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Lee boosted Florida; Florida loves Lee

Hampton Dunn

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



LEE BOOSTED FLORIDA; FLORIDA LOVES LEE

By HAMPTON DUNN

FORT MYERS --- A Southwest Florida historian, Miss Florence Fritz, former Mayor of Fort Myers, tells us that the best of the post-war Southerners who settled this region were deeply religious, possessing ideals of honor and integrity, and "admired George Washington and Robert E. Lee above ail others, except God."

So it was when angry residents of this area decided to break away from their mother Monroe County in 1887, they chose to call the new county Lee. There's a handsome monument at the foot of the new bridge here that salutes the General (see photo). It was erected by the United Daughters of the Confederacy "with the assistance of the citizens of Lee County in honor of the man for whom this county was named."

In all probability, General Lee visited this county because as a young Lieutenant Colonel in the U. S. Engineers, he had an assignment in 1849 to survey the entire coastline of Florida, from Fernandina to Pensacola. He was secretary of a commission and he recorded the results of the examination of every bay, river mouth of any importance, or estuary. Lee was interested not only in the military significance but he observed the prospects for commercial and agricultural development.

On the Tampa Bay area, Lee was favorably impressed and recommended that Egmont, Mullet and Passage Keys be reserved for coastal defenses.

During the Civil War, he visited the state from time to time. His last visit came in 1870, when he went up the St. Johns River nearly to Palatka. He stopped off at Jacksonville, and praised it, saying "The climate is delightful, the fish inviting and abundant."

