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OUR MUSICAL WELLS.

Another of the Charms of Life in Punta Gorda.

Travellers with world-wide experience often speak of the strange strains that rise from a great city, where it is possible to ascend far enough above the turmoil to render the harsher sounds much modified. The combination rises like the far-off strains of some great pipe-organ that is too distant to enable one to catch the entire air, and to the novice this experience is a most impressive thing.

That one might live in a flat country and enjoy a similar phenomenon would hardly be credited, but residents of Punta Gorda could assure you of this fact with much evidences of their veracity.

In the last six years, a number of artesian wells have been driven in our progressive little city, for various commercial purposes,—one eight-inch well at the present ice factory, four eight-inch wells at the defunct ice-factory, one eight-inch city well and several lesser ones scattered about the city.

As a matter of course, no two of these wells have exactly the same pressure nor do they discharge the same quantity of water; consequently, the roar of each well is in a different key, if we may be permitted the use of the expression; and as each well has been opened up, it was always noticed that its roar was not exactly like any of its predecessors. Then some musical soul in the community called attention to the similarity that these roars bore to a chime of bells; and, as well after well added its own distinctive note to the scale, the range and variety of the chime became almost infinite in its combination of harmonies.

On still, quiet evenings, when the air was heavy and sounds were carried with great clearness to long distances, the combined rhythm of our many wells, ranging from deep bass to rippling trebles, throbbled and swelled through our little burg, thrilling all true devotees of music with the rapture that Nature only can impart when conditions are right and Man meets her half way.

The poet who rhapsodized over "the music of the spheres," was much nearer the truth than the common herd could comprehend, when his ear caught and revealed to the dull minds about him the glory of Nature's specialties in the musical line.

Punta Gordians, however, need no trained ears to catch the strains of grand music played on the pipes provided by man, on which the great Mother might play her terrestrial melodies. The throbs of the deep bass mingled with the mellow tones of the two-inchers and the rippling cadenzas of the smallest pipes, made a never-to-be-forgotten strain that permeated and clung to the mind like the lullabies we heard on our mother's breast.

As each of these wells have been muzzled to serve man in some mundane way, the chime has been robbed of first one note and then another, marring of course the harmony of the whole. Keen re-

gret has been freely and openly expressed by true lovers of music in our town, whose souls revelled in the delight of such unique music, over the desecration of so wonderful a musical novelty, but let us hope that some day we may appreciate the advantage of real Nature music, and Florida may be known as the Nature Lover's Paradise, when the peninsula is dotted over with musical pipes that sing a never ceasing song of grandeur, to the wonder and delight of less favored individuals who seek our environs for Nature in her purest and most undiluted form.

We have been most modest in bringing this novelty of ours into prominence, but the time now seems most propitious for calling attention to it and its possibilities in other vicinities as well as our own, wherever artesian water may be tapped in our beautiful State.

Tampa Times:—The interstate commerce commission has decided in favor of the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Shippers' association and against the railroads in the matter of charges on shipments of fruits and vegetables from points in this state to distant markets in the north. The effect will be a reduction of rates to an appreciable extent. It is by this kind of steps, one at a time, that an eventual basis of fairness between the shippers and the transportation companies will be reached, after which permanence and satisfaction may be expected.

Lakeland News:—A gentleman whose business takes him into most of the printing offices of the State and who knows what's doing in a business way, told the writer the other day that he could count on the fingers of one hand all the country papers of Florida that were making more than barely enough to allow both ends to meet. This is a pretty hard time on newspapers, because everything that enters into their production has nearly doubled in cost, while their subscription price and advertising charges remain the same.

Prohibition in Lee County.

Fort Myers Press:—Fort Myers and Lee County are "dry" and a large majority of the citizens are glad of it. When the dry question was settled, quite a number threw up their hands in holy horror and said ruin was in our wake. So far the experiment has proven a winner, and business has not lost a bit on account of the dry side winning. In fact we have ample proof that the county is in far better condition than before the election.

Lee county boasts of its law-abiding citizens. On the 1st day of July, Lee county was voted dry. During said month there was not a single warrant issued in the county or municipal courts. The city marshal has not made an arrest for drunkenness or any other offense. The sheriff has made no arrests and has kept his jail doors wide open. This coincidence may be attributed to various causes, but there is one fact that should be noted, and that is we must have a high-toned law-abiding set of drinking people in Lee county to abide by the result as they have.

OUR FISHING INDUSTRY.

Men and Boats Engaged and Capital Invested.

Saturday will usher in the fall fishing season, and from that day throughout the ten months following Punta Gorda will be the scene of increased business activity. While between fall and spring, a closed season will intervene for a few weeks during the early winter, operations will not be discontinued long enough to greatly affect conditions in general.

Chief among our industries, a resumption of the fishing business after two months closed season naturally gives an impetus to trade. During the past week, grocery men have been busily engaged filling orders for supplies to go to the numerous camps, which will dot the lower islands and coasts for miles. And fishermen returning from vacation trips, in making necessary purchases for their families and their own personal needs, have added their pro rata to the new life which business has taken on. But it is only a repetition of what characterizes the 15th of August in each successive year.

Those at the head of the companies and firms engaged in the industry, however, have not been idle during the past month or six weeks. The construction of new boats and repairing and overhauling of old boats and the making of preparations for the fall work has kept them busy. And this has necessitated an outlay of thousands of dollars, much of which has been expended in the city. On this expenditure, the dealers will not begin to realize until after they market the fish and receive the returns, which will require several weeks.

Shipments of fish will be going forward by Monday, at the latest, for hundreds of men are now in camp ready to make their first hauls as soon as the 15th dawns. For ten days boats have been plying between town and the camps transporting the men and their supplies to the scenes of coming operations.

Information obtained from all the local dealers, gives a total number of 364 men employed in all capacities. The men engaged in catching the fish are divided into crews of from 2 to 4 in charge of an experienced and capable captain. For every man there is at least one net. A total of 278 skiffs are in commission and scattered throughout Charlottee Harbor, Lemon Bay and the waters about Marco and Chokoloskee. Each skiff is handled by one man, who navigates the boat and manipulates the net without help.

Twenty-seven house-boats are necessary for the use of the men at the fishing grounds, being occupied as living quarters by those located among the islands at the mouth of the bay. Fishermen in Lee county waters have homes so near their work that it is not necessary for them to have house-boats. Not over 50 men being engaged in that region, however, there are 314 who are really a part of the population of Punta Gorda.

Twenty power-boats will ply between the railroad wharf and

the various camps transporting the fish to the packing houses here and carrying ice and provisions to the crews on return trips. These power-boats are generally manned by two persons. They are equipped with modern engines and make quick trips. In addition to these vessels, there are 15 sharpies propelled by sail alone, which when not engaged in carrying fish, are used as lay-boats and tied up at the camps for storing fish upon until the power-boats transport them to town.

Independent boats engaged in carrying fish for parties who fish for no particular firm, bring their cargoes to this port and dispose of them to the local dealers, who buy all the fish offered them and find a ready sale for all they can get. There are two oyster dealers, whose boats are also a part of the fishing fleet.

Taking into consideration only the boats and general equipment in actual use, they represent an investment of \$80,000. This is exclusive of the packing houses, independent boats and accouterments, nets, gears etc., in storage and not in actual use, all of which will probably run the amount up to \$100,000. If the value of the docks is to be considered also, \$150,000.00 is a conservative estimate of the money employed in the fishing industry at this point.

The enforcement of the stop-net law has put thousands of dollars worth of nets and gear out of use, and has also handicapped those dealers whose principal equipment was of this character. The change after the fall season of last year had opened, caused short catches throughout the ten months ending the first of the past June, and it is not probable that the shipments this season will reach what they amounted to two years ago. While the fish seem to be equally as plentiful, those dealers with a large amount of capital tied up in stop-net equipment are not in a position to make the necessary outlay to assure large catches.

All the fishing is now done with gill-nets and the number of gill-net crews engaged this season is greater than ever before.

An Editor's Pure Motive.

Lakeland News:—Although the governor of Florida has only about fifteen offices to bestow, Governor-elect Gilchrist is besieged by about fifteen times that number of applicants. We know that to a man of Gen. Gilchrist's kind make-up, this necessity of choosing between friends will create a most embarrassing situation. It gives us genuine pleasure—and we are sure the genial general will share our pleasure—that there is no office in the governor's gift that we would accept were it proffered us. As Editor Jordan says, "a four year's job is not worth much to any man who wishes to build for the future;" and while we did what little we could for Gilchrist, he owes us absolutely nothing except to make good the promise we made in his behalf to the people of Florida—that he would make us as good a governor as the State has ever had. And this we believe he will do.

Leon county's tax rate this year will be 12 mills. This does not include the State tax of 7 mills.

OUR CONVICT SYSTEM.

What the Chief Lessee Has to Say About It.

Jacksonville Metropolis:—Startling revelations brought out by the Georgia legislature in investigating alleged abuses in connection with the convict lease system of that state have naturally brought into general discussion the matter of abolishing the system in Florida, which many have long favored.

Conditions in Florida, however, appear to be entirely different from those existing in Georgia, particularly as the system does not offer the same chances for graft and political trickery as that of Georgia, prominent officials of which have been brought into decidedly bad repute by disclosures made. It is also generally known that the authorities of Florida enforce better treatment of convicts than those of Georgia.

Owing to the revival of the discussion of abolishing the lease system in Florida, a Metropolis representative this morning called on S. A. Rawls, head of S. A. Rawls & Co., lessees of the state convicts, who was asked for an expression on the subject.

"Of course the situation in Georgia has to a great extent revived the talk of abolishing the system in Florida," said Mr. Rawls, "and I do not see how this could be otherwise, for conditions in our neighboring state appear to have reached the limit in every way. The principal cause of complaint in Georgia is the graft feature, about which I have known for a long time that startling revelations would eventually be made. As the lessees pay all salaries, however, making the payment of a salary by both state and lessee impossible, the chance for graft in Florida is cut down to a decidedly low notch.

"The people of Florida may rest assured that no such conditions prevail in this state," continued Mr. Rawls, "and I cordially invite any newspaper reporter, state official or private citizen to investigate every feature of the work of S. A. Rawls & Co., and I will personally aid in such investigation and have all my employees to do likewise. You will find conditions far different in Florida from those in Georgia."

That few occasions have arisen for criticising the manner in which S. A. Rawls & Co., conduct their business or treat their convicts is a fact well known throughout the state.

Gainesville Sun:—Those persons who are now clamoring for the abolition of the present convict lease system, would be the very first ones to cry out against the increase in taxes, which would unquestionably come about as a result of putting the convicts at work on the public roads or their incarceration in a State prison. The time will come when the State can afford to abolish the lease system, but that time is not now. The convicts are at present very well treated by the lessees, and most of the reports of cruel treatment are sent out by sensational correspondents, and are not warranted by the facts in the case.