

LEE COUNTY: EARLY DAYS IN FORT MYERS

Continued from Issue #11:

To tell of the event of that through trip would be interesting, but space forbids. Fort Myers in that day was a veritable oasis in the desert. Uncle Sam never does things by halves, and Fort Myers was as neat and clean as a new pin. Fort Myers of today may well be proud of her creditable standing as a pretty, well kept little city, but it will be hard to excel herself when she was dressed up in her military garb. The trees of fruitage as seen today did not exist then, but the forest trees of shade and beauty were then most carefully selected, dressed and trimmed to suit the most fastidious taste for natural scenery. The paved streets and sidewalks of today were not there in that day, but the walks of that day in and around the garrison, around the parade grounds, were shelled with carefully selected shell, not from the common oyster shell banks and bars, but shells from the seashore -- the most beautiful. The parade grounds were the most attractive. Except the shell borders, the most beautiful grass lawn, all kept immaculately clean. The long line of uniformed soldiers, with white gloves and muskets as bright as new coin; officers, too, with their golden epaulettes and burnished sidearms, their soldierly deportment drilling and exercising on these grounds, were grand and magnificent to behold. Their quarters within were the very personification of neatness and cleanliness. All well laid out and arranged. Special care was given to the rock-rimmed river banks, and every tree, oak and palm, presenting the most tropical appearance, were most scrupulously preserved. The large commissary and sutler's store were well filled and tastily stored. The wagon yard and stables were exceptionally well kept, and the horses, mules and milch cows were as fat and sleek as corn, oats and hay could make them, and all were groomed to perfection. The garrison garden was cared for by expert detailed gardeners, and supplied the wants of the garrison with as fine vegetables as man ever ate.

My pen would fail to describe the hospital, with its well filled drug store. This was said to have cost Uncle Sam the pretty little sum of thirty thousand dollars. It stood very near where the present Royal Palm hotel now stands. It was in this hospital that Lieutenant Hartsuff, poor fellow, slowly recovered from his wounds after being shot almost to death by Billy Bowlegs, Christmas morning, 1855, sixty miles southeast of Fort Myers, while on duty. It was one of these fine horses from the stables above mentioned, a beautiful dapple grey, that old Billy Bowlegs mounted and charged around the massacre camp and called to Hartsuff to come out of the sawgrass, where he was secreted, bleeding from the wounds he had received from the treacherous Billy Bowlegs and his murderous band. Captain Thomas F. Quinn wrote me from Fort Spokane, Washington territory, under date of March 19, 1889, that he was one of the rescuing party that found Hartsuff, nearly dead from wounds and exposure, within a few hundred yards of the blockhouse at Fort Simon Drum. He was a drummer boy then, only fourteen years old. When he wrote me he was captain of an infantry company. He says Hartsuff's command was made up at Fort Myers, and marched for their final campaign December 14, 1855. Their Christmas day was ushered in by the yells and warwhoops of the red devils near Billy's town. This was the beginning of hostilities of the Indian war of 1856-57, and ending in 1858 as above. During this eventful period old Billy played havoc with the frontier settlements. He killed John Carney on the Alafia River, between his plow handles. He killed Lieutenant Alderman Carlton, a dear uncle of mine; William Parker and Scott (Lott?) Whidden, near Fort Meade, and two days later killed George Powell and Robert Prince (Prine). He killed Starnes and Hinson,