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Gloria Jahoda

(courtesy of *Tallahassee Democrat*)

A TRIBUTE TO GLORIA JAHODA

By Peter D. Klingman

The recent passing of Gloria Jahoda has deprived Florida of one of her most powerful literary talents. Few other authors or poets could match her sensitivity, her keen powers of observation and insight, or her command of the language. Born Gloria Love in Chicago on October 6, 1926, she attended Northwestern University and the University of Wisconsin. She married Gerald Jahoda in 1952, completed two novels, *Annie and Delilah's Mountain*, by 1963, and moved that same year to Tallahassee when her husband joined the faculty of library science at the Florida State University. Thereafter, she focused much of her energy on bringing Florida's history to life.

Four books represent her main contributions to Florida history, and each is, in its own way, a product of her own special feelings about the state and its people. In her first Florida book, *The Other Florida*, she concentrated on rural Florida, especially the Panhandle. Of the Florida cracker she wrote: "It is easy to smile, to feel virtuously ambitious and superior to the rural Floridian. It is easy to forget that until recently he and his wife and children were infested with hookworm, that he has been bone-poor for a century and too busy hoeing his collard patch and

cotton crop to stay in a one-room school His good nature is not the Florida cracker's weakness. It is his victory." Nor did she in this work fail to point out that crackers come in different varieties. Traveling the sideroads of rural Florida from Fernandina to Cedar Keys, she encountered Jews, Swedes, Germans, and others who "become curiously alike . . . strong individualists who may sneer at the cracker's prejudices but who have acquired his sensitivity to his landscape."

Jahoda's second book was *The Road to Samarkand: Frederick Delius and his Music*. While the book is obviously a biography of the composer, it is a story which begins on the Florida orange grove where Delius once lived. In this book, Jahoda gave us her portrait of migrant laborers, especially their music, and showed how Delius wove their themes, rhythms, and moods into his own composition.

Her third book focused on Tampa Bay – *River of the Golden Ibis*. Jahoda meant to describe the Hillsborough River as a part of a series of books on "Rivers of America," published by Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. But the book was to Jahoda herself more "a love letter to the Hillsborough River and Tampa Bay" and is intended to be a poetic evocation of both. She explored the entire stretch of the river from Green Swamp in central Florida to Tampa Bay. One reviewer wrote that *River of the Golden Ibis* was "like old home week," telling Tampa Bay's traditions and history: Tarpon Spring's sponge industry, Gamble Mansion, pioneers of Pinellas Point, Peter Demen's Orange Belt railroad, and many more.

Jahoda's last work on Florida summed up her feelings for her adopted state in a way few of us can. "Florida," she wrote in her bicentennial history, "is the great American escape – a lot of people's idea of heaven." "It's something of an essay about the people who make up the state – who they are, where they came from, what they contributed. Everybody from the Palm Beach socialite to the migratory worker." And if the book was not encyclopedic, it was, after all, never meant to be. How did Glorida Jahoda see Florida? "Florida is a living testament to the American belief that there will always be a tomorrow, the clouds will roll away, and a stunning sun will shine." So, too, will her works be a living testament to her talent and a fitting testimony of her personal love affair with Florida and its history.