LOYALTY HAD A PRICE ON THE COLONIAL FRONTIER

A SEMINOLE’S SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH

BOCA GRANDE REVELS IN ITS SECLUSION
EACH MORNING ON MY WAY TO WORK I take a scenic detour past the Weedon Island Preserve. The site, which overlooks Tampa Bay, was home to prehistoric people 1,700 years ago. The shoreline is a tangle of mangroves, riddled with horseshoe crabs bubbling out of the sand as the tide goes out, and neon pink Roseate Spoonbills wading knee-deep into the brackish water, rhythmically swinging their heads as they filter crustaceans and insects through their long flat bills.

Except for the occasional airplane descending into the Tampa airport and the belching smoke of a nearby power plant, it is easy to imagine life on these steamy wetlands nearly 2000 years ago. In my imagination, these prehistoric people look a lot like the Jacques LeMoyne illustrations of seven-foot tall Timucua warriors with exotic ponytails doing battle with dragon-looking alligators. LeMoyne was the French artist who accompanied the ill-fated Jean Ribault expedition to North Florida in the 16th century. While the authenticity of his illustrations has been questioned, they have certainly sparked our interest in Florida’s people before European contact.

This issue of FORUM is a prequel to our Fall 2011 “Viva Florida 500” issue that explored our state’s 500-year Hispanic heritage. In the coming pages, we look at our history from a different vantage point—the view from the shore—the perspective that archaeologists offer of the lives of people who inhabited our state for 14,000 years. Almost completely annihilated by warfare and disease, these were the indigenous people who clashed and cooperated with Spanish explorers and colonists to create the cultural exchange that married the old world to the new.

As the Florida Humanities Council prepares to commemorate Florida’s quincentenary—the 500th anniversary of the Ponce de León landing on our east coast in 1513—our programs and resources will explore Florida’s history from both vantage points—from those on the tall ships and from those on the shore.

Janine Farver, Chair

The Florida Humanities Council (FHC) would like to acknowledge the generous support of the National Endowment for the Humanities; the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs; the Florida Council on Arts and Culture; and the National Endowment for the Arts.
What was the view from the shore?
In this issue we offer a glimpse of the people who were here when Spanish explorers arrived. Our guide into the world of Florida’s first people is Jerald T. Milanich.

Native cultures are wiped out after Europeans move in

The Calusa ruled South Florida

The magical world of the Timucua

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How power was brokered in Spanish colonial Florida
Native chiefs pledged their loyalty to the crown—for a price.
By J. Michael Francis

Creek Indians become Florida Seminoles

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A Seminole wants people to know the real story of Florida’s past.
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By Peter B. Gallagher

My Favorite Florida Place
Finding a haven—and tarpon adventures—in Boca Grande.
By Bob Morris
What was the view from the shore?

By Barbara O’Reilley

When the 3-year-old girl died, “her parents placed her favorite toys in her arms, wrapped her in fabric woven from fibers of native plants, and buried her body in the soft, muck bottom of a small pond,” writes Florida archaeologist Rachel Wentz. When the girl’s tiny remains were discovered some 7,000 years later, the toys—a small turtle shell and a wooden object shaped like a pestle—were still cradled in her arms.

Her burial place, Windover Pond, was accidentally uncovered by a backhoe operator in 1982. This ancient pond cemetery, located just outside of Titusville near Florida’s central Atlantic coast, has been called one of the most important archaeological sites ever excavated. The well-preserved remains of another 167 individuals were also found there—all offering clues to how these early Florida people lived and cared for each other. (See more details next page.)

Windover is one of the scores of sites throughout Florida offering mute testimony to cultures that developed on this peninsula starting around 12,000 B.C. By the time Spaniards arrived in 1513, native people were living in hundreds of villages all across Florida. Who were they? What were they like? What was the view from the shore when the Old World ships appeared on the horizon? We’ll never know for sure. Florida’s indigenous people didn’t survive for long after the Europeans moved in, and they didn’t leave their own written accounts. But in this issue we try to provide a glimpse of them.

By delving into reams of documents written by Europeans and mountains of artifacts unearthed by Florida archaeologists, scholars have gleaned enough to sketch some portraits. In the next several pages, you’ll read about the fierce, clever Calusa, who ruled south Florida; the Timucua, who believed in

By 12,000 B.C.
First people reach Florida. They are descendants of people who crossed over the land bridge from Siberia to Alaska, eventually populating the Americas.

6,150–5,000 B.C.
The Windover people live along the coast and rivers in current-day Brevard County. They bury their dead in the soft peat at the bottom of a pond, discovered in 1982.

3,000 B.C.
People live in every part of the Florida peninsula.

By 500 B.C.
Regional cultures develop all across the Florida peninsula, and societies become more complex.

500 B.C.—A.D. 1513
Ancestors of the Tequesta Indians live in and around current-day Miami. The architectural footprint of a large meetinghouse or ceremonial building, discovered in 1998, is called the Miami Circle.
**A.D. 750**
People in the northeastern St. Johns region begin cultivating corn. They and others began growing squashes and gourds many years earlier.

**Circa A.D. 800**
The Calusa people of the southwest Gulf coast begin their domination of southern Florida. They are called “The Fierce Ones” by other Indians.

**1513**
An estimated 350,000 native people are living on the peninsula when Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León arrives on the central Atlantic coast and christens the land “La Florida.”

**1513–1559**
Spaniards make their way to Florida, looking for gold, slaves, or opportunities to colonize. In 1539 Hernando de Soto marches through the state with an army, but fails to establish a single settlement.

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**Animal Art**
An eagle, an otter, a heron, a cat—these are among numerous figures carved from pine by the Belle Glade people who lived west of Lake Okeechobee from about 450 B.C. to 1700. Bones of animals discovered at the Fort Center archaeological site on Fisheating Creek suggest that these people ate almost every kind of animal found in the nearby wetlands and prairies. Strangely, they did not eat wading birds; perhaps there was a taboo against using them for food.

**Human Effigy**
The distinctive fired-clay vessels and effigy figurines of the Weeden Island culture (A.D. 200 to 1000) have been found in mounds and village sites from northwestern Florida to the central Gulf Coast. The name of the culture comes from Weeden Island in Pinellas County, a site excavated in the 1920s and misspelled “Weeden” Island in archaeological records.

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**An Ancient Cemetery**
Windover, a small pond in Brevard County, was a burial place for people who lived here at least 7,000 years ago, long before pyramids were built in Egypt. Preserved in its soft peat bottom were the remains of more than 100 individuals, some with brain tissue intact. They ranged in age from infancy to about 60. Some had birth defects or injuries suffered long before death, suggesting they were cared for and not abandoned. Shrouds were made from fabric thought to be the oldest found in this part of the world.

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Many omens; the wealthy Apalachee, who loved to play ball; and many others.

Our guide and collaborator in this endeavor is Jerald T. Milanich, called the “dean of Florida archaeology.” Milanich, an emeritus professor at the University of Florida, is author of more than 20 books on the lives of the early Indians of Florida and the Americas. He provided the content and insights for our many articles and vignettes about these people of so long ago.

Also in this issue, historian J. Michael Francis details how Spanish colonial officials maintained a balance of power with Florida native chiefs by giving them elaborate gifts. After being feted and receiving European luxuries, the chiefs pledged their loyalty and gave the Spanish access to Indian labor.

In the “Bridging Cultures” column, Seminole historian Willie Johns tells a personal story of growing up poor, using hardships as his motivation to succeed, and pursuing his passion to learn the real story of his people. He gives his perspective on Florida’s last 500 years. Also, Peter B. Gallagher writes about a weathered red barn that is an important historical building for the Seminoles and is being restored.

In “My Favorite Florida Place,” writer Bob Morris describes Boca Grande, a town that revels in its seclusion on a Golf Coast barrier island. Morris sees it as a haven—and a launching point for tarpon fishing.

So read on. We hope this issue illuminates some of Florida’s little-known past and provides some modern perspectives.

**Barbara O'Reilley** is editor of FORUM.
Native cultures are wiped out after European powers move in

Night came on; the moon being up, an Indian, who performeth their ceremonies stood out, looking full at the moon making a hideous noise, and crying out acting like a mad man for the space of half an hour; all the Indians being silent till he had done: after which they all made fearful noise some like the barking of a dog, wolf, and other strange sounds.

JOHNATHAN DICKINSON, a merchant from Jamaica who was shipwrecked in 1696 near Jupiter Inlet on Florida’s Atlantic coast, wrote this description of a Hobe Indian ceremony he witnessed after being found by the natives. He and his fellow passengers feared the Hobe were bloodthirsty, pagan cannibals. But the Indians, who seemed primarily interested in salvaging loot from the shipwreck, allowed them to make their way north to Spanish St. Augustine. They later traveled to Charleston, the British colony in South Carolina.

If it weren’t for Dickinson’s journal, we would know virtually nothing today about the natives in the Jupiter area. The Hobe were among the estimated 350,000 people living in hundreds of societies on the Florida peninsula when the Europeans first arrived, starting in 1513 with Spanish explorer Ponce de León.

Within 250 years of European contact, Florida’s native people were gone—victims of foreign diseases to which they had no immunity, warfare, slave raids, and dwindling birth rates. A couple of hundred escaped—migrating to Louisiana or accompanying Spaniards to Cuba or Mexico. A small number are thought to have assimilated with Indians who moved into Florida from adjacent northern states.

Virtually everything we know about Florida’s native people comes from documents left behind by Europeans and from clues unearthed by archaeologists. The natives themselves left only a handful of firsthand accounts recorded by Europeans.

This map illustration by artist Theodore Morris shows the approximate territories of Florida’s indigenous people.
1656
Timucua chiefs revolt against an unpopular Spanish governor's orders, killing seven people and burning missions. The Spanish ultimately arrest about two dozen Timucua, execute half of them and sentence the other half to hard labor. Spanish missions are reorganized.

1670
England establishes the colony of Charles Town in Carolina.

1680
The English Carolina militia and its Indian allies begin attacks on Spanish Florida missions. The Carolina Indians later rampage through the peninsula—taking slaves, burning villages, killing Florida natives, and pushing out the rest.

1700–1750
Most of Florida's native people are gone.

1750
Creek Indian groups move into Florida from Georgia and Alabama. Later, these people are called Seminoles.

Crystal River: A Royal Cache
A burial mound and earthen embankment mark the central Gulf Coast town believed to have been a major political and religious center from about A.D. 50 to 500. Coastal traders probably canoed up Crystal River to the site where residents amassed an array of exotic metal, stone, bone, and ceramic objects and ornaments (including a copper ear spool with a pearl inset). Some materials appear to have come from as far away as the Ohio River Valley.

What have we learned about them? They were diverse—living in a variety of ways, speaking many languages, and holding distinct religious beliefs. They created art, tools, and weapons; ate what they hunted, fished, gathered, and, in some cases, farmed; traveled by canoe and foot; and traded in networks that extended throughout eastern North America.

Archaeologists say Florida's natives descended from people who crossed over the land bridge that once connected Siberia and Alaska. Migrating south and east, some reached Florida at least 14,000 years ago. By about 5,000 years ago they inhabited every part of the peninsula, from Miami to Pensacola and coast to coast.

Most lived in villages and marked their territories with mounds and other earthworks, some containing the remains of deceased relatives. Those monuments served as physical ties to ancestors and to the land.

As strange as it sounds, we don’t really know what the Indians called themselves. Starting with 16th-century explorers, Europeans have used names for the early Indian groups that the natives themselves may never have used. The Spaniards often used the names of chiefs to refer to towns and societies; for example, Outina, Saturiwa, Cale, and Potano. Today we do the same.

There were many other names, too, including Tequesta, Santaluces, Bocaratones, Ais, Uzita, Guacata, Chatot, Tocobaga, Jorono, Mayaca, Pensacola, and Matecumbe, to name several. Many never got recorded in documents and are lost to history.

In the next pages we focus on three of Florida’s early native groups that are best known today: the Calusa, Timucua, and Apalachee Indians. They had substantial contact with Europeans and appear in numerous historical documents. In addition, archaeologists have discovered much about them. For the most part, we deal with the overlapping 300 years when Europeans and Florida’s indigenous people lived on the peninsula at the same time.

Window into the Past
The Miami Circle—24 holes cut into limestone bedrock at the mouth of the Miami River—is a 38-foot circular footprint of a structure built at least 2,000 years ago. Archaeologists believe it may have been a public or ceremonial building in the principal village of Tequesta Indians, hunters and fishers who lived in southeast Florida. Artifacts found at the site were made of materials from as far away as Missouri, indicating long-distance exchange networks.
THEY RULED SOUTH FLORIDA

The Calusa inhabited a water world—an American Indian version of Venice, Italy. Their villages of huge shell mounds, houses on pilings, and cleverly engineered canals blanketed the shoreline and islands of the southwest Gulf Coast—from Charlotte Harbor near present-day Fort Myers, down to the Ten Thousand Islands.

They were several thousand strong and had an impressive realm of more than 50 villages, from which they ruled over the southern half of the peninsula. Other Indian groups showed allegiance to them by paying tributes—gifts such as food, hides, items salvaged from Spanish shipwrecks, and even captives from the wrecks.

The Calusa were fierce warriors—responsible for killing Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León. Their religious practices included human sacrifice (as some unfortunate shipwreck survivors discovered). And they believed that humans had three souls—one of them in the pupil of the eye.

They retained their independence for more than two centuries after the Spanish arrived, rebuffing attempts to convert them to Catholicism, and even ridiculing and “mooning” the last two priests who tried.

Today, Calusa ingenuity is still evident in the remnants of their canals, artworks, masks, and mounds.
Spanish overtures fail

Shortly after Juan Ponce de León first landed on the Atlantic Coast and christened the peninsula “La Florida,” he sailed to the Gulf Coast and met the Calusa. Though there were skirmishes and an actual battle with fatalities suffered on both sides, the Spaniards and Calusa remained interested in trading and learning more about one another.

Ponce returned eight years later, intent on colonizing in Calusa territory. He brought 200 people, Catholic clergymen, seed for planting crops, horses, cows, sheep, and goats. But the Calusa attacked the fledgling settlement. During the fighting Ponce was shot with an arrow. The expedition withdrew to Cuba, where Ponce died of his wound.

The Spanish didn’t try again to develop an alliance with the Calusa for a half-century. Then, in 1566, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés sailed to Calos. He had founded his own colony at St. Augustine less than a year before. He hoped to establish relations with the powerful Indian group—and to find his son who had been shipwrecked, perhaps on the Florida coast. He approached the Calusa differently and fared better than Ponce.

Menéndez orchestrated a grandiose entrance calculated to demonstrate the might of the Spaniards. With weapons drawn and lit matchcords at the ready to ignite them, more than 200 Spanish troops marched to the accompaniment of fife, drum, and trumpet. The entourage included banners, fifers and drummers, three trumpeters, a harpist, a violinist, and a dwarf who could sing and dance. It is not recorded if the Calusa were impressed, but Menéndez did gain an audience with the chief.

During this visit he negotiated the release of five shipwrecked Spanish
men, five mestizo women from Peru, and an African woman, all victims of the same 1545 shipwreck. However, 42 others weren’t as fortunate: They had already been sacrificed by the Calusa during religious ceremonies. At least two survivors chose to remain among the Indians. Menéndez did not find his son.

He made a second expedition to Calos that same year, leaving behind a small garrison. Then he returned a third time, bringing Father Juan Rogel, a Jesuit missionary who was to convert the Calusa to Catholicism, making them loyal subjects of the Spanish crown. The priest’s efforts failed, though, after a little more than a year. (See excerpt below from Rogel’s letters.)

The Spanish didn’t try to befriend the Calusa again for about 130 years. In 1697, two Spanish friars, this time members of the Franciscan order, again were sent to Mound Key. It was hoped that the Calusa could be recruited to replace North Florida mission Indians, whose numbers had declined precipitously as a result of epidemics. This left the Spaniards with a shortage of laborers and farmers needed to sustain St. Augustine.

The new missionaries, however, met with even less success than their predecessors. The Calusa ridiculed the friars, laughing at them and throwing mud and soot on them when they tried to preach. According to a Spanish account, some of the hecklers even turned around and showed [the priests] their buttocks.” The priests fled down the coast by canoe and ultimately were rescued by a Spanish ship in the Florida Keys.

**Indian raiders attack**

Once again, the Calusa had managed to remain outside Spanish control. But their hegemony in South Florida would not last. With the destruction of the North Florida missions in the early 1700s, the entire tribe was down the coast by canoe and ultimately were rescued by a Spanish ship in the Florida Keys.

**Were the Calusa tall?**

Seminole Indians today remark that a Tribal member who is tall may be descended from a Calusa. Relative to the shorter Spaniards, the Calusa probably were tall—as depicted in the image below.

**CATECHISM AND CORN**

Father Juan Rogel, a Jesuit missionary, wrote letters while living among the Calusa Indians. Here is an excerpt from April 25, 1568:

Little by little, through an interpreter, I taught them about the oneness of God, his power, and his creation of the universe and the first man and woman. I also explained the concept of a soul and corrected their own erroneous concepts. The Calusa believe each person has three souls. One is in the pupil of an eye, another in one’s shadow, and the third is a person’s reflection in a mirror or in still water.

When an individual dies, they believe the latter two souls leave the body, but the soul in the pupil of the eye remains forever. They go to where the dead are buried and talk with them and ask their advice. I believe it is actually the devil who answers them, because the dead tell them about real events that occurred in far-away places and things that actually happen in the future...

They began to see that the things I taught them made sense, while their own beliefs did not. But they said that their ancestors had lived with their beliefs forever, and they wished to do the same. They told me to leave them alone; they did not want to listen to me. But by treating them with kindness and love and using handouts of corn as bait, I was able to get them to continue coming to lessons...Though when the corn ran out, they left.

![A depiction of the Jesuit missionary trying to convert a Calusa.](image_url)
The Calusa could not withstand the brutal Indian attacks. To escape, some fled to the Miami area, others to the Florida Keys, and still others to Cuba where many died of diseases. Spanish officials in Cuba, recognizing that the raids threatened Spain’s hold on Florida, laid plans for a mission at the mouth of the Miami River at Tequesta. In 1743 two Jesuits priests sailed from Havana to Tequesta, where they found 180 refugee Indians living in five large houses. Many of the Indian men spoke Spanish as a result of having worked for Cuban fishermen.

The Jesuits reported that among the refugees were Keys Indians, Calusa, and Boca Ratones (probably Tequesta Indians). They reported another 100 refugees farther inland, including Mayaimies, Santaluces, and Mayacas, all South Florida Indians.

At Tequesta they built a church and christened it Santa Maria de Loreto. The problems of maintaining and protecting the small settlement, however, were too many, and the priests were soon withdrawn. This left the Calusa and other Indian refugees at the mercy of the raiders. By 1750 the surviving South Florida Indians had relocated to the Keys, probably all to Key West. On May 17, 1760, Creek Indians raided the refugees, burning their houses, boats, canoes, and fisheries. In a final evacuation, just over 60 Indians were taken to Cuba and resettled. The Calusa Indians, who had lived on the Florida peninsula for thousands of years, were gone.

Ingenious canals

The Calusa engineered a sophisticated 2 ½-mile canal that enabled canoers to cut across Pine Island, avoiding the more than 10-mile route around the island. The canal was up to 23-feet wide, and it extended from Pine Island Sound to Matlacha Pass. How does one dig a sea-level canal across an island that is nearly 13-feet high in the center? One doesn’t. The clever Calusa instead constructed a series of stepped sections of canal, each from three- to five-feet deep, and separated from the next by wooden dams. Paddlers could simply lift their dugout canoes across these devices, moving from a lower segment to a higher one, or vice versa, as they crossed the island.

Masks that transformed

Numerous intricately carved wooden masks were recovered from the Mound Key archaeological site. Originally painted in bright colors, some of the masks had moving parts—and transformed. Archaeologists have recently discovered that the masks and figureheads, described by Spaniards as being used in Calusa ceremonies, show evidence of hinges, pull strings, and other devices that would have allowed them to be manipulated.

At Key Marco, one of the many artifacts discovered at the Key Marco archaeological site.

A depiction of a Calusa shaman wearing a mask.
THE MAGICAL WORLD OF THE TIMUCUA

But they had to compete with Timucua priest-shamans, powerful religious and medical practitioners who were thought to make rain and conjure up storms, cast spells on individuals, find lost objects, and perform soothsaying before war. They also prepared charms from herbs, snakeskins, blackened palm fronds, white feathers, newly tanned hides, and owl eyes. The priest-shamans offered prayers to cornfields before planting, to newly constructed fish weirs, and to just-harvested or collected food products. Before eating new foods, prayers and ceremonies (usually a food sacrifice) were performed.

The Indians believed in many omens. In additions to owls and fawns, they had beliefs involving snakes and woodpeckers. Lightning also had meaning, as did the popping of a fire. And the twitching of eyes and mouths (as well as eyebrows) was seen as significant. On special occasions the Indians took Black Drink, a sacred tea brewed from the yaupon holly.

A book written in 1613 provides a glimpse into their beliefs. The author, a missionary priest in Fort George Island north of Jacksonville, wrote it to help friars in Florida administer to the Timucua. Father Francisco Pareja lists questions that priests should ask Indians during confession:

Have you believed that when the blue jay or another bird sings and your body is trembling that this is an omen that people are coming or that something important is about to happen?

When an owl hoots have you believed it to be an omen of evil?

Before you went on a fire drive to hunt deer did you take six arrows and six splinters of oak, mix them together between a woven cloth, and then sing all night, believing that you would then get a lot of deer?

Before hunting deer, did you take the antlers from another deer and pray to them the ceremony of the Devil?

Have you taken the skin of a poisonous snake or a black snake, mixed them with black guano and other herbs, and tried to bewitch a person?

During the colonial period, Franciscan missionary friars actively campaigned against these ideas—and, over a generation or two, many of the indigenous beliefs did fade away.
Discovering the truth behind the image

They had physiques like Roman statues and carried out exotic activities such as barbecuing unusual arrays of whole animals, marching in formation like European soldiers, and shoving a tree trunk down an alligator’s throat. They were the Timucua Indians—as depicted in the now-famous images created by a 16th-century Flemish engraver named Theodor DeBry.

DeBry hinted at the time that his engravings were based on sketches by Frenchman Jacques Le Moyne, who was part of an expedition to northeast Florida in 1564. For many years, scholars accepted that explanation. But in recent years, questions began to be raised: Why are the alligators depicted as having ears? Why are mountains sometimes shown in the background? How could these indigenous people on Florida’s Atlantic coast be drinking from Pacific Ocean nautilus shells?

The authenticity of the images has since been questioned. And archaeologists and historians have pieced together a different portrait of the Timucua people, one that is less exotic but more believable:

Some 200,000 Timucua lived in north Florida and south Georgia when the Europeans arrived. Their villages were organized into about 35 distinct groups, each with its own territory and chief. They grew corn, squashes, and other plants, though the majority of their foods probably came from hunting animals and gathering plants.

They also spearfed fish from canoes and caught them in nets and weirs. Hunters, sometimes disguised in deer costumes to get near their prey, used bows and arrows, snares, and other techniques. Sometimes fires were lit to drive game toward waiting hunters or into nets.

The villages also had granaries and round council houses, some large enough to hold hundreds of people. In these, villagers met to take care of community business and to dance and hold ceremonies, which at times included taking Black Drink, traditionally drunk from a whelk shell cup.

Like other Florida Indians, the Timucua decorated themselves with paint and tattoos and wore bone hairpins and shell and bone ornaments. They made clothing from animal hides and plant fibers, including Spanish moss. Men wore ear ornaments, including some fashioned from fish bladders.

Families lived in small, circular, palm-thatched houses shaped like round pyramids. Low benches for sitting and sleeping lined the walls. Small smudge fires under the benches helped ward off insects.

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A MOUNTAINOUS MISTAKE

Through a colossal geographical error, Europeans named the Appalachian Mountains after the Apalachee Indians of Florida. It all came about after the early French colonists asked Florida Indians where to find silver or gold. They thought the Indians said that the Apalachee lived in a mountainous region where precious metals could be mined. European writers and cartographers later equated the territory of the Apalachee with the Appalachian Mountains; hence, the name.

THE APALACHEE PLAYED A MEAN GAME OF BALL

The Apalachee Indians—highly successful farmers and traders who resided in the Tallahassee Hills region—had a reputation for wealth and power that was acknowledged by Indians throughout the peninsula. Once they were missionized, their agricultural prowess earned their region a reputation as the breadbasket for Spanish St. Augustine. But among mission friars, they also gained another reputation: They were fierce, violent competitors in a ballgame that could vie with Harry Potter’s Quidditch for its fanfare, complexity, and potential for injuries.

The ball games, steeped in tradition and ancient beliefs, lasted half a day and involved 50 or even 100 people on a side. Betting was intense, and players often got hurt. A game would involve entire towns in Apalachee territory, a fertile farm belt between two rivers in the Tallahassee Hills region of the Panhandle.

The competition would begin when one town challenged another by dispatching a courier whose face and torso were painted red and black and who was adorned with bells and rattles and wore horns and a badger’s tail. (A friar at an Apalachee mission wrote that the courier looked like the devil himself.)

Centuries-old rituals were used in raising the seven-foot-high goalpost in the home team’s plaza. Sassafras pegs anchored wild grape vines that six women and six men used to hoist the pole up. They pulled the pole’s butt into an anchoring hole in which a skull or scalp had been placed. Atop the pole went an eagle’s nest and shells, probably large conchs. Omens and rituals surrounded every aspect of the game. The night before was a time of dancing and lasciviousness, according to one friar’s account.

In the game, players kicked a hard deerskin ball at the goalpost. One point was awarded for hitting the post, two if the ball was kicked into the eagle’s nest on top. The first team to reach 11 points won the game. Typically the players were men, although women sometimes also played.

Even friars and Spanish soldiers stationed at Apalachee missions enjoyed the spectacle of the game. But in the late 1600s they began debating its propriety. One friar wrote this description of the game: “When a scrimmage pile is broken up, four or five players are stretched lifeless. Others have their eyes gouged out, and many arms, legs, and ribs are broken. Buckets of water are poured on the survivors, and the game continues until sunset.”

The mission priests also questioned whether the game was tied to demonic practices. An Indian told one friar that the games were dedicated to the supernatural beings associated with the sun, thunder, and rain—all elements important to a successful harvest. Ultimately some Apalachee chiefs admitted it was indeed non-Christian, and the games were halted.
Early Indian royalty enjoyed symbols of power and position

Among the most spectacular artifacts left behind by Florida’s indigenous people are nine copper breastplates embossed with figures of hawk dancers, birdmen, falcons, and other symbols of the Upper World. Archaeologists discovered them in 1975 when excavating a Lake Jackson mound that a private owner unknowingly had been using for fill dirt.

Today this site in Tallahassee is considered one of the great archaeological discoveries in Florida. Lake Jackson was the capital town of the Apalachee’s early ancestors, known as the Fort Walton culture. Generations of Fort Walton chiefs, their families, and other elite individuals lived there from about 1,000 to 1,500 A.D. They developed sophisticated farming techniques that they passed down through the generations to the Apalachee. They also passed down a hierarchical social structure in which chiefs were treated like royalty.

The site has seven large flat-topped mounds that once served as platforms for ancestral temples and homes for the ruling class. The mounds, one of them 36 feet high and as long as a football field, were physical reminders of the chief’s power.

Complex Society

The Apalachee were the most densely populated and politically complex of all the Florida Indians. United in a single political unit governed by a paramount chief, they traded in networks that extended hundreds of miles north to the Appalachian Mountains and beyond. The bulk of the population, estimated to be 50,000 in the mid-1500s, lived in small farmsteads on fertile land between the Aucilla and Ochlockonee rivers, where they cultivated corn, beans, squashes, and other crops.

This painting, “Bird Man Dancer,” artfully captures the mask worn by the Bird Man on the copper breastplate.

From here, the chief ruled his realm, giving orders, offering supplication to supernatural beings, and collecting tribute from vassal chiefs in the form of crops, rabbit furs, bear skins, feather cloaks, and a host of other valued goods. During the excavation, archaeologists discovered that ruling families had also used the mounds to inter their dead, literally wrapping them in luxury and surrounding them with magnificent objects of anthracite, copper, lead, mica, graphite, steatite, and greenstone—all exotic to the area. Among the spangles, ornaments, plates, pendants, pipes, and adornments were the copper breastplates.

The breastplates are decorated with raised images, hammered into the copper from the opposite side. Some depict raptorial birds—eagles, hawks, and falcons—symbols reflecting the importance of the chiefs and their families, their ties to the supernatural, and their status as a link between villagers and the powers that controlled nature. Some of the breastplates are embossed with figures of chiefs or priest–chiefs wearing bird costumes—depictions of hawk dancers or Birdman, an important figure in ancient Mississippian Indian culture associated with warfare, dancing, and games.
WHY DID THE INDIANS AGREE to become Christians and live at mission villages? In short, they were made to. Spanish officials invited important chiefs to St. Augustine, hosted them at feasts, and presented gifts of blankets, tools, wheat flour, and Spanish clothing. In return the chiefs agreed to be baptized—often on the spot—and to accept Christian names. They also agreed to welcome friars to their villages. In essence, the chiefs aligned themselves with the power of the Spaniards and helped to bring their own people to Catholicism.

Mission Indians were taught to read and write Spanish, recite the catechism, pray, sing and serve at Catholic Mass, raise and eat new foods, use new tools, and much more. At times the learning was harsh. Friars whipped Indians who skipped services or religious schooling; only chiefs and married women were said to be exempt from such treatment.

The friars worked to eradicate Indian beliefs and practices they saw as morally corrupt or at odds with Catholic teachings. They made converts whose children then grew up in Christian families. In a generation or two there was little alternative to the mission system.

Indians who grew up in the missions were Christians, just as steeped in religion as the Spanish colonists in St. Augustine. Some joined religious confraternities and associations; others practiced self-flagellation on Holy Thursday before Easter.

But the Indians didn’t always embrace the missions. A short-lived Timucua rebellion took place in 1656. A decade earlier, a major Apalachee rebellion erupted, destroying most of their missions and resulting in the deaths of a Spanish official, his wife and children, and three friars.

The Spanish responded by sending soldiers, along with 500 recruits from Timucua missions, to quell the disturbance. They faced a huge army of Apalachee warriors—8,000, according to one account. A fierce battle ensued; the Spaniards fired 2,700 musket balls before retreating. The loss of life devastated the Apalachee. Ultimately, the Spanish hanged 12 Apalachee rebel leaders and sentenced 26 to hard labor. The chiefs again rendered obedience to the crown and church, and the missions were rebuilt.

CLEVER COUNTERFEITERS

Mission Indians quickly learned how to live in the Spanish world—and even to game the system. In 1695, two innovative young Apalachee men figured out how to make counterfeit Spanish coins. After finding a broken pewter plate on a St. Augustine street, they hand-carved a wooden mold in the design of a Spanish coin, melted the pewter, and cast nine counterfeit coins. They gave two of the coins to an innocent friend to buy pastries at a St. Augustine shop. The shopkeeper didn’t notice the coins were fakes, so they bought more pastries. The scam was discovered when a resident received one of the coins in change and noticed it was not silver. The counterfeiters were arrested and sentenced to hard labor, but their unwitting friend was freed.
THE FIRST RAID took place in 1680, a decade after the founding of Charleston. Seeking to pry Spain’s hold from Florida, Carolinians and their Indian allies attacked Spanish missions on the Georgia coast and in northern Florida.

They continued their attacks in the early 1700s, destroying more Florida Timucua missions. Then they turned their attention to Apalachee territory—sacking and burning churches and hammering mission bells into submission. Catholic Indians were tortured and burned at the stake. Three hundred Apalachee men and a thousand women and children were forcibly marched back to Carolina and resettled there.

The raiders also captured several thousand mission Indians to sell as slaves. Others opted to leave Florida and follow the raiders back to the Carolinas. Additional raids from 1705 to 1707 finished off the missions, in the process routing Spanish soldiers who were stationed in the provinces to protect them.

By 1710 northern Florida was abandoned; all that remained were the ruins of the missions. Ten refugee mission villages were set up near St. Augustine; they housed 942 Indians in 1717, according to a census.

Indian raiders then began to rampage through the rest of Florida. They sacked Florida Indian towns and took slaves. Non-Christian Indians began seeking safety in St. Augustine, bringing the number of refugees there to slightly more than 1,000 in 1726. But a decade later, after another epidemic and a raid by Carolina militia and Indians on the main mission town outside St. Augustine, only 340 Indians remained.

The raiders continued their scourge, reaching as far south as Key West and annihilating the Calusa and other South Florida Indian groups. When Spain ceded Florida to Great Britain in 1763, only about 95 Indians still lived in two mission towns near St. Augustine and about 100 lived in Pensacola. Most of these remaining Indians went with the Spanish to Cuba and Veracruz. The Florida Indians were no more.

About that same time, some of the raiders, as well as Creek and other Indians from the north, began to resettle northern and then central Florida. Those newcomers are the ancestors of the Seminole, Miccosukee, and Creek Indians who live today in Florida.

THE LAST TIMUCUA INDIAN
What happened to the Indians living in St. Augustine after they left Florida with the Spanish in 1763? Historians traced them to Guanabacoa, Cuba. There they discovered the name of the last known Timucua Indian: Juan Alonso Cabale. Records show he was born in 1709 at a St. Augustine mission; married a Yamasee Indian woman, María Rosa Tuslipalea, and had two sons, Juan and Francisco. The entire family was resettled in Guanabacoa, where Cabale died on November 14, 1767.

By the end of the 17th century, diseases had decimated the Timucua population, leaving only a few hundred, and reduced the number of Apalachee to about 8,500. Then came another scourge: Militia from Britain’s South Carolina colony began raiding the missions.

A Florida mission village burns after an attack.
Traveling in ancient Florida

When Spaniards arrived in Florida they found a world of canoes. In such a watery place, canoes were an ideal form of transportation. They could glide through narrow passages on shallow waterways, as well as brave deeper water along the coastlines.

They carried cargo as well as people, helped fishers catch dinner, and, in one reported instance, were fastened together and topped with mats and awnings. Longer canoes could carry lots of passengers; a 1612 account mentions a canoe that held 40 people. Sometimes there were caravans, with as many as 60 canoes traveling together. Archaeologists say canoes also connected cultures over long distances, and that Florida natives used them for trading throughout eastern North America.

Today, more ancient canoes have been unearthed in Florida than anywhere in the nation—about 400 from over 225 sites around the state.

The largest single cache was found in Newnans Lake, east of Gainesville, where 101 canoes were discovered in 2000. They lay partially buried in the dry lakebed, exposed by drought.

The canoes are called “dugouts” because people fashioned them by hollowing out logs, usually pine but sometimes cypress. Most of the Newnans canoes were 2,300 to 5,000 years old. All were about two feet wide; the longest was just over 31 feet, the shortest half that length.

Why so many canoes in one place? Scholars don’t know, but there is probably no single reason. Prevailing winds may have washed canoes from around the lake into this 1.5 mile-long area. The historic name for the lake is also suggestive: Pithlachocco, which appears on 19th-century maps and documents, and has been translated from similar Seminole words for “boat house” or “place of long boats.” Perhaps Newnans had long been a place where canoes were made and used, a place where people crossed paths on canoe trips elsewhere, or a special meeting place.

Information for this article was provided by Darcie MacMahon, exhibits director, and Donna Ruhl, Florida Archaeology collection manager, at the Florida Museum of Natural History.
Experience and imagine…

Florida abounds with sites that commemorate its first people. We list several on this map, but there are many more. Visit our website, floridahumanities.org, for information.

Museum of Florida History, Tallahassee: A new multidimensional exhibit highlights Florida’s indigenous people, the arrival of Spanish ships, and the peninsula’s 16th-century cultural mix. It features colorful murals, recreated settings, artifacts, and interactive and hands-on activities.

Mission San Luis de Apalachee, Tallahassee: This is a striking recreation of a mission settlement inhabited by more than 1,400 Apalachee Indians. Visitors see how the Indians and the Spanish coexisted four centuries ago.

Florida Museum of Natural History, Gainesville: A featured site is based on the discovery of 101 dugout canoes at nearby Newmans Lake; another, based on new research, celebrates Florida’s pre-Columbian past.

Crystal River State Park: This “Weeden Island culture” site was one of the longest continuously occupied in Florida and includes 61 acres of burial mounds, temple/platform mounds, a plaza area, and a substantial midden.

Weedon Island, St. Petersburg: The visitor’s center interprets natural, cultural and archaeological history of pre-Columbian Indians who lived in the area. Native Americans helped design the center.

De Soto National Memorial, Bradenton: The site commemorates the Spanish explorer’s expedition, but nearby Emerson Point offers Portavant, southwest Florida’s largest Indian temple mound, and the surrounding Tocobaga midden complex.

Randell Research Center, Pine Island near Fort Myers in Lee County: Artifacts, remnants of an ancient canal, sand burial mounds and a 3,700-foot interpretive walkway highlight this site, a Calusa village for 1,500 years.

Mound House, Fort Myers Beach: This unusual exhibit was created by digging out a 1950s in-ground swimming pool. The pool cavity has been transformed into a room within the Calusa’s shell mound where visitors see the site’s 2,000-year history through a cross-sectioned view.

Miami Circle: This mysterious Tequesta site was discovered in the heart of downtown Miami. The property is not open for regular visits, but the museum History Miami tells its story.

Jupiter Inlet, near Jupiter: A museum and midden make this a good site to understand the environment of the Jaega, a canoe culture that lived on its catches of fish, turtles, alligators, and manatees.

Woodover Bog People, Brevard Museum of History and Natural Science, Titusville: Showcases one of the nation’s most important and productive archaeological sites; Windover Pond was the burial ground for natives who lived in the area about 7,000 years ago.

Jacksonville Museum of Science and History: The museum features models of local Indian mounds and Timucua Indians, showing how they dressed and decorated themselves.

Jacksonville Museum of Science and History and Natural Science, Titusville: Showcases one of the nation’s most important and productive archaeological sites; Windover Pond was the burial ground for natives who lived in the area about 7,000 years ago.

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Miami Circle: This mysterious Tequesta site was discovered in the heart of downtown Miami. The property is not open for regular visits, but the museum History Miami tells its story.
Don’t miss our launch parties for “Teaching Florida” website

Watch for our launch parties starting this fall, when we premiere our new educational website, TeachingFlorida.org. The first event is scheduled for November in St. Petersburg. Several more are planned for cities around the state later this year and continuing into 2013. We’ll let you know the details, times, and places via the media and on our Facebook page and main website, floridahumanities.org.

The new Teaching Florida website is designed to be an educational tool for Florida teachers—although we think anyone interested in knowing more about Florida history and culture will enjoy it. Featured will be expertly researched articles accompanied by dynamic lesson plans and classroom activities created by Florida teachers. All articles are aligned to stated Next Generation Sunshine State Standards.

Also provided will be links to numerous primary and secondary resources, images, related topics, and audio programs.

The website’s first unit will focus on Colonial Florida, with an emphasis on St. Augustine. The next unit, planned for Spring 2013, will focus on Florida in the Civil War. Eventually, the site will grow to encompass other major Florida humanities topics.

Community groups can host PrimeTime reading programs

We are accepting applications from public libraries and nonprofit community groups that would like to be hosts to PrimeTime Family Reading Time.

PrimeTime is a free, six-week reading program targeting underserved and low-literacy families. Led by specially trained humanities scholars and storytellers, the program uses award-winning children’s books to relate literature to personal experiences and real life.

Agencies may apply for up to $10,000 in funding to present three six-week programs over a two-year period. The programs may be presented in English, Spanish, French, or bilingually. Go to our website, floridahumanities.org/primetime to find PrimeTime information.

Seeking nominees for Florida writing award

December 15 is the deadline to nominate candidates for the 2013 Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing. This award recognizes a living Florida author for “a distinguished, highly regarded, and influential body of work” that has had a major influence on Floridians.

Nominations may be made by publishers, agents, booksellers, or colleagues knowledgeable about the author’s accomplishments and influence. Visit floridahumanities.org for more information.

FORUM receives honors for magazine excellence

FORUM magazine received an award for “Best Overall Magazine” in the 2012 Florida Magazine Association (FMA) competition. This third-place honor is one of four awards FORUM received, all in the category for magazines of associations.

Others: Our Summer 2011 Florida Book Awards issue won second place for special-theme issues; the article “Who Started the Myth about a Fountain of Youth,” by J. Michael Francis, in the Fall 2011 issue won second place for in-depth reporting; and our regular feature, “My Favorite Florida Place,” won third place for best department.

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Discover Florida’s Spanish heritage
at upcoming Tampa conference

A cooking demonstration, poetry, music, children’s activities, an oral-history project, scholarly presentations, and much more will be featured during the weeklong “Florida’s Spanish Heritage” commemoration in Tampa, October 13–20, 2012. These events, organized by the University of South Florida’s Institute for the Study of Latin America, will take place at many venues in Ybor City, at the Tampa Bay History Center, and elsewhere.

The community-based activities begin Saturday, Oct. 13, with two programs at the Centro Asturiano in Ybor City: Historian Gary Mormino presents an interactive cooking demonstration highlighting “500 Years of Eating in Florida”; and Cuban poet, essayist, and playwright Orlando Rossardi features poetry and Spanish-style guitar music.

Several acclaimed scholars from Florida and around the country will make presentations starting October 17 on how Latin American and Caribbean histories have been intertwined with Florida’s. The opening keynote address, “The Latin American History of the United States,” will be delivered by Felipe Fernández-Armesto, the William P. Reynolds Professor of History at Notre Dame University.

The sessions are free and open to the public, but those planning to attend must register online. See our website, floridahumanities.org, for more information and links to the conference website.

The Florida Humanities Council helped fund this conference, as well as two conferences earlier this year at the University of Miami and at Flagler College in St. Augustine. These events are designed to advance the knowledge Floridians have of their Spanish past. They are being held in preparation for our state’s 500th-anniversary commemoration next year of Spanish explorer Ponce de León’s 1513 landing on Florida Atlantic coast.

Join us in Spain!

Journey with us next spring as we explore Florida’s cultural roots in Spain. We’ll learn about our history in medieval cities and villages that were home to explorers and kings, examine 16th-century architecture and historic documents, and savor local cuisine and regional wine as we make our way from the city of Madrid to the ancient port of Avilés.

Our trip, scheduled for March 10–17, 2013, will be led by historian J. Michael Francis, a distinguished author and scholar who has researched and written extensively about the historical ties between Spain and Florida.

Bring a Florida speaker
to your community

Our 2012–2013 Speaker’s Bureau offers presenters who can enlighten, entertain, and engage audiences at your local meetings and events. In conjunction with Florida’s upcoming 500th-anniversary, our roster of speakers will be exploring different aspects of Florida’s Spanish history and heritage.

Nonprofit organizations can apply for funding to help bring speakers to their communities. For more details and to apply, visit our website at floridahumanities.org/speakers.

Listen to history

Go to our website, floridahumanities.org, to hear lively audio programs on Florida’s Spanish history. Our series of 100 brief programs, recorded and edited by producer Bill Dudley, won the 2012 Hampton Dunn Broadcasting Award from the Florida Historical Society.
HOW POWER WAS BROKERED IN SPANISH COLONIAL FLORIDA

By J. Michael Francis

In late July, 1600, a small group of Timucua nobles appeared in St. Augustine to inform Florida’s governor that their new chief, a woman named doña Ana, was on her way to see him. Gov. Gonzalo Méndez de Canzo quickly summoned a local merchant and placed an order for a yellow satin dress, with soft velvet lining and sleeves sewn from gold and silver thread. He would pay for this with royal funds and present it and other gifts to the new chief on her arrival to St. Augustine. After all, he later explained to authorities in Spain, doña Ana, chief of San Pedro (modern Cumberland Island, just over the Georgia border) was an important ally who had come to St. Augustine to “render her obedience” to the Crown.

This was not an unusual event. Back in 1597, within weeks of Méndez’s arrival, more than 25 Indian chiefs came from around La Florida to “render their obedience” to the new governor. In exchange for their loyalty, Méndez followed the long-standing practice of his predecessors, offering visiting rulers a variety of gifts, including hatchets, iron hoes, knives, scissors, fish hooks, blankets, hats, socks, shoes, shirts, fine wool cloth, glass beads, and even silk ribbons and buttons. A number of chiefs were fitted with tailor-made new suits, or as in doña Ana’s example, fine dresses made of satin and velvet. To sustain them during their stay, native rulers (and their entourages) always received a healthy supply of wheat flour, maize, biscuits, and other foodstuffs. In just his first two months as governor, Méndez provided visiting chiefs with more than 1,300 pounds of flour and 500 pounds of maize, all paid for out of Florida’s royal treasury.
Accepting “obedience” had its costs. But Spanish officials saw this investment as critical to their success. Throughout the colonial period, Europeans were vastly outnumbered by Florida’s native population, and St. Augustine’s governors were never able to impose their will over southeastern chiefdoms. Instead, they opted to negotiate alliances. Some chiefs, on the other hand, chose to “render their obedience,” but not because they feared Spanish military might. Rather, such alliances gave them access to rare and prestigious items, which they used to increase their own power.

Over time, the cost of obedience only increased for the Crown. Between 1615 and 1650, the annual budget for “Indian expenses” quadrupled. Florida’s “Indian expense” account was often overdrawn, leading some Spanish officials to complain about the fund. Some argued that Indian chiefs accepted Spanish gifts not with a sense of submission, but rather with one of entitlement, adding that many rulers came to expect these gifts as a form of tribute owed to them. In other words, rather than rendering their obedience to the Crown, Indian leaders increasingly viewed such gifts as a right.

Yet Florida’s governors had few alternatives. If they wanted access to Indian labor and tribute, gifts had to be given. Alliances were not free in La Florida. As historian Amy Bushnell has correctly observed, “when [gifts] were delayed, loyalty faltered.”

If Spanish gifts helped to secure and maintain Indian alliances, they also played a critical role in the political economy of southeastern Indian chiefdoms. Control over the distribution of highly valued European prestige items such as metal tools, glass beads, and cloth could augment chiefly authority. Dressing in exotic clothing set rulers apart from their subjects and their competitors. Not surprisingly then, southeastern chiefs increasingly competed for access to such items. But access required obedience, at least in name.

By the late 16th century, several chiefs around St. Augustine proved particularly adept at this. Doña Ana was just one of them. When she arrived in St. Augustine to meet the governor, she had just inherited her position from her uncle don Juan, who had passed away at the age of 29. Before his untimely death, don Juan was one of the most powerful Indian rulers in La Florida, and one of St. Augustine’s most important allies. In 1595, one Spanish observer described don Juan and his wife as good Christians who spoke Spanish well and dressed like Spaniards.

In 1596, Spain’s King Philip II issued a royal decree granting don Juan an annual salary and rations equivalent to that of a Spanish soldier stationed in St. Augustine. The decree commended don Juan for providing maize to St. Augustine, as well as military service against its enemies. It also praised his commitment to the Christianization of
his subjects, alleging that the chief had issued a proclamation that any Indian who refused to become a Christian would be banished from his chiefdom.

As don Juan’s services to the Crown increased, so too did the value of his gifts. In 1598, the Spanish Crown granted him a payment of 250 ducats (about a fourth of the annual salary of Florida’s governor and more than twice the annual salary of a Spanish soldier). At the time, don Juan was perhaps the only southeastern chief who possessed his own horse.

Another powerful Indian ruler of the late 16th century was doña María, the female chief of the Timucua village of Nombre de Dios, located just “two musket shots” from St. Augustine. Married to a Spanish soldier, doña María could read and write in fluent Spanish. Like don Juan, she also enjoyed favor from St. Augustine’s officials, and from the Crown. A royal decree from August 1598 acknowledged her services to the Crown and ordered that she be rewarded with gifts and clothing “not to exceed 150 ducados.”

In one of several letters she wrote to Spain’s monarch, doña María explained that she had been a Christian since early childhood. She added that her mother not only was the “first Christian” Indian in the province, but that she had provided valuable military assistance to the Spanish when the “English corsair” (Francis Drake) attacked St. Augustine in 1586. Doña María’s subjects worked Spanish fields around St. Augustine and helped construct its wooden fortress. When visiting chiefs arrived to meet with Florida’s governor, they often stayed in doña María’s village.

Her loyalty did not go uncompensated. By 1604, it appears that doña María was able to extend her political authority far beyond Nombre de Dios and its surrounding villages. In fact, sources suggest that she likely replaced doña Ana as the principal ruler (cacica) of San Pedro.

Spanish goods enjoyed a certain prominence among Florida’s Indian chiefs, who increasingly used these items as replacements for traditional symbols of power and authority, such as copper ornaments, fine skins, and shell beads. Indian rulers then introduced these luxury goods into their own political economy, distributing European “gifts” to other chiefs in exchange for loyalty. Gaining access to rare and prestigious European luxury goods could reinforce, perhaps even increase, a leader’s power and influence. But it was also a risky practice.

By accepting Spanish “gifts,” Indian chiefdoms became increasingly drawn into the commodity-driven economy of Spain’s expanding colonial empire. At times, these exchanges disrupted local power relations, leading to violent clashes between chiefdoms, as leaders competed for control over rare prestige goods.

Finally, the decision to accept Spanish “gifts” also carried with it certain obligations, at least in the minds of Florida’s Spanish authorities. By taking these gifts, Indian chiefs were expected to submit to Spanish power, both spiritual and temporal. Over time, as the value of these luxury goods increased, so too did Spanish demands for tribute, labor, and loyalty. Yet despite the risks, many native rulers succeeded in taking advantage of their ties to Spanish authorities to increase their own power and prestige. Southeastern chiefs such as doña Ana, don Juan, and doña María successfully manipulated their alliances with St. Augustine to bolster their own political authority. They were not alone.

Following her initial visit to St. Augustine in 1600, doña Ana returned periodically to render her obedience to the Crown. Each time, she received a supply of gifts from Florida’s governor. In exchange, she brought Indian laborers to work St. Augustine’s fields or to provide assistance with construction projects. On other occasions, she sent maize to feed the garrison’s slave population.

In 1601, after several years of drought conditions had threatened St. Augustine’s food supply, doña Ana agreed to provide the Spanish city with one thousand arrobas (25,000 pounds) of maize, which she promised to collect from the various chiefdoms under her authority. On January 28, 1602, one of San Pedro’s Indian leaders arrived in St. Augustine with a cargo of 983 ½ arrobas of maize, which he presented on doña Ana’s behalf. But this was no gift. Each arroba cost the Florida treasury four reales, which was to be paid directly to doña Ana. Rendering obedience, indeed!

J. Michael Francis is the Hough Family Chair of Florida Studies at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. His most recent book is Murder and Martyrdom in Spanish Florida: Don Juan and the Guale Uprising of 1597.
The Seminole proudly kept to their traditions, save a few important items adopted from others: silver, the sewing machine, and of course, the occasional boater hat.

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JUST BEFORE SPANISH COLONISTS withdrew from Florida, taking the few hundred remaining indigenous Indians with them, natives from the north began moving in. Most were Lower Creek Indians from Alabama and Georgia. They saw opportunity in the newly abandoned mission agricultural fields, open hunting lands, and the feral cattle left behind by Spanish ranchers. In the early 1800s, they began settling in the northern and central areas formerly occupied by Apalachee and Timucua natives.

The newcomers started growing crops, raising cattle, hunting, fishing, and trading with Europeans for manufactured goods. It wasn’t long before these Indians had a society of their own, independent of the Creek nation they had left behind. They took on a new identity: Seminoles, a name derived from the Spanish word cimarrones, used to identify non-Christian Indians living apart from their traditional lands.

More Creeks migrated to Florida in the 1830s and 1840s, many driven by the U.S. Indian-removal policy or military action. They were joined by escaped slaves, people called Black Seminoles. Small groups of indigenous Indians still in Florida may have assimilated with the Seminoles, also.

But white settlers were moving in, too. Fearing friction and encouraged by federal policy, they pushed to have the Seminoles moved out of Florida. War broke out between the Seminoles and the U.S. government and raged intermittently for years. The Indians moved farther and farther south, away from Anglo settlements but there, too, they were hunted by federal troops. Many were captured and forced to relocate west of the Mississippi River. Several hundred sought refuge in the isolated Everglades and other South Florida wetlands. The Seminoles living in Florida today are their descendants.
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**I always had a thirst,**

a hunger, for the history of my people. But when I was growing up, nobody talked much about it. There wasn’t time for much besides survival. We lived in chickees on the Brighton Seminole Reservation. My family was dirt poor and spent most of our time working in the fields, working with cattle, anything we could find, even cutting palm fronds for the Catholics to use on Palm Sunday. As a kid, I would hear my uncles talk about when the Seminoles all lived in camps across Florida and how they missed the free hunting and trapping way of life. When they came onto the reservation, it was like a death sentence to them. A lot of them became migrant workers just to keep food on the table. The struggle to survive overshadowed the memories of the shooting and guns and wars and genocide of the past.

When I was a boy, I also spent time in the world outside of the reservation. At the age of three I caught polio, and they took me away for three years in a crippled children’s hospital in Orlando. I remember when I finally came back. The first night I woke up in a chickie, I could smell the hog pens. I realized then that God had pity on me to put me on an Indian reservation, because nothing was going to come to me; I had to get off my ass and run it down myself. By seven I had thrown my braces into a cabbage tree. I played four years of high school football at Okeechobee High, rode bulls, went out with the pretty girls. I was determined to make it. If there was ever any prejudice directed at me, I didn’t know it.

As I got older, my hunger to learn about my people’s history only got stronger. I started doing a lot of independent research. I asked questions. People would tell me stories passed down, but I knew there was more. The more I studied, the more I didn’t understand the magnitude of what took place among my people. As time went on, I found out that other Tribal members really wanted to know the history, too. My phone would ring off the hook with others wanting me to find out historical information for them. Long ago, they began calling me a Tribal historian. I’ve got a history degree. I’ve amassed a large library of books written about my people, from every angle you can imagine. The past is very, very real to me. I am worried it could disappear unless we make a determined effort to preserve our history.

Last year I signed on as the Seminole Tribe’s representative in the Viva Florida 500 project [commemorating the 500th anniversary of Spanish explorers landing on Florida’s shore]. I didn’t do this to make a politically correct statement that will render everybody happy. I did it to make sure that the history of my people is represented. We are here to educate, not forgive. We are here to enlighten, not accuse. We want to keep very alive the memories of those days when the Europeans first came. We want to tell who the Spanish people were who came to our shores, and we want to educate people about exactly what they did.

“The past is very, very real to me. I am worried it could disappear unless we make a determined effort to preserve our history.”

**Author Willie Johns looks out of the window of a helicopter flying over the reservation. He is part of a team documenting the locations of historic campsites that Seminoles occupied for many years.**
People may not realize how many tribes and native peoples existed before being decimated by the disease and warfare brought on by the Conquistadors. With the priests looking on, Spanish explorers took out the aboriginal Floridians with massacres in the name of God. And they sent the good news back to the King! But, we can only speak for ourselves. The Florida Indians of long ago could illustrate what happened, but they didn’t write books and journals.

Indians all across America shared stories that were kept alive and passed down through the generations about what the European invaders did. That’s how it was told to me: The truth of those days was kill the Indian—or give him a blanket, invite him to supper, sneeze on his blanket, then send him away.

Yet, we survived all of this atrocity. We actually learned from our attackers. We learned to practice slavery from them, and we even learned the behavior to sell out our own people. Creek warriors did real well in that regard; they would come down here and hunt down the other Indians the same way the white man did. They would sell Indians as slaves just like the white man did.

The Spanish brought in their culture and tried to make us a part of it. They were actually merciful in some ways. After they put you in your place, enslaved and unarmed, they would Christianize you and make you a Catholic. Our cultures clashed, and the Spanish had the upper hand.

When I think of the past, I feel like we were always running. For hundreds of years, we were on the run. We ran here from all over. Some of us ran here earlier than others. We Seminoles believe we are descended from the indigenous tribes of Florida, running and hiding like all the others. You had the Calusa, the Apalachee, the Mayaimi along Lake Okeechobee, the Ais people of the Indian River Lagoon, the Tocobaga in Tampa, Arawak in the Caribbean, Timucua up in the northeast and the Tequesta in the southeast. The individual tribes were too small to engage in effective warfare with the Spanish and their allies. So they ran.

The Seminole Tribe of Florida has a Tribal Historic Preservation Department that is absolutely concerned with the accurate interpretation and preservation of our history—all the way back to the first peoples who occupied this land. Both the State of Florida and the United States, under the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), recognize the Seminole Tribe as the guardian of the ancient southeastern tribes who were eliminated from their home lands. It becomes our official duty to handle repatriations, which can include re-burials of human remains and the return of funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. We have been involved in many, many of these cases.

While all Seminole people have respect for our culture and our ancestors, not all Seminoles agree on how we should relate with our neighbors. Some who have been quite active and vocal about these issues are Independent Seminoles who choose not to be enrolled members of the organized Seminole Tribe of Florida. They frequently speak at public meetings when issues arise where they perceive traditional Seminole culture is being wronged. Some of the Independents want to regain Paradise by loading every person in the state on a boat and then shipping ‘em all out. But that ain’t gonna happen.

I think education is the answer. Some Independents argue that the City of St. Augustine should tear down the old fort (Castillo de San Marcos) because of the atrocities that occurred to Indians there 400 years ago. I look at it differently. I would rather it remain standing so the memories of those days would not...
Those who don’t remember the past are doomed to repeat it. For St. Augustine’s 450th anniversary (planned for 2015), I made a suggestion that it would be cool if we could invite representatives of all the Native tribes who were incarcerated there during and after the Seminole Wars, get them all together, and do a healing ceremony. But some Independents did not agree, so the Tribe refused to endorse the idea.

Many Seminoles would say: “Leave it all alone.” They argue we shouldn’t spend a whole lot of time, money, and effort on worrying about the Spanish Conquistadors—that today there are much bigger things we need to be worried about.

Maybe the best place to focus on the history is in the schools. I don’t think the European invasion is discussed a lot in the classrooms. The Conquistadors came over here 300 years before Andrew Jackson started chasing us. Students are taught more about the three Seminole Wars than the genocide performed by the Europeans and the Americans. In my home of Brighton, our charter school spends a lot of time on language, which is very important to us, and on taking the kids on cultural outings. The Spanish are part of the curriculum, but I don’t believe there is much said about it. We have to change that, in all Florida schools.

It’s too bad we all haven’t been talking about all this history all along. Maybe it would not have been so glorified.

In the end, I don’t believe the Spanish were ever that happy with Florida. We just didn’t have what they were looking so desperately for. They were basically gone by the Revolutionary War. Then along came the American settlers. Wouldn’t you know it, they wanted the Indians’ land. They held their meetings. “How we gonna get the land? What are we gonna do with the Indians?” Somewhere, someone had an idea: “Let’s hire Andy Jackson. He knows what to do: Write up failing treaties, spank ‘em in a few wars, go after ‘em, keep ‘em on the run, put ‘em out West somewhere.”

When the Supreme Court ruled the Indian Removal Act was unconstitutional, ol’ Andy Jackson just said “Stop me,” and rode off after the Indians anyway.

If he defied the law like that today, the federal marshals would be all over him. To tell you the truth, Seminoles today despise Andrew Jackson more than the Conquistadors.

But, you know how they say, “Out of bad things, good things come”? When the Spanish sailed away, they left their horses and cattle here, and we used them to start the Seminole cattle industry.

In fact, for most of the past 100 years in Florida, the Seminoles have thrived in the cattle industry. We once sold the meat and hides to the Cubans, even loaded up cattle on the St. John’s River. People called us the Cow Creeks. Today, we are the fourth-largest calf producers in the country! After we stopped running, those abandoned cattle pulled us through. That was our first casino: the Spanish cow!

If it was Paradise before the Europeans came, Florida was an absolutely horrible place to live after they left. Post-Civil War, you had outlaws, bandits, deserters, every sort of bad individual, all the problems of poverty, everyone hit hard. Before we got reservations we were surviving in little camps all over the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp where only the mosquitoes and gators were supposed to be. Our homeland had shrunk. But we weren’t running anymore.

Our communities began to grow and we began to organize. The Indians who settled in the ‘glades became the Miccosukee and Big Cypress Seminoles. Those who lived to the North were Creek speakers whose descendents are the Brighton Seminoles of today. We survived nearly 500 years of genocide and atrocity with our culture and languages still intact. That is who we are.

The Conquistador is a distant ghost. But we will not forget.

WILLIE JOHNS is Outreach Community Specialist for the Seminole Tribe of Florida.
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Proud and precarious, like a lone weathered cowboy, the historic Red Barn stands still in a gusty green field, withstanding the ghostly fade of time. Windswept, battered, craggy and gnarled, the cypress-planked barn was once bright red and full of community.

Built in 1941 by the Indian Division of the U.S. Civilian Conservation Corps, the Red Barn was the hallowed centerpiece of the Brighton Seminole Reservation, where the 13 stables held the top cowboys’ horses, where thick nails hung heavy leather saddles, where the hay was stored in the loft above, and where the first flames of Tribal government were fanned at meetings and get-togethers among the dirt-poor Seminole Indians. The beloved Red Barn, 16 years older than the organized Tribe itself, was the Seminoles’ first Town Hall.

Seminole Indians worked cattle since the departing Spanish Conquistadors left their horses and cows. But the Seminole Wars and the depression that was Florida after the Civil War scattered the Indians and depleted their first industry. To revive it, the Bureau of Indian Affairs sent a herd of Apache cows and Brahma bulls to the Seminoles in 1936. Five years later the Red Barn was built, along with a water tower and troughs where the cattle were treated for ticks and disease. Today the Seminole Tribe of Florida maintains one of the largest calf-producing operations in the country.

The old Red Barn hasn’t been used since the 1960s. The main part of the Reservation has moved three miles east. Hurricane Wilma took its original wood shingle roof in 2005. Worried the sacred barn might fall, the Tribe held it together with a shiny steel roof. Still, the elements of rot and disrepair robbed the grand icon of its splendor.

It was home to termites and an owl that swooped from the loft to scare intruders. The doors fell off, the wooden walls developed holes, and the unforgiving heat of the cruel Okeechobee sun took its toll. The barn was used as a haunted house during Halloween, and there are stories that marijuana was once hidden here to dry. Children, believing the barn harbors ghosts of old cowboys, stay away from it to this day.

In late 2008, the Tribe’s Historical Preservation Department successfully applied to have the Red Barn listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Political turmoil drew attention from the project, however, until 2012, when Seminole Tribune Editor-in-Chief Camellia Smith Osceola, alarmed at the barn’s eroding condition, called for a Red Barn renovation.

Work on fixing and strengthening the structure has already begun. Preliminary plans call for the barn to anchor a park, serve as a museum, or be used as working barn for 4-H students. A Red Barn Dance is being planned for mid-February, when a National Register plaque and roadside marker will be unveiled.

“From the moment the Red Barn was built, it became a gathering place for all the Seminoles up here, whether they were involved with cattle or not,” says Tribal Historian Willie Johns. “In the middle of kids running around and cowboys taking off their saddles, with horses and cows everywhere, the dream of today’s organized Seminole Tribe of Florida was born. That Old Red Barn is our history and it must be preserved.”

PETER B. GALLAGHER is a Special Projects Writer with the Seminole Tribe of Florida.
SUMMER UPDATE: ALTHOUGH WE ARE STILL MANY MONTHS FROM SAILING...WE HAVE ALREADY BOOKED TWO-THIRDS OF OUR CABINS! DON'T MISS THE BOAT! MAKE YOUR RESERVATION TODAY WITH A $50 PER PERSON DEPOSIT. WWW.MYFLORIDAHISTORY.ORG/CRUISE
“Fish heading our way.”
It’s last light of a June day when my angling buddy Brandon, atop the poling platform of his skiff, spots the pod of tarpon about 50 yards off our bow. I glimpse a patch of nervous water, what might or might not be fins. We had been on the verge of calling it quits.

“You sure you see fish?”
Brandon grabs his fly rod, plays out line. Yeah, he’s sure.

The wind softens through Gasparilla Pass. God’s own sunset airbrushes the Gulf. Not even nips from no-see-ums can detract from the moment. And the cooler still holds a couple of beers.

The tarpon draw nearer. I see the dorsal of one, the tail of another, then a full-body roll—a hundred-plus pounds of silver king.

“Holy shit,” says Brandon.
“Must be 20 of them.”
But well out of casting range. To make a move might spook them. We wait.

EVERY FLORIDIAN needs a go-to place, a sanctuary tried and true, a place to lick our wounds, nourish our souls, howl at our personal moons, and convince ourselves that some small parts of this state have not yet gone completely to hell. For well on 32 years now, ever since my wife was just days away from giving birth to our first son, my place, our place, has been Boca Grande.

Our first visit we stayed at the Gasparilla Inn, which opened in 1913 and is fully deserving of the term “venerable.” After unpacking and getting squared away, I realized that the bellman hadn’t given us a room key, so I headed back to the front desk to get one.

“Sorry, sir, but we do not issue room keys,” the desk clerk told me.
“Here at the Inn, we don’t lock our doors.”

Later that afternoon, while my wife was napping, I grabbed a book and headed for the bar, with its paddle fans dangling from a pecky-cypress ceiling, rattan furniture with overstuffed cushions, and a palpable sense that a calmer more genteel era still prevailed. At the adjacent Pelican Club, with a stuffed brown pelican above the door, Boca Grande’s ultimate sporting trophies were framed and mounted on the walls—tarpon scales, plucked from prized catches over the decades. Hundreds of scales, many double the size of a half-dollar. While the ink had long since faded on some, others bore still readable handwritten inscriptions like: “107 lbs., caught by Andrew Givens, May 17, 1922.”

For an hour or so it was just me and the bartender and no one else. I sipped a gin ‘n tonic. The two of us chatted. I ordered another gin ‘n tonic. We chatted some more until, in mid-

The author’s son, Dash, and wife Debbie head out on the water in a Boston Whaler.
conversation, the bartender made a minor production of looking at his watch and said: “Mr. Morris, I appreciate your company and your conversation, but I must ask you to leave.”

Say what? I had been kicked out of bars before, but barely into a second cocktail? And while conducting myself in civil fashion? I’d brought a book with me for gosh sake, a book.

“It’s five o’clock,” the bartender explained. “And after five, gentlemen must wear jackets.”

I went to the room, slipped into a sport coat, and returned to the bar to finish my drink. Just me and that by-the-rules bartender. Yes, I was chastened, but mostly I was smitten by the notion that Boca Grande was truly a place apart.

For the record, the Gasparilla Inn now issues room keys and the dress code has been relaxed to the point that jackets after five are no longer specifically required. Yet Boca Grande doggedly retains its separate nature.

To get there you must drive over a narrow causeway that includes the state’s only swing bridge, a two-and-a-half mile stretch that until recent years was the only privately owned causeway in Florida. The toll is $6, which dissuades most casual daytrippers, as does the fact that, aside from the Inn, where standard rooms go for $385 during season, nightly accommodations are not abundant. No fancy hotels, no chain motels, and no more than a few dozen rooms at places that rent overnight. If you want to stay on Boca Grande, you either own a place—small, non-spectacular homes with no water views start just shy of $1 million, even in these deflated times—or you rent a house or condo, most typically for a week. To stay any less time defeats the notion of coming to Boca Grande in the first place.

The island is about seven miles long, with a bike/pedestrian/golf cart path running the better length of it, following the old railroad bed traveled by trains that once loaded Peace River Valley phosphate into freighters at docks on Boca Grande Pass. Downtown Boca Grande, all four-square blocks of it, has most everything you could ask for—post office, bank, a couple of cafés and boutiques in the restored train depot, two outfitter shops, a small department store (Fugate’s) and an excellent restaurant, The Temptation, which doubles as the island’s only liquor store. The Temp’s wall murals date to the 1930s and you have missed out on one of Florida’s truly memorable meals if you do not order the bronzed grouper on sautéed Brussels sprouts topped with beurre blanc.

Here, Florida’s traditional seasons still matter and remain strictly delineated. There’s “social season,” which runs from late December until April, when the island fills with generational clans that have migrated here since the Inn opened, moneyed folks from the Northeast.
mostly, descendants of DuPonts and Rockefellers, Cabots and Biddles, many of whom own stately beachfront compounds. Yet Boca Grande is not a Gulf Coast version of Palm Beach, and it diligently tries not to be. In Boca Grande you can have old money or money so new that it needs to sit on the windowsill a few days to ripen in the sun. You can fit right in as long as you don’t flaunt it. Or as long as you don’t blow your cover, as many do, by mispronouncing Boca Grande.

“There’s this tendency by some folks to fancy it. They insist on calling it Boca GRON-day,” says writer David Futch, who comes from an old island family and who, like many longtimers, has often worked part of each year as a tarpon-fishing guide. “We don’t go for that la-di-da stuff. It’s plain ol’ Boca Grand, only we really try to do our best to de-emphasize the grand.”

Social season segues into tarpon season, which stretches into late July, at the whim of the tarpon, whereupon Boca Grande slips into the somnolence of the off-season. It’s a time when you can often walk the full length of the beach, from pass to pass, not encountering another person. Boca Grande remains one of the few places that still observes another Florida tradition: the totally off season. After Labor Day, many of the island businesses, including the Temp, hang out signs that say: “Closed until October.”

Most folks on the island get around in golf carts and the only thing approximating rush hour is the scramble to get to Hudson’s, the island’s only grocery store, before it closes at 5:30 p.m. There’s no longer a gas station in Boca Grande, not since Clyde Nabers closed his downtown Chevron station back in the 1990s. One of my favorite Boca Grande stories involves the time a tour bus showed up on the island and broke down not far from Naber’s. The driver walked into the gas station and asked if Clyde could give him a jumpstart.

“I said I was real sorry, but we didn’t need the business,” Clyde told me. “I’m still not sure how he got that bus started and off the island. But I am sure we don’t need tour buses on Boca Grande.”

That calls to mind the story of the island’s first newspaper, the Boca Grande Journal, which folded in 1947. The paper went out of business because local merchants stopped advertising. But they did this for an altogether uncommon reason: They felt their ads were bringing in too much business.

According to island historian Betty Barndollar, “If they had wanted to work that hard they wouldn’t have come here in the first place.”

Catching a tarpon on a fly rod, though, is hard work of an altogether agreeable variety.

“The fish move closer and closer as it gets darker and darker. Despite the dim light, we can clearly make them out, churning in a daisy chain near the surface. Twenty of them easy, maybe more.

“Now or never,” says Brandon.

We raise our rods, prepare to cast. I aim for one side of the pod, Brandon the other. Not my best-ever cast, but the fly falls near where I want it. I see a swirl, tensing as a tarpon rises and... But, ah, that’s another story.

BOB MORRIS, a fourth-generation Floridian, writes mystery novels set in Florida and the Caribbean and is the author of several nonfiction collections. He lives in Winter Park and teaches creative writing at Rollins College.
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