



Trapper Nelson

Trapper Nelson was a tall man. At six foot four inches, 240 pounds he was the "Tarzan of the Loxahatchee River", but his strange shotgun death in July 1968 was the talk of the town. It had all the elements of a murder mystery. The stories surrounding his death ranged from a jealous lover seeking revenge, to killers looking for hidden money, but in the end the sheriff ruled it a suicide. Vincent Nostokovich was born in Trenton, New Jersey and later became known as Trapper Nelson. He owned land on the northwest fork of the wild Loxahatchee River and built his camp and zoo there. He lived on the animals he trapped and fish he caught. Tourist boats from West Palm Beach brought visitors to see the wild man wrestle alligators. Celebrities like Gary Cooper, Gene Tunney along with countless society heiresses visited the jungle hideaway and were amazed to see the huge man, wrestling wild animals. There was no doubt that the flamboyant trapper had an eye for good real estate and beautiful heiresses. He had an interest in real estate and bought land at every opportunity until he owned 800 acres of valuable land including waterfront. When he needed money to pay his taxes, he sold two hundred acres to the Bessemer Corporation for \$335,000, an area now known as Turtle Creek and Riverbend developments. Friends noticed that Trapper Nelson thought people were trying to get his property away from him. He

became more suspicious of people and more private. He put up gates and cut trees to block the south end of the Loxahatchee River to prevent people from getting near his camp. Supporters of the suicide theory said he became obsessed with sickness and complained about his stomach, saying he thought it might be cancer. Friends tried to encourage him to go to a clinic, but he was afraid of doctors and refused. Trapper Nelson seemed to get worse. He holed-up like a hermit and the only way he would see anyone was after he received a letter asking for an appointment. On July 24, 1968, Nelson made an appointment to meet with an old friend at the John DuBois house. When he failed to show up his friends put a call to the post office and learned that he had not picked up his mail. John DuBois went to the camp to check things out.

At the rear of Nelson's cabin DuBois was shocked to see Nelson's body lying near his hammock with his shotgun nearby. Rumors began circulating. First it was said that he died of a wound to the head. Later it was determined that he had been shot in his abdomen. Everyone seemed to have his own theory as to what happened, however, the coroner's jury delivered a verdict of suicide. Sheriff Slater Grose said in a news article, "pretty clear cut case." "He was a sick man and he knew it." One of Nelson's friends wondered. "He had a lot of enemies, a lot of people were jealous of him. I

wouldn't rule out that somebody sneaked up on him." The sheriff conceded that they gave the case special attention, "what with that business about the big land deal and him being so controversial." Like a soap opera, the girls were still a factor in the case. DuBois, who may have known Trapper the best, wrote, "He remained the prime attraction. Girls came away exclaiming. . . 'Do you mean that big, beautiful man lives up there all alone?'" Was it murder or suicide? We may never know.