

Seminoles left in Florida by the treaty of 1842—between two and three hundred only in number; and here they lead a peaceful life, cultivating their fields, and hunting.

It was while among the Seminoles, in 1872 and 1874, that I enjoyed my best sport hunting the alligator. All are, of course, sufficiently familiar with this saurian not to need a further description from me. By thousands and thousands the guileless alligator of tender years has been ruthlessly torn from the maternal breast and sent adrift upon the frozen North; hence, the alligator in a menagerie is as familiar as the ubiquitous monkey.

Even to-day, after having been the sport of tourists for years, they may be shot on the St. John's; though the best hunting is to be found in secluded creeks and bayous.

Though the alligator attains sometimes a length of 12 or 14 feet, he is more commonly found at 8 or 10. His jaw is always one fourth his entire length, and one 12 feet long displays an open countenance a yard wide. The teeth work up well into ivory ornaments, and the skin, when properly tanned, makes the most

durable of leather. Some hunting boots I had made from a pair of nine-footers lasted me five years' wear and tear by flood and field. The alligator's vulnerable spots are the eye, ear and just abaft the fore-leg. The rifle is the best weapon, but I have shot several dozen with a shot-gun and some even with a small revolver.

The alligator is daintily-choice in his food, preferring a dog to the piney-woods hog, and a juicy, well-developed negro to either. The bull alligators have a tremendous roar, which shakes the forest when they indulge in a concert. I once found them so numerous, in the Indian country, that we gave over shooting and took to harpooning them; a certain hunt by moonlight lingers in memory yet through a dozen intervening years.

One hundred years ago, when that quaint old philosopher and botanist, Bartram, sailed up the St. John's in his Indian canoe, the river was without a settlement its entire length, and the worthy man was frightened nearly out of his wits by the enormous alligators, which bit pieces out of his boat and nearly succeeded in devouring him.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Frederick Albion Ober (1849–1913)

Frederick Ober was born in Beverly, Massachusetts, to a relatively impoverished family and had little formal education. At 14, he learned the shoemaker's trade, the traditional winter occupation of local fishermen; at 18, he was working in a drug store; at 21, he was in business with his father. However, his passion was ornithology. As a teenager, he taught himself taxidermy, collected and classified nearly all the birds of New England, and attracted the attention of Alexander Agassiz, the distinguished biologist from Harvard.

In 1871, Ober abandoned business and went on a major expedition to Florida to explore Lake Okeechobee, writing a series of vivid journal articles. For the next twenty years, he was an almost constant traveler, principally in the Caribbean, but also in México, Spain, North Africa, and northern South America. Ober initially saw himself as a scientist; he sent much material back to the Smithsonian Institution, two species of birds carry his name, and the Smithsonian published the report of his first Caribbean expedition. However, after the commercial success of his travel book, *Camps in the Caribbees: The Adventures of a Naturalist in the Lesser Antilles* (1879), Ober broadened his horizons and, after some financial struggles, made a career for himself as a travel writer, journalist, public lecturer, novelist, and historian.

Ober wrote over forty books, including three classic travel books: *Camps in the Caribbees* (1879), the long and beautifully produced *Travels in Mexico and Life among the Mexicans* (1884), and the book that resulted from his appointment as collector of Caribbean and Columbus-

related material for the quatercentenary, *In the Wake of Columbus: Adventures of the Special Commissioner sent by the World's Columbian Exposition to the West Indies* (1893). In addition, two of many novels had a contemporary Caribbean setting: *Under the Cuban Flag, or the Cacique's Treasure* (1897) and *The Last of the Arawaks: A Story of Adventure on the Island of San Domingo* (1901).

In the last years of his life he worked as a real-estate dealer in Hackensack, New Jersey, where he died in 1913. Since his death, nobody has taken much interest in Frederick Ober or his writings, but, during the last decade of the nineteenth century, Ober probably knew as much about the Caribbean as anyone in the United States. He had traveled widely in the region, especially in the more remote parts rarely visited by other travelers, met with many of the statesmen and leading figures, and read widely about the area's history. Nobody knew the contemporary situation of the small indigenous populations as well, and few had a better knowledge of its history and the history of Spanish colonialism with which it was intertwined. In one sense, however, this made Ober an atypical figure. After 1898, when the stream of writing about the Spanish-speaking Caribbean became a torrent, his would seem like a minor voice, that of an amateur drowned by the instant expertise of economists, sociologists, and other analysts of the backward islands that had fallen into U.S. hands.

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