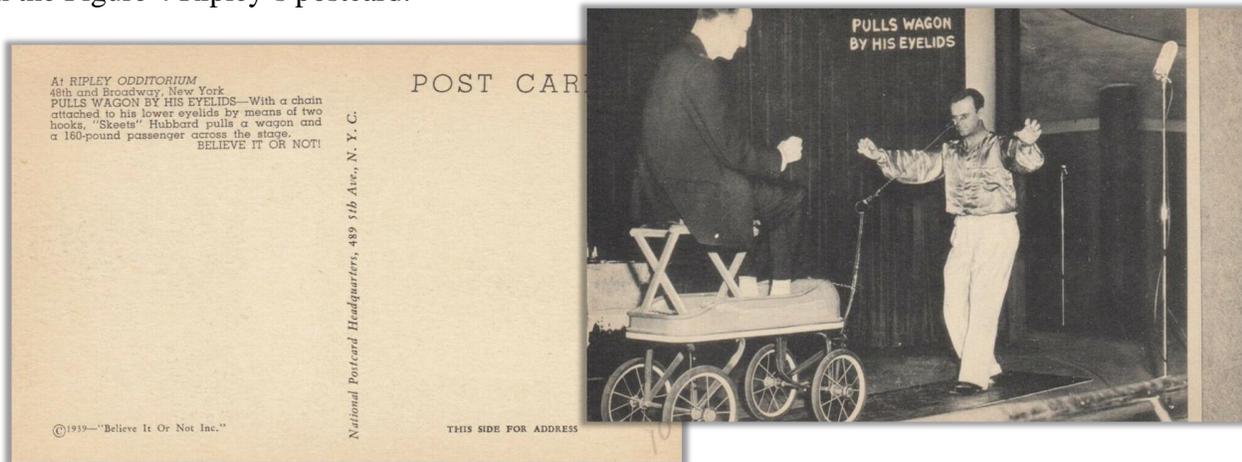


Figure 4. Odditorium attraction of wagon and rider pulled with a chain attached to lower eyelids.

I hope you have found this a fun and interesting article and encourage you to visit a Ripley's Believe It or Not! attraction. In Florida, there are locations in St. Augustine, Key West, and Orlando.

Perhaps you can also look for and collect Ripley's related philatelic material. It is a lot of fun, Believe It or Not!

References

Mooney, Julie, *The World of Ripley's Believe It or Not!*, 2003, Bookwise International.

# Florida RPO Manuscript Marking

## By Thomas Lera and Alex Hall

The 51.33 mile long Tallahassee & Carrabelle R.P.O. service was established on the Carrabelle, Tallahassee & Georgia Railroad June 11, 1896<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1). The card in Figure 2 was picked up on the Tuesday 1:05 p.m. northbound train to Tallahassee where the manuscript **Talla & Carra 6/30/96 X** postmark was applied as the Tallahassee & Carrabelle Railroad did not yet have circle date RPO handstamps.

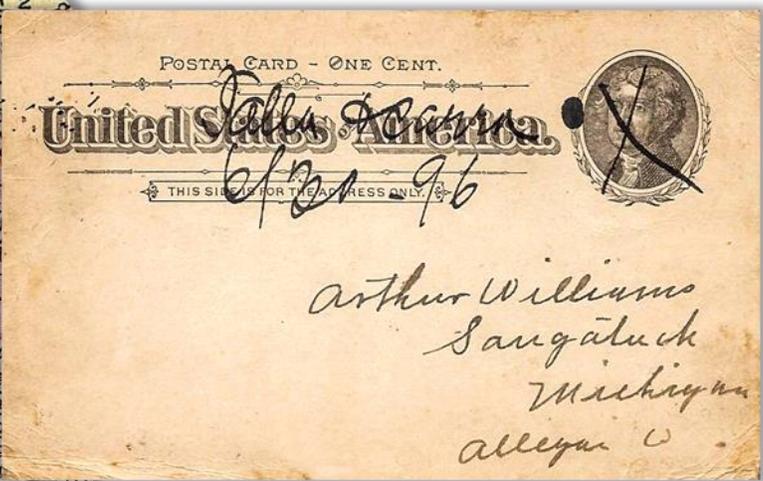
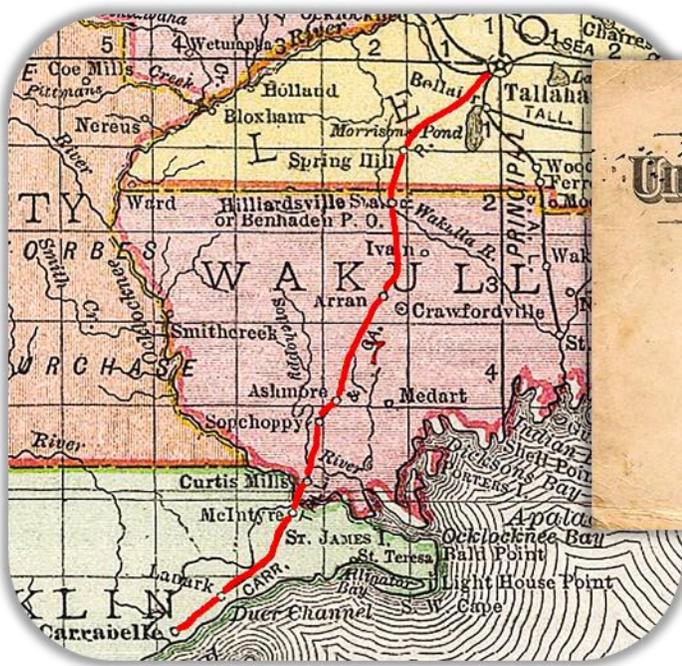


Figure 2. Talla & Carra RPO manuscript postmark. (Courtesy of the Alexander Hall Collection.)

Figure 1. 1903 Rand McNally & Co. Map showing the Tallahassee & Carrabelle train route.<sup>2</sup>

**Carrabelle, Tallahassee & Georgia R. R.**  
 TIME TABLE IN EFFECT JANUARY 2, 1897.

North Bound—Read down.				South Bound—Read up.					
Miles	No 7	No 5	No 3	No 1	STATIONS	No 2	No 4	No 6	
0	10 30p	6 30p	5 15p	11 45a	Lv. Carrabelle	Ar	9 45a	10 00a	4 55p
4.5	10 40a	6 40p	5 25p	11 55a	Lanark Shop	Ar	9 30a	9 45a	4 45p
5.0	10 45a	6 45p	5 30p	12 00a	Lanark	Ar	9 35a	9 45a	4 40p
17.2	7 0 p	6 10p	12 45p	.....	McIntire	Ar	9 05a	9 25a	4 30p
15.0	7 00p	6 15p	12 51p	.....	Curtis Mills	Ar	8 50a	9 20a	4 30p
19.8	7 10p	6 25p	1 05p	.....	Sopchoppy	Ar	8 40a	9 10a	4 30p
21.4	7 20p	6 35p	1 12p	.....	Ashmo e.	Ar	8 30a	9 05a	4 30p
29.1	7 35p	6 50p	1 20p	.....	Arran	Ar	8 20a	8 45a	4 30p
31.5	7 45p	6 55p	1 27p	.....	Parker's Mills	Ar	8 10a	8 40a	4 30p
37.0	8 00p	7 10p	1 30p	.....	Hilliardville	Ar	7 55a	8 20a	4 30p
40.9	8 20p	7 30p	1 30p	.....	Spring Hill	Ar	7 45a	8 10a	4 30p
41.0	8 20p	7 30p	1 30p	.....	Turner	Ar	7 35a	8 00a	4 30p
50.0	8 40p	7 45p	1 30p	.....	Tallahassee	Lv	7 15a	8 00a	4 00p

Nos. 7 and 8—Lanark Excursions, Sunday only. Nos. 5 and 6—Passenger, Saturday only. Nos. 1 and 2—Daily except Sunday. No. 3—Mail and Express, Sunday only.  
 Connections: At Tallahassee with trains on F. C. & P. At McIntire with Ochlocknee river steamers. At Carrabelle with Apalachicola steamers. At Apalachicola with Chattahoochee river steamers. U. S. mail steamer, Crescent City, will leave Apalachicola daily at 7 a. m.; returning leave Carrabelle 12 noon.  
 S. D. CHITTENDEN, General Manager. G. N. SAUSSY, Passenger Agent.

CARRABELLE, TALLAHASSEE & GEORGIA RAILROAD, Route 391 travelled between Richland - Cuthbert, Arlington, Havana, Tallahassee, and Carrabelle<sup>3</sup>

- Tallahassee & Carrabelle, Fla., R.P.O., 51 miles - June 11, 1896 - June 13, 1904
  - 391-F-1; TALLA...BELLE R.P.O., 29mm, black, 1897, with TR2 (Train 2)<sup>4</sup> (See Figure 4).

Figure 3. Carrabelle, Tallahassee & Georgia R.R. timetable.<sup>5</sup>

The R.P.O. circle date stamp was used two days after the January 2, 1897, timetable (Figure 3) which shows not only the mileage and time the trains left the station, but also connections at:

- Tallahassee with the Florida Central & Pensacola Railroad
- McIntyre with the Ochlocknee River steamers
- Carrabelle with the Apalachicola steamers
- Apalachicola with the Chattahoochee River Steamers

Note the US Mail steamer *Crescent City* will leave Apalachicola daily at 7.a.m.; returning leaving Carrabelle at 12 noon.

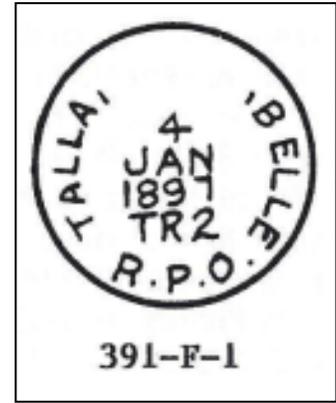


Figure 4. R.P.O. circle date stamp.

**Talla & Carra 6/30/96 X** postmark was discovered in Jim Mehrer's July 2020 Postal History Mail Bid Sales. Doug Clark listed it in the "Unlisted Railroad Markings" column of the Summer 2020 issue *Transit Postmark Collector*.<sup>6</sup>

The Tallahassee & Carrabelle R.P.O. was discontinued June 13, 1904 and absorbed into the Cuthbert GA. and Tallahassee FLA. R.P.O.<sup>7</sup>

*The United States Railway Post Office Postmark Catalog 1864-1977*, by Charles L. Towle and Fred MacDonald, illustrates and briefly describes Florida markings applied on trains, steamboats, and at some terminal points by clerks who were post office employees. Only those markings containing the words "Railway Post Office," the abbreviation "R.P.O.," or are known to have been officially used by the railway post office are listed. The catalog is available from the Mobile Post Office Society Mobile Post Office Society ([eskimo.com](http://eskimo.com)).

Thanks to Doug Clark for his suggestions, comments, and Mobile Post Office Society information.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Daily Bulletin*. Vol. XVII, June 11, 1896, No. 4964, page 1.

<sup>2</sup> David Rumsey Maps, 1903 *Rand McNally & Co. Enlarged Business Atlas and Shippers Guide*, Image No. 2844035.

<sup>3</sup> Lera, Thomas, May 1, 2017, *Florida Railroad Post Offices Markings*, Florida Postal History Society Website under the Research Tab. accessed September 5, 2021. [FPHSonline.com](http://FPHSonline.com).

<sup>4</sup> Towle, Charles L, & MacDonald, Fred. *The United States Railway Post Office Postmark Catalog 1864-1977*. Published 1990. LL. 1001 p. Shows & classifies markings/killer types. Lists marking, RR name, routes, mileage, rarity factor. Volumes 1 to 3 catalog R.P.O. markings.

<sup>5</sup> Carrabelle, Tallahassee & Georgia Railroad - Wikipedia accessed September 5, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Mobile Post Office Society *Transit Postmark Collector*. Volume 71, No. 3 Summer 2020, page 52.

<sup>7</sup> *Daily Bulletin*. Vol XXV, No. 7403a, dated June 13, 1904, page 1.

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