



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Future Is Coming

The older we grow, it seems, the more we dread change. How easy it is to sit back on our porch in a rocking chair, dream of the good old days and wish they would continue forever.

I believe it was the miserable fellow with boils, sitting on an ash pile listening to his wife say, "Curse God and die, Job," who mumbled, "That which I feared is come upon me."

Those of us native Floridians — crackers, we're called — who have fought growth and change in an effort to maintain our old, easy-going way of life, are now being forced to say the same thing. Most of us realize (and are glad for it) that the days of having to cross the Indian River in a rowboat, bounce along a two-lane sometimes-paved U.S. Highway 1 in a Model A Ford, and point out the Sleepy Eye Lodge and the Del Prado Hotel as Vero's best-known landmarks are gone forever. Yet the idea of a new bridge across the river, widening streets, building high rises along the ocean,

and turning pasture and grove land into shopping centers is still a bit repulsive.

Now comes the U.S. Census Bureau's projected growth reports for the next 20 years. USCB estimates Florida will be the fastest growing state in the Union, followed by Arizona, Nevada, Colorado and New Hampshire. Seeing that the other four states now have a combined population which is two million less than Florida's present population, it means we're in for some big changes down here in the sunshine state.

By the year 2000 — which incidentally, is only 21 years away — Florida will have leaped over four other states to become the fourth largest state in the Union with a population of 12,924,000. Only California with 28,000,000, New York with 18,800,000 and Texas with 16,654,000 will be larger. The growth rate will be 56 percent — compared with California's rate of 32 percent growth and New York's four percent.

The Census Bureau admits its projections could be wrong. But if

they have erred, they say, it will be because they have estimated too conservatively as far as growth in the sunbelt states is concerned. In fact, if growth continues as it has over the past five years, Florida could experience almost 90 percent growth in the next 20 years.

Where are all these people going to sleep? Eat? Buy? Park their trailers? (They'll have to park them for no one will have enough money to buy gas to pull them around). Do we pretend we can continue to depend on antiquated systems? Do we fight progress, hoping all those people will move to Tampa or form a new community between Okeechobee and Indiantown? Do we say with Job, "That which I feared is come upon me?" Or do we realize that as the population grows older a lot of people need a warm climate where prices are lower — and we Floridians now have the opportunity to share with the nation that which we so long have enjoyed.

Problem? Or challenge? Take your choice. But the future is upon us.