

# Up Close

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## Cow hunter history

Local author's book celebrates area's cowboy pioneers

By AMANDA PEAVY

News-Sun

It is a clear sunny day in Florida. The cowboy pulls his worn cowboy hat down a little to protect his eyes from the glare of the sun. His skin is a deep brown from years of constantly being outside. He nudges his horse forward with the heel of his boot. There are at least 10 more cows in the palmetto brush that need to be rounded up.

The cowboy cracks his whip and circles around the wild cattle. They still have a long journey ahead in order to get to the cattle market on the east coast. Once at the market, the cows will be put on a paddle boat bound for Cuba.

Before Disney and highways, this is how Florida used to be. Florida has 200 years of cow hunter history.

"There are so many people that move here that just know the beaches or the condos," Nancy Dale said. "They don't realize there is a cultural heritage with the Seminole Indians and the cow hunters."

Dale is an author whose goal in writing is to help expose people to native Florida and help preserve it. Her recently published book, "Would Do, Could Do and Made Do: Florida's Pioneer 'Cow Hunters' Who Tamed the Last Frontier," is a collection of stories from some of Florida's cattle ranchers. This is the second book Dale has written.

"Each story is so unique, but the basic thread that runs through them is how they survived well under whatever circumstances they were confronted with to preserve their family and the land," Dale said. "They carved a lifestyle out of a very not-so-friendly environment and learned how to live in harmony with it."

Robert Ray Smith, the owner of the Hardee Livestock who is featured in the book, really enjoyed reading the book. "I knew most of the characters that Nancy wrote about. Some old-timers, such as myself, would be interested in the book," he said.

The title for the book came from a pioneer fisherman, Ray Donald of Moore Haven.

"That was their philosophy," Dale said. "That's how they lived their lives and the stories they tell are so interesting and inspiring. Whatever they had, they did with. They lived in harmony with nature."

The idea for "Would Do, Could Do and Made Do" was born from



News-Sun photo by KATARA SIMMONS

Author Nancy Dale poses with her new book 'Would Do, Could Do And Made Do' (below) on Thursday afternoon outside of her home in Sebring.

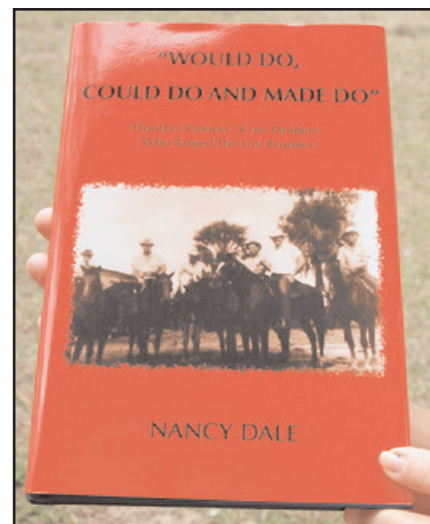
Dale getting to know the cow hunters in Palmdale. Dale said the ranchers accepted her and used to call her "the lipstick girl from Miami."

"I'm a wanna-be cowgirl," Dale said. "This lifestyle passed me by, so writing books about those that survived the early wilderness experience in Florida gives me a chance to be a part of something that I missed."

Some families have had their land for some 200 years and are still ranching. However, the number of these families is declining in Florida because the developers want the land; they are offering the ranchers millions of dollars. The land is now worth more than the cattle.

In the preface for "Would Do, Could Do and Made Do," Kevin Fussell, of Polk County, said, "The future of Florida's cattle industry lies in the hands of today's ranchers. Will they be able to hold onto their land despite all the pressures from urbanization and development? With a history and heritage as deep as ours, we must do our best to preserve it for the future."

Dale has three Sebring distributors for her book: The Hammocks Inn at Highlands Hammock State Park,



Brewster's Coffee House and The Yoga and Massage Studio. If someone would like a signed copy of the book, they can contact the author at [nancydale@yahoo.com](mailto:nancydale@yahoo.com).

"I'll never be a rancher, as much as I would enjoy it, but I certainly love driving through Florida and looking at the cattle," Dale said. "The peace and serenity that it gives me having the land still there."

Born in Miami, Dale said she progressively moves away from populated areas. She has lived in Sebring since March after being displaced from her home on Hutchinson Island

by hurricanes.

"I wanted five acres, but couldn't afford it," Dale said. "The closest I could get was an acre. I plan to turn the landscape back to as native as possible."

Attempting to do what the ranchers did for the land on her own land, Dale grows organic vegetables, has a wildlife backyard habitat and is part of the Florida Friendly Landscaping program with the University of Florida.

In addition to being an author, Dale is a nationally published journalist, teacher and a member of the Florida Cattlemen's Association. She was also in broadcasting for 20 years with her doctorate in communication and broadcast journalism.

Her previous book was "Where the Swallowtail Kite Soars: The Legacies of Glades County, Florida and the Vanishing Wilderness" and she is currently working on a third book.

Her focus now is to continue to write about the Florida pioneer culture because Dale says our heritage is disappearing in Florida.

"Rural America is disappearing. It is important to be aware of our history because it helps us with our own identity," she said.