

H-Net Reviews

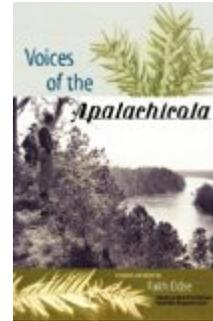
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Faith Eidse. *Voices of the Apalachicola*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006. 352 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2864-4.

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Ghosts of the Apalachicola: The Voices of Florida's Forgotten River

Some say future wars will be fought over water, not oil. In the southeastern United States, Florida, Alabama, and Georgia have already been in federal court more than once fighting over control of this increasingly important natural resource.

As we grapple with the problems associated with the conservation and allocation of water, Faith Eidse's *Voices of the Apalachicola* offers some insightful perspectives concerning this essential liquid. Water means many things to many different people, and understanding the myriad of perspectives is key to finding fair and lasting solutions to the challenges of water management—an often ignored, but vitally important function of modern government.

The Apalachicola River is formed at the Florida-Georgia line by the union of the Flint and Chattahoochee rivers, two rivers that reach into Atlanta and northern Georgia. Before the Apalachicola River reaches the Gulf of Mexico, it is joined by a third river, the Chipola, and together the water from these rivers flow into Apalachicola Bay.

Where these rivers once brought cotton and other products south for shipment to England and the northeastern United States, today they provide the three states with water, recreation, and electrical power, and they are playing an ever-increasing role in the tri-state struggle for control of water.

A second-generation oral historian, Faith Eidse is

also a writer and public-information specialist with the Northwest Florida Water Management District. In this volume, she has compiled and edited a collection of more than thirty stories detailing the history, people, culture, and communities found within the Apalachicola River and Bay Basin.

Voices of the Apalachicola presents a diversity of voices—white settlers, Native Americans, and African Americans—individuals who have spent their lives just a stone's throw from the river. The interweaving of their stories offers readers an expansive view of the life of a river as well as the importance of water in our history and the role it may play in our future. Included in Eidse's cast of characters are: Andrew Boggs Ramsey, a Muskogee-Creek Indian chief with a Ph.D. in education; Sakim, a Creek medicine man, and the webmaster of the tribe's Web site (www.tfn.net/museum); David Taunton, a local judge who has earned the nickname "Robin Hood judge" for his defense of swamp dwellers and who publishes a local newspaper that offers folk wisdom such as, "Eat what you can, can what you can't, and what you can't can, turn the hogs in on and then eat the hogs" (pp. 29-30); Joseph McMillan, a ninety-three-year-old African American who remembers the days of sharecroppers and tenant farmers; and Capt. Tom Corley, the last first-class river pilot on the Apalachicola, who offers tales of moving cotton down the river and life during Prohibition.

The list goes on, including a catfish trap maker, Greek fisherman, net maker, seafood dealer, timber and tur-

pentine worker, local politician, environmentalist, and innkeeper. Each has an interesting story to tell about the river. These are the people who have witnessed the changes that have altered the flow and importance of the river. Some are supporters of change, other are not.

Beyond its importance to students of Florida studies, *Voices of the Apalachicola* is a collection of stories about life in the Deep South, life on a river, and a way of life that is disappearing faster than the water of the Apalachicola into the Gulf of Mexico. It is a collection that will interest many—social historians of Florida and the South, environmentalists, governmental officials, and anyone else with an interest in the complexity of the communities that surround our rivers and the future use of water.

If there is a weakness in this book, it concerns readability. I found it a slow read. At times, I had to force myself to push on. Sadly, while the book might have been a magical tale, it seems to flounder for want of a better storyteller. In truth, it should have been written by a poet. That said, the book is well worth the effort, because of the significance of the information it provides. I recommend it to those who have a serious interest in the issues related to the management of this essential resource.

Voices of the Apalachicola is part of the Florida History and Culture Series, edited by Gary R. Mormino and Raymond Arsenault, for the University Press of Florida. It was published on behalf of the Northwest Florida Water Management District.

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