



Edgar Everett Goodno: A Florida Pioneer and His Ghost Town Remembered

Matthew M. Robb

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Forgotten for decades until cryptically remembered in the 1970s as “the son of a gambler and a patiently suffering mother,” Edgar Goodno was a force of nature from the moment he stepped foot in 1890s Florida. Making up for lost time, the former Kansas farmer quickly parlayed his modest lunch stand in Fort Myers into a sprawling empire in the state's rugged outback -- amassing 8,000 acres of land, becoming a successful citrus grower and innovative cattle baron, opening two popular hotels, guiding the “Wild West” outpost of LaBelle into a modern city, and finally setting his sights on transforming the tiny railroad settlement of Goodno into a thriving community. His nickname (“the hustler from Hustleville”) spoke volumes about outsize ambition.

In 28 fast-paced chapters featuring dozens of vintage images, readers will journey with the Goodno family into the 1850s frontiers of Illinois and Wisconsin, trek into Reconstruction Missouri, then traverse the Oklahoma border on the eve of the 1893 Cherokee Land Run. Matthew Robb's biography also spotlights Edgar Goodno's until-now unknown arrival in Fort Myers, his feverish land acquisitions along the mystical Caloosahatchee River, his never-published street plat for the “city” of Goodno, and his work with Henry Ford, Thomas Edison and Harvey Firestone on a hush-hush project soon widely advertised as a “mammoth rubber plantation.” In capturing one man's boundless faith and courage, success and failure, Robb illuminates the legions of forgotten developers who waged a feverish if ill-fated battle to transform Florida's marshy interior into the nation's newest promised land.

Reviews of *Edgar Everett Goodno: A Florida Pioneer and His Ghost Town Remembered*

“Matthew Robb has succeeded in reminding us of the power and thrill of narrative history. Readers will discover unforgettable characters living on the edge of the Florida frontier, where Edgar Goodno and Henry Ford chased an elusive Florida dream.” - Gary R. Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Florida*; Resident Scholar, Florida Humanities Council; and former co-director of the Florida Studies Program at USF St. Petersburg

“Matthew Robb is that rare biographer who can weave long-buried information into a highly readable story. Here, in absorbing fashion, he spotlights the life and times of Edgar Goodno, the massively ambitious, headlines-making land developer who sought to transform southwest Florida's interior, yet today is mostly remembered for his ghost town. Read. Learn. Enjoy.” - Joseph H. Thomas, President, LaBelle Heritage Museum

“In this fascinating chronicle of one of the most influential-yet-unknown men in the history of southwest Florida, Matthew Robb brings Edgar Goodno and his tumultuous era to vivid life.” - Amy Bennett Williams, *Along the Caloosahatchee River*

“Matthew Robb and I first met when he contacted me to obtain vintage images from my family's archives. One photograph in particular continues to haunt me and readers will find it on the cover of his new biography. Here, the specter of Edgar Goodno materializes from his eponymous settlement, as though waiting to take us to the other side, to the spirit world of a long-forgotten Florida. To be sure,

Edgar Goodno was an enigma, yet Matthew Robb possesses that rare ability to bring him to life, to captivate his audience and to fire our imagination. The result is a spellbinding masterpiece of a biography that strikes a fine balance between lore and legend, man and town, then and now. If you love the history of southwest Florida, particularly its places and faces, this book is a must read. Enjoy the journey." - Woody Hanson, Hanson Family Archives of Fort Myers

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Ebony Lower:

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Phillip Barker:

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Edgar Foley:

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