

# Jerome

*Lost, Found.*



FIRST TIME ON THE MAP.

The small town of Jerome as sketched by United States Department of Agriculture cartographer R.G. Leighty, in January of 1942. Courtesy of Collier County Soil Conservation Service.

## THE STORY OF THE C.J. JONES LUMBER COMPANY

A Photographic Essay by: Cesar A. Becerra

As a small child I remembered tagging along with my father as he went to purchase some choice lumber for one of his many projects. I distinctly remember bypassing the now extinct "Lindsley Lumber" and asking my dad why he would travel an extra few miles to purchase wood at "Everglades Lumber". "Son," he said "there are two things in this world that one mustn't take for granted, one is good quality wood and the other is The Everglades Lumber Company!"

He was right, after more than five decades in the Lumber Industry, Everglades Lumber remains a stable South Florida institution for quality lumber, whether it was local wood from our own Everglades (thus the name Everglades Lumber) or an exotic species from Brazil,

mented histories; The Logging History of The Big Cypress Swamp. Little has been written about the logging history of Florida in general. Most of the documentation has centered on North Florida, completely deleting the fact that South Florida helped rank Florida as one of the top lumber producing states in the country.

So barren were the historical files on this subject that the majority of information came from aging pioneers whose interviews tell of the difficulty of logging the pine and cypress out of impenetrable swamps, not to mention the dangers of interrupting a female alligator's den, a water moccasin's privacy, or failing to escape from a falling cypress tree. In a rare 1955 article, the Saturday Evening Post described logging in the swamps of South Florida "the

was C.J. Jones who at a very young age began cutting railroad ties part-time unaware that in the future he would become one of the most ambitious loggers in Florida history. By the time his sawmill burned down in 1957, he would be responsible for supplying lumber for the production of P.T. Boats in World War II, and the rebuilding of Europe after that war. His Jerome mill would also become the largest sawmill in the southeastern United States, producing over 100,000 board feet of finished lumber daily.

Most importantly, at a time when most steam powered locomotives were sitting idle in museums or carrying tourists at amusement parks, they were hard at work in our own backyard hauling tons of timber throughout the more than 150 miles of railway and tram

roads of South Florida. Some of those locomotives dated back to the early 1900's. As for the connection with my beloved Everglades Lumber Company, it was one of the seven retail outlets for the C.J. Jones Lumber Company, owned by C.J. Jones.

toughest logging job in America, if not the world." Nonetheless it was one of the most lucrative businesses in South Florida during the 1940's and 1950's, employing thousands of men willing to endure the challenge.

One of those men

"They tell a story in Florida about the tourist who paddled his canoe out into Big Cypress Swamp. When he picked up an old hat he saw lying on the water, he was horrified to find under it a man up to his nostrils in water. "Grab the boat!" the tourist cried. "Don't be afraid! I'll get you out!" "Get me out, nothing," the man replied. "I've been sawing cypress in this swamp ten years and this is the best footing I've found yet."

Jeanne Van Hohnes, Saturday Evening Post, May 29th, 1954



## About the Exhibit

The exhibit before you is not by any means, meant to be the final word on the town of Jerome. If these six months of research have proven anything, it is that there is much

work to be done. Each day that passes, I receive calls from people who either have something, know something or know someone associated with the subject. I have pro-

duced this exhibit in the hopes that more information can be gathered on the Logging History of South Florida. If any worthwhile information surfaces about Jerome or any

other logging operation in South Florida I would certainly invite you to write to me at 14021 SW 109 Street, Miami Florida 33186 or give me a call at (305) 382-2425.

The information pertaining to the Logging History of the Big Cypress region of Southwest Florida is a culmination of over six months of research begun May 24th, 1993. The study was a joint venture sponsored by The Big Cypress National Preserve, the Student Conservation Association and Florida International University.

The exhibit itself is an attempt to tell a small portion of the "Logging History of the Big Cypress" in the form of a biographical story of the owner of one of the area's most prominent logging towns; Jerome, Florida. The man whose life work is depicted within these photos is Conrad Jerome Jones (C.J. Jones), founder of the C. J. Jones Lumber Company. This exhibit consists of thirty panels of photographs that have been col-

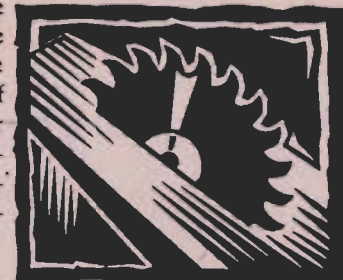
lected from May 24th, 1993 to December 10th, 1993.

The photographic work in this exhibit was handled by David Dunn, a freelance photographer with extensive background in black & white archival photography. Many of the negatives and prints I received this summer have undergone several stages of preservation techniques in order to present the clearest visual record. My thanks to David on a superb job!

Accompanying the exhibit is a five minute video produced at the Television Production studios at Sunset Senior High

School. Heading the transferring of vintage 1940's views of the Jerome Mill were Andy Brown and Hector Serrano. Andy is a senior who is well on his way to becoming a professional videographer and already has established his own video editing company. Hector is an Audio Visual Advisor assisting hundreds of high school students in television production.

On site research of the town of Jerome was handled by the Railroad Museum of South Florida. Photographic documentation that day was handled by Cee Cutcher and Jeanne Hickam. Both of their labors are seen in the exhibit as a startling reminder that history is vanishing before our eyes. Also assisting that day were Bob Timson, head of the "Rip-track Crew" and Kent Shneider, the museum's president.



See Inside!

by Cesar A. Becerra

# Giants of the Big Cypress

you could be sure that Everglades Lumber had it.

This summer I was fortunate enough to be accepted as a research assistant by The Student Conservation Association and the Big Cypress National Preserve to uncover one of South Florida's most undocu-



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## To those who made it possible...

**F**irst and foremost I would like to thank C.J. Jones Jr. and Gwendolyn J. Tate for sharing their fond memories of Jerome with me and for realizing the role that their family plays in giving Floridians a "sense of place" and understanding about their past. This project would'nt have ever "taken off" the way it has without their involvement and support. I look forward to documenting the rest of the Jones story in the near future! ☀ To all my friends at the Big Cypress National Preserve, I thank you for sharing with me what I believe to be one of my most cherished experiences thus far. Especially Elizabeth Dupree, Interpretive Specialist and my supervisor this summer who made sure I was provided with the necessary research tools and resources, then "let

me loose" to research one of South Florida's most undocumented histories. I thank you all; Wally, Bill, Marianne, Tina, Tony, John, Jack, Bob, Riana, Deb, Tom, Madeline, Amy, Stephanie, Larry, Ed, David, Paul, Marla, Adelaide, Tom M., and the great secretaries at Headquarters.

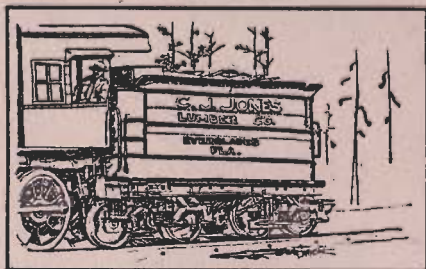
☀ Special Thanks to; Dan Stevens who introduced me to the historical side of Bluegrass Music and who offered me a place to stay just about every weekend I had to do research in Fort Myers.

☀ Jim Pickans, of the Railroad Museum of South Florida who put up with my last minute treks to his photo shop

on Sanibel to "just take one more photo and I'll be out of here, I promise!" Most of the exhibit and a good portion of the research was born in that back room at Sanibel Photo. I thank you for your patience and understanding. ☀ To my parents, Cesar Sr. and Olga Becerra, who basically have put up with and supported (better word might be funded) all of my projects throughout the years. If anything, they truly are the sole reason this project has been possible. ☀ Finally, to my (she corrected me last time I said old) former 5th grade teacher, Mrs. Rita Collard, I thank you for exposing me to South Florida's rich his-

tory and for challenging me to "help others dream of the past and future". I shall always think of our trip to the Barnacle with fond memories and future implications. Let it be known that you have created a monster, and I am no longer a historical buff but a historical junkie as well!

☀ Last, but certainly not least, Clyde and Niki Butcher who have shown our Big Cypress Swamp to those who don't dare enter its vast stretches of water and muck. Clyde, you have done Florida a grand service by showing the public that the Everglades of long ago are still with us today. I am also grateful for your encouragement in convincing me that my research means nothing if I don't share it with the world. I have taken your advice seriously and this exhibit is proof. Thank you.



C.J. Jones on logging locomotive at Jerome Florida.

*Last, Found.*