The Other Side of the River: Historical Cape Coral by Betsy Zeiss

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A coffee table book which might also have been an excellent visual history of Florida’s capital around the turn of the century.

Michael Thomason


The Other Side of the River: Historical Cape Coral is an interesting, albeit rambling, account of the life of the early settlers on the north side of the Caloosahatchee River. Two-thirds of the book is devoted to a look at the development of the broad area reaching from Pine Island Sound to Alva and other upriver settlements. The last eight chapters sketch the history of Cape Coral. The time span covered by the book is from the late 1800s to the 1980s.

A lack of background material and definite geographical information gives rise to difficulties in getting an overview of the area and in locating homesteads, ranches, schools, etc. of earlier periods on today’s maps. The range covered in the book is so widespread that some of the information does not seem to be relevant to the history of Cape Coral.

The principal source material used was the reminiscences of the early settlers and their descendants. These are invaluable in the preservation of local history, and they provide an aura of authenticity and a dash of color to the book. However, they need to be reinforced, amplified and coordinated with events from historical sources. The reader would have received a clearer understanding of the area’s history if the author had followed a more orderly, chronological account of events and growth.

Chapters fifteen through twenty-three give a delightful glimpse of how Cape Coral began, its early struggles, and its growing pains as it became a city. The author touches lightly but accurately on how drastically the land was changed as development began: “Early days at Cape Coral found a plethora of wildlife and a paucity of people. Those who were there manned draglines and dredges, land movers and graders, and they leveled the earth’s silhouette of picturesque pines and stubby palms against a bleak, wintry sky to a skinned, barren, and truly desolate scene. They created canals where none had been....They disturbed rabbit warrens and fox dens and rattlesnakes living in the dense growth and ditches bordering Harney Point Road.” (pp. 150-151) However, the author does not deal with many of the serious problems and legal questions involving sales promotions and law suits.

The book closes with an upbeat look at the continuing growth of the city and gives a veiled promise of a rosy future.

Alberta C. Rawchuck