

Trip to the Isle of Pines - January 1911

by Mattie Finton Windnagle

In January and February 1911 the Finton's, G. W. and Martha, and the Windnagle's, T. Warner, Mattie, and Fenton, took a trip to the Isle of Pines to visit Herman and Drusilla Bullock; Drusilla was G. W.'s sister. Mattie was G. W. and Martha's daughter. This eighteen page handwritten travelogue was among Mattie Windnagle's memorabilia now in the possession of her granddaughter, Shirley Windnagle Weinberg. The photo to the right shows Martha, G. W., T. Warner, Herman, Drusilla, and Fenton in front of Herman and Drusilla's home on the Isle of Pines. Mattie took the photo.



The party of which I was a member sailed from New York Jan 12 on a Spanish vessel the Montevideo.

Yes everything was Spanish. No one on board except one young fellow could speak English, at all.

All the passengers were of foreign tongue, many of them were priests, monks, and nuns on their way to Mexico.

It gives one rather a strange feeling to be out on the broad Atlantic and unable to converse with any one except your own party.

Occasionally we could understand some things if we watched the motions of the different people. As the Spanish language is composed (*beginning page 2*) of nearly as many motions as words.

Sometimes I would try to talk to the stewards and they would answer by saying: "no English, no salvia, no comprehende." They meant they could not understand English.

They would say "no speakie Spanie" and I would have to shake my head and say no.

The phonograph talked and sang in Spanish. There were a number of cats on board, pets of the sailors and they could not understand plain English. Mr. Windnagle remarked everything was Spanish, even the chairs because they were made with six legs.

(*beginning page 3*) At seven o'clock in the morning we had lunch consisting of bread and coffee. Breakfast at eleven. Was served soup, three kinds of meat, also fish, bread without butter, sheese, radishes, olives, apples, raisins, and coffee. Also claret and sometimes champagne.

The Spaniards drank wine to excess at every meal but without any ill effects seemingly. This young Mexican who could speak a little English said it was good for seasickness but I disagree with him. He always insisted that we drink with the rest but we constantly refused, but as it was the first time I ever saw a glass of champagne I

was (*beginning page 4*) tempted to taste and see what it was like, and the result was it nearly made me seasick and I could not be persuaded to taste again because some of our party did not enjoy the ocean trip to the fullest extent, as they were stowed away in their stateroom for about three days, and I did not care for the same experience, so avoided every thing possible that would likely put me in the same condition. We had lunch again at 2 o'clock. Lemonade and wafers.

Dinner at six. Was served to soup, 3 meat courses, potatoes, citron sauce, custard, fritters, figs, oranges, cheese, ice-cream and coffee also wine again.

(*beginning page 5*) Lunch again at nine o'clock. Tea or coffee and bread and butter.

Butter must have been considered a luxury as it was served only at the evening lunch. Five meals every day and all were Spanish potatoes, eggs, fish, and fritters in fact every thing prepared or fried in olive oil.

Having been on the ocean four days and four nights we arrived at Havana early Monday morning and entered the harbor by the guidance of a special pilot who came out and boarded the Montevideo at a given signal.

The insurance companies will not allow any ship under their protection (*beginning page 6*) to leave or enter the harbors without a special pilot and if they do, it is at their own risk.

We passed by the great light house and Morro Castle and the anchor was cast only a short distance from the wreck of the Maine, only a few feet of one mast of this great battleship is seen above the water.

Great preparations are being made to raise this obstruction as it is a menace to navigation.

All ships have to anchor quite a little distance from the wharf, consequently all

passengers, baggage and freight has to be transferred by means of small boats at (*beginning page 7*) an extra expense, and before you leave the large ship every passenger has to get in line and pass before the doctors, and they are able to tell at a glance if you have certain diseases which are objectionable to the country that you are about to visit.

From the small boats you are landed directly into the custom house, and there your luggage is searched by government officials.

Some people get through very easy others do not. Recently I have been told that a person belonging to the order of Masons can pass through the customs house with a reasonable amount of foreign goods with very (*beginning page 8*) little trouble. Also that a tip would sometimes be very effective but personally I would be afraid that I might be the one to get tipped if I disobeyed the custom house rules and regulations.

One man coming from Havana to the U. S. paid \$64.50 duty on 20 small boxes of cigars. They would cost him in the first place, #2.50 or more per box. When this added duty would make them rather expensive. This is only one instance of the many.

Havana is said to be the largest city in Cuba and here the Spanish language predominates.

All the stores and markets are conducted by Cubans – However there are two streets, Obispo and O'Reilly where American people (*beginning page 9*) can do their shopping and they will be waited on by English speaking clerks.

Many hotels advertise American accommodations but you will find it otherwise – as a rule, some of them employ an interpreter or runner as he is called and it is his business to meet the incoming trains and boats to solicit patronage.

Most of the houses in Havana are small and show decay. Many are painted light blue with white trimmings. They do not have glass windows but simply iron gratings at the openings and a light or shutter blind they can close if they choose to do so.

Many of the streets are very narrow only wide enough for one team (*beginning page 10*) and all have to travel in one direction.

The journey from Havana southward across Cuba by rail a distance of 30 miles to a place called Batabano. Here we went aboard a small steamer similar to the Penn Yan on Lake Keuka. At nine o'clock in the evening we were provided with staterooms and immediately took possession for the night but later on there seemed to be a disturbance – chairs, tables, and furniture began to move around as if they were possessed with spirits. Mrs. Bullock and I occupied a room together and after consultation we decided to leave our beds and arise in proper manner if possible.

The Caribbean Sea was very (*beginning page 11*) rough so we sat up the rest of the night and had a genuine visiting party to pass away the time.

At 4 o'clock in the morning we entered the mouth of the Jucaro River and after a trip of 2 miles we arrived at the small landing called Jucaro on the Isle of Pines.

Autos and carriages meet the boats regularly as there is no other means of transportation on the island and this is limited on account of the lack of good roads, though there are a few in good condition. They were made at the time of the Spanish American War by American soldiers and since then have been extended by the Cubans.

Many of the roads are simply trails and lead everywhere. (*beginning page 12*) Not much trouble for one to get lost for a time even on this small island which is about 35

miles in diameter either north and south or east and west.

We were conveyed in an auto bus to Mr. Bullock's home which was a distance of six miles from the landing and one mile from a village called Santa Fe. This village is about the size of Branchport and the population consists chiefly of Cubans although there is one American store, two American hotels, and three churches.

The other stores are conducted by Cubans also. The P. O. in order to get our mail we had to write our names on a slip of paper as the postmaster could not understand oral English.

(*beginning page 13*) At the American store you would pay:

- 38 cents per gallon for kerosene in 5 gallon sealed cans
- 42 cents for gasoline – 50 autos on the island
- 7 ¼ cents per # for sugar
- 58 cents for coffee
- 80 cents for B. tea
- 75 cents for a yard of soap
- No butter – ate oleo for 35 cents per lb.
- Not many cows on the island – people keep goats for their milk supply
- No meat except canned goods

Here at Santa Fe there are two mineral springs – iron and magnesia. The mag water is shipped to Havana in large tanks and sold for 50 cents per gal.

There is another village called Neuva Gerona – it is 12 miles distant from Santa Fe. (*beginning page 14*) This is called the capitol of the Island and is about 43 or 4 times the size of Santa Fe. So far as I know there are only two villages of any size on the Island.

In speaking of the Isle of Pines in general, 90% of the land is owned by Americans. Agriculture is the principal occupation and grapefruit is the main

product. The people are budding their lemon and orange trees as fast as possible to grapefruit as they consider that will be the most profitable.

The grapefruit groves are set with 70 trees to the acre. Trees well cared for. That is cultivated and plenty of good fertilizer applied will at the age of 7 or eight years yield on an *(beginning page 15)* average of 8 boxes per tree and will sell at \$1.50 per box net. Many of the groves with much less care and same amount of fertilizer of poorer grade will yield only about half the amount.

The best fertilizer costs \$80 per ton and one ton will fertilize 1 acre for 1 year.

There are a few wild fruits: guaras, maumas? and mangoes. Pineapples are grown to some extent and of mammoth size some weighing 14 or 16 # a piece.

Gardening is carried on to quite an extent and the vegetables are shipped to Cuba and the U. S. One afternoon we went to see a large garden farm and the following is a list of vegetables and eatables that were growing on *(beginning page 16)* this place.

Watermelons, musk melons, radishes, onions, beans, corn, beets, cucumber, cabbage, lettuce, eggplant, Irish and sweet potatoes, bananas, peanuts, and tobacco.

The native sweet potatoes are called Buenos atus. You can have vegetable any time by planting at different intervals. Watermelons grow from seed and ??? in 9 to 10 weeks. Potatoes will grow 7 weeks large enough.

The unimproved land has a scattered growth of hard pine and many kinds of palm trees numbering 33 different species.

In the southern part of the island is found many valuable hard woods such as mahogany, white ebony, granadelia, mahogua?, and heart of the forest.

This timber is not being used or exported, because there is a lack of means of transportation.

(beginning page 17) Climate was ideal in Jan. while we were there. Two seasons rainy and dry. The sun very hot in middle of day but always a good breeze blowing from the east and at any time you can find a cool place in the shade.

The water is excellent but very warm, have to cool before drinking. It is very soft, much more so than rain water.

In regard to animal life there are very few wild animals or birds except parrots and they are plentiful in mid summer. People shoot these in great numbers because they destroy the ripe fruit.

There are many advantages and disadvantages in the island and one must needs have plenty of money to improve the land and enjoy himself. *(beginning page 18)* Taking it as a whole our stay of nearly three weeks with Mr. and Mrs. Bullock in their southern home was pleasant and profitable.

We returned north by way of Havana, Key West and Florida where we spent two weeks in company with Mr. and Mrs. James Sprague at St. Petersburg. We arrived home the last of February just in time to vote.



This photo shows G. W., Martha, Fenton, T. Warner, and Mattie on the beach in Florida while visiting the Spragues.