



Burial Mounds in South Florida



“Dead men tell no tales.” I wish they could, for I might hope to unravel the mystery which now hides the unwritten past of these shores from view, and thus gain material from which to weave a story of the lives and doings of the former dwellers here.

Take your map of Florida and after finding Biscayne Bay on the southeastern coast draw a line west by southwest from Cape Florida, until it touches the western line of the Bay. You then strike the point known as the Hunting Grounds, where a small settlement has been located called “Perrine,” in honor of the memory of Dr. Perrine, who was killed by the Seminole Indians at the Indian Key massacre in 1840, to whom a grant of a township of land was made by Congress for services rendered in the introduction of useful tropical plants into the United States. It is here, within two of three hundred yards of the landing, that I have found the evidences of all unrecorded history which are offered as a trifling addition to the instructive and exhaustive paper on the Mounds of Florida, by Dr. F.D. Lente, which has lately been published in your valuable journal.

Within the limits of a dense hammock there are several small mounds, or heaps, composed almost entirely of the soft oolitic rock which is the characteristic feature of this entire region. The one which I have partially examined is not over four feet in height and forty or fifty feet in circumference. Upon the top near the outer edge stands a “gummolimbo” tree about two and one-half feet in diameter. My attention was first called to it by one of the men who had been searching for a suitable piece of dogwood or “teak” for the bow of the boat he contemplated building. He had found various human bones and teeth lying near the surface, and my curiosity being excited, I immediately asked for volunteers to join me in further investigation. The response was not very enthusiastic, as it was thought that mosquitoes were too numerous for comfortable scientific research. However, Sam, a stalwart six footer volunteered, and arming ourselves with a pick axe and crowbar, followed by my son, we ventured in. Working our way through the dense undergrowth, pausing occasionally to clear away an obstructing prickly olive, which doubtless has some hard botanical name of no interest to any but the few, we soon reached the spot and commenced our labors. It was not very hard work, as the remains found were nearly all near the outer rim of the heap, and within about one foot of the surface.

I do not propose to attempt an elaborate description of the numerous bones found. Our examination was conducted in such a hasty manner that we could not determine with any degree of certainty the position in which the bodies had been placed, but we did ascertain the fact that the heads had been buried face downwards and nearly all were arranged near the edge of the room the skulls crumbled under slight pressure so that for a time I despaired of procuring a perfect specimen, but while raising the corner of a goodly sized rock, I caught a glimpse of several well preserved skulls beneath, and by using great care in moving the superincumbent rocks and earth, I secured two, out of some eight or nine, which I have now in my possession. One of them, to my uneducated eyes, appears to be that of a white man; the other of an Indian or negro. I would observe here that some of the remains were evidently those of children, two jaw-bones having the second tooth just showing itself; then, again, among the numerous teeth scattered through the earth we found the perfect crowns of teeth, with the roots absorbed, which were of course the first growth.

The arrangement of the skulls was such that it suggested to my mind some central object of and thoughts "Treasure" (of anon) caused working tools energy, as we our way down central portion Nothing of than a plentiful rewarded our concluded to exploration for antiquarian who pass this way.

The "Treasure," like that of has often been but thus far, in when pirates



great interest, of "Cæsar's which more us to use our with redoubled slowly dug through the of the mound. greater value crop of teeth search, and we leave further some future may perchance

"Cæsar's hinted at above, Capt. Kyd, searched for; vain. In the days roamed the seas,

one Cæsar had his headquarters somewhere upon this Bay, and his place of entrance to, or exit front it, was a tortuous channel at the southern extremity of Elliott's Key, some fifteen miles distant from this point, which channel goes by the name of Cæsar's Creek to this day.

Tradition says that the aforesaid pirate captured a Spanish vessel and, after murdering the Captain and crew, approach the Captain's wife and offered to spare her life if she would consent to marry him. The heroic lady indignantly refused, and preferring death to dishonor, sprang over the vessel's side into the sea. The pirate captain in his eager determination not to lose such a prize leaped after her. As he approached she drew from her bosom a dagger, with which she pierced him to the heart, and both were "in the deep bosom of the ocean buried."

Many articles of iron have been frequently turned up by the plough and spade here, with bits of brick, showing that at some time since the discovery of this country, civilized men have dwelt hereabouts.

I had intended to say something about the incomparable climate of this beautiful bay, and the reasons which have prevented the settlement and improvement of the adjacent county hitherto. An article on the Indian River country in March number, by W. P. Browne, presents the case as to the imperative needs of that section down to Lake Worth in fuller light and better language than I have at my command. The remedy needed is the same for this locality, viz.: Steam communication with Fernandina, giving us passenger and freight accommodations such as we now languish for.

Easy and rapid communication with the northern part of the State at stated and regular times. Then we could confidently expect our shores to be speedily dotted with homes of an industrious and thriving population, and the winter residences of our more wealthy northern visitors.

It is not to be expected that freight and passenger traffic would in the beginning be sufficient to pay a steamer, but it surely ought to be deemed a wise and generous policy for a beneficent government to encourage the building up of its waste places by extending its aid in the way of awarding a liberal contract for the carrying of mails—liberal enough to pay the running expenses of the boat. If our Senators and Representatives in Congress would bring this matter before the Postmaster-General in the right light, I feel confident that before the year is out, our hearts would be gladdened each week by seeing the arrival and departure of a steamer, and thousands of health and pleasure seekers would turn their faces hitherward.

H.E. Perrine.

Perrine, Fla., May, 1877.