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Many Histories by the Manatee Mineral Spring

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Driving down Manatee Avenue (State Road 64), it is easy to assume all is recent. Yet going from Holmes Beach on Anna Maria Island eastward through Bradenton and then across the Braden River and on to Arcadia, the road passes impressive history, if one knows to look. Just north of Manatee Avenue in east Bradenton, Reflections of Manatee, Inc., has preserved and interpreted the past around the Manatee Mineral Spring. The historic marker might seem out-of-place but much history is beneath the surface.



A View of the Manatee Mineral Spring (photograph by Uzi Baram)

The spring although capped still empties into the Manatee River, the namesake of the county and a large waterway that starts in the highlands of eastern Manatee County. The Manatee River is the southernmost of five rivers emptying into Tampa Bay. Once known as the Oyster River, for its thick oyster banks, the city of Bradenton stretches on its southern side. Joe Warner's 1986 *The Singing River: A History of the People, Places, and Events Along the Manatee River* is titled after a tale of romantic love between a princess of the Calusa (this gives away its lack of historical accuracy) and her love affair with the son of a Tocobaga chief, with the Manatee River dividing them. In another local history, Lillie B. McDuffee's 1933 *The Lures of Manatee: A True Story of South Florida's Glamorous Past* has a story of a pirate ship half-sunk in the river. Folk tales remind us of the questions that people faced in the mid-19th through early 20th centuries; the ancient mounds by the spring and the fields, abandoned for two decades but still visible, point to the mysteries the settlers faced about the previous inhabitants. Today, archaeological and archival research has recovered evidence of the histories by the spring.



View of Manatee River near the Manatee Mineral Spring (photograph by Uzi Baram)

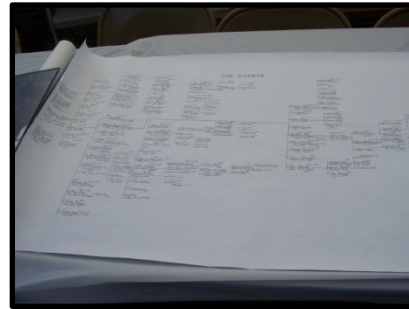
The history around the Manatee Mineral Spring is impressive, complicated and engaging. Reflections of Manatee, Inc., the stewards of the property, has collected a tremendous amount of information on those histories and has been generous in sharing the knowledge with scholars and community members. What is today a field with interpretative signs, a historic marker, sugar cane fields, and gardens was, many times over the centuries, a thriving center of social activities. From evidence of the Native American presence to suggestive insights into the modern period, archaeological excavations have informed the history, expanding understandings for many chapters and revealing new ones.



Eating, Playing, and Listening - Scenes from various Reflections of Manatee events (Photographs by Uzi Baram)

Archaeology is a process that includes background research, archival study, comparative studies, excavations, descriptions of finds, analysis of artifacts and ecofacts, interpretations, and

publications that lead to the history and anthropology of specific places and times. While, at one point, archaeologists engaged in that process behind the scenes, today's ethics include engaging local and descendant communities in the research process. By opening up the process, local insights, information from family histories and oral traditions, and greater collaboration comes forward to improve the science for the archaeology.



Reflections of Manatee hosts excavations, inviting the public and the media to see the process, and a Pioneer Picnic that gathers genealogical information on the previous generations of families that owned the land (Photographs by Uzi Baram)



Community engagement includes On-site Public Outreach Events. Pictured are a Florida Humanities Council supported "Why the Past Matters" lecture by Barbara Little and explanations of artifacts by the Florida Public Archaeology Network. The event included a discussion titled "To Dig or Not To Dig." (Photographs by Uzi Baram)

Archaeological interpretations can enter two spheres: the intense study of the materiality of a particular time period or the study of change over time. The synchronic approach captures and presents a slice of time, the insights into the lives of people at a particular time contextualized and informed by the material evidence that can range from small artifacts of

everyday life to massive architectural remains. The diachronic perspective stresses change over time, how peoples and societies adapted and changed their surroundings to meet culturally-informed needs, traced by studying material remains from the oldest evidence to the most recent. For the Manatee Mineral Spring, the chapters of history are important for the region, and beyond; the change over time is impressive. Both aspects deserve to be better known.

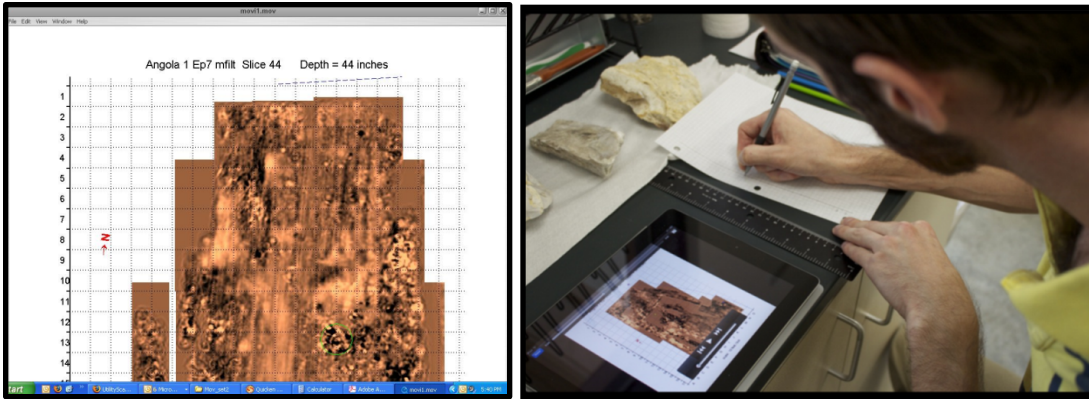
The archaeological research into the area by the Manatee Mineral Spring has included extensive archival research and study of the histories for the region. The first stage of excavations tends to be shovel test pits (STPs), a means to gain a view into the subsurface. The advantage: they are quick and easy and offer a sampling of artifacts and stratigraphy. The results of STPs around the Manatee Mineral Spring consist of artifactual evidence from the many time periods, in fact too many artifacts. That might seem a strange problem for an archaeologist but excavations of complex, artifact-rich sites need scientific control for the levels of history to be meaningfully understood. Facing the challenge, remote sensing surveys of the property offered a view on the subsurface.



Witten Technologies donated a Radar Tomography survey of the property (Photograph by Uzi Baram)

Remote sensing surveys provide guidance for excavations, what the National Park Service calls the ground truth. Witten Technologies provided the technology to differentiate the

material remains inch-by-inch over the property by the Manatee Mineral Spring. The interpretation of the remote sensing information allowed targeted excavations aimed at particular levels of history.



Screen Shot of the Radar Tomography and New College student interpreting the image
(Photograph by Uzi Baram)

The use of one-by-two meter excavation units allow a larger, more controlled approach to the stratigraphy, the levels of the archaeological record. But even with careful excavations, the key to archaeology is the analysis in a lab, where all the artifacts can be cleaned, examined, organized, described, and identified; for Reflections of Manatee, the New College Public Archaeology Lab (NCPAL) has served as the locale for analysis and storage of excavated artifacts. The results have illuminated several chapters from the history by the spring.



Excavations (Photograph by Michael Temple)
Baram)



Analysis in NCPAL (Photograph by Uzi

The archaeological evidence for people living by the spring goes back a thousand years. The first inhabitants are Native Americans who fished and hunted and settled in villages. Those peoples created enormous shell middens and mounds, thriving along the river. Montague Tallant documented the mound by the Manatee Spring back in the early 20th century; only fragments from that history remain.

In May of 1539, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto landed near Tampa Bay, in the homeland of the Tocobaga people. The De Soto National Memorial is a National Park dedicated to the *entrada* even though it is not the landing place of the expedition. De Soto led the first large-scale, organized European exploration of the interior of today's southern United States. The influence was felt throughout the region. But beyond the early naming of what is today Tampa Bay as Baya de Spirito Santo ("Bay of the Holy Spirit"), the Spanish imprint was light in the region. From 1763-1783, the British ruled over Florida. One of the rivers to the north of the Manatee was named after the English earl Hillsborough (the British mapping of the region gave us "Zarazote"). The Spanish returned in 1783 and in 1793 Vicente Folch y Juan surveyed Tampa Bay, including the Manatee River. Folch wrote of his experiences, including encouraging and fearing Native Americans.



Carlos Bicho as "Vicente Folch y Juan" telling of the survey of Tampa Bay at October 2013 Florida Humanities Council-supported event (photograph by Uzi Baram)

During the Second Spanish Period, activities accelerated throughout the Florida borderlands. Some peoples were escaping the pressure of Anglo-American settlers encroaching on their traditional homelands and others were escaping the dominance of Native Americans groups. By the 1770s these groups collectively became known as Seminoles, with the Native Americans on the coast being known as the Spanish Indians. In addition, during the late 18th century to early 19th century, the Manatee River was part of interactions around the Gulf of Mexico that included fishermen, filibusters and other military forces, and havens for freedom. One of the connecting strands for that interactive sphere is the little remembered Cuban fishing rancho industry. As early as the mid-1600s, Spanish fishing ranchos first appeared along the Florida coast. By 1770, there were multiple ships actively engaged in fishing operations off the west coast of Florida. The Cuban fishermen settled in villages or ranchos during the fishing season from August to March. The ranchos served as processing areas where fish were cleaned, salted, and dried. The early ranchos generally were not permanent settlements; after each fishing season ended, the fishermen would return to Havana with fish prepared for the Atlantic market. But the fishermen traded, worked with, and married with local Native Americans and self-emancipated slaves and maroons, free peoples of African heritage, and by the 1790s, some fishermen established permanent year-round ranchos and cultivated gardens and citrus groves. The ranchos became home to a diverse group of Cubans, escaped slaves, Seminoles, Creeks, and other Native Americans. Many fishermen who settled permanently married Native American women. The ranchos were on the coast; inland on the banks of the Manatee River was a community of formerly enslaved Africans and maroons born in freedom in Florida. Settled by warriors who had fought several battles against American forces in northern Florida, the

community is remembered as Angola. As a refuge of freedom, the region was a rallying spot, in the words of Andrew Jackson's aide James Gadsden, for self-emancipated people of African heritage and Native Americans, and a focus for economic and diplomatic activities within the broader Atlantic world. British filibusters, maybe including the famous Alexander Arbuthnot and Robert C. Ambrister or Edward Nicolls and George Woodbine might have had a presence at the mouth of the Manatee River. The maroon settlement could have included farms and homes from the Little Manatee River to Sarasota Bay, including using the strategic location and waters of the Manatee Mineral Spring.



James Bullock as "Abraham" telling of the saga of the freedom-seeking people, including the chapter at Angola at October 2013 Florida Humanities Council-supported event (photograph by Uzi Baram)

In 1821, Spain ceded Florida to the United States. Within three months the free communities across the Gulf Coast were destroyed by a Lower Creek Indian war party. Over 300 men, women, and children were sent into slavery from the community centered by the Manatee River but others escaped to the interior or through southeast Florida, and then to the Bahamas. The "ruins of their cabins" were recorded by John Lee Williams in his 1837 *The Territory of Florida*. In 1835 a US military expedition left Fort Brooke (now Tampa) heading northward to Fort King. A resident of a Sarasota Bay rancho joined the expedition as a translator; Luis Fatio

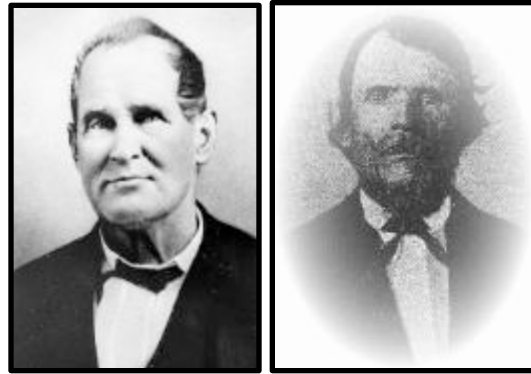
Pacheco was one of only two survivors of the Dade Ambush that triggered the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). At the end of the war, President John Tyler signed the Armed Occupation Act. Its aim was to settle civilians and protect the land gained after the long and bloody war. The Act provided each settler applicant with a 160-acre plot of land a year's supply of food and provisions. To obtain a permanent title to the land, the settler had to erect a dwelling, cultivate a minimum of five acres, and live on the land for at least five years.



Armed Occupation Act Permit (Source: http://www.reflectionsofmanatee.org/06_RiverHistory.html)

Colonization of the Manatee River had actually preceded passage of this law by a number of months. By the date of the Act's passage, many of the original colonists had not only staked their claim, but also brought their families out to join them. Cuban fishermen were instrumental in guiding the first Anglo-American settlers to the Manatee Mineral Spring, Josiah Gates and his brother-in-law Miles Price in 1841. Others joined them and sugar cane, tobacco and cotton became the crops for the slave-holding settlement. Dr. Franklin Branch began harvesting oaks, an early pioneer of the settlement's timber industry; his home became the Branch Fort with a stockade to protect residents during the Third Seminole War (1855-58).

In December 1859, Captain John Curry purchased 30 acres containing the Manatee Mineral Spring from Dr. Franklin Branch. The next year, Captain John moved his extended family. The Currys helped found the Manatee United Methodist Church and a Masonic Lodge.



Dr. Franklin Branch and Captain John Curry
(Source: http://www.reflectionsofmanatee.org/08_WalkingTour.html)

During the Civil War, Union troops were stationed in Manatee in 1864. Also around the turn from that century, the US Corps of Engineers dredged the Manatee River. Two key events at the start of the 20th century: the railroad to Sarasota coming in 1902 and electricity reaching the community in 1903.

In 1943, Manatee (the village had been incorporated in 1888) merged into the City of Bradenton; the area is informally known as East Bradenton. In 1997, Trudy and Jeffrey Williams organized Reflections of Manatee, Inc., for the conservation of historical resources that benefit the general public around the Manatee Mineral Spring. Reflections of Manatee has sponsored archival research, archaeological excavations, public outreach presentations, school trips, and festivals on the property.



Reflections of Manatee, Inc. (Photograph by Uzi Baram)

As part of the commitment to community engagement and public outreach, in 2013 Reflections of Manatee commissioned and placed a series of interpretive signs around the Manatee Mineral Spring. And in October, nine New College students interpreted the new signage for the histories around the spring as part of Reflections of Manatee's History Flows from This Spring public outreach event. The interpretative signs explain archaeology and community, gardens and sugar cane, and many of the chapters of the history including Native American life, Spanish exploration, creating the Village of Manatee, and the Curry houses. The signs have text on how the past matters to community as well as images of artifacts and from historical documents, offering the public an opportunity to discuss history while enjoying today's landscape around the spring.



New College students who led interpretations in October 2013 (Photograph by Uzi Baram)



Interpretative Explanations by New Colleg Students and Academic Lectures by Rosalyn Howard in October 2013 (Photographs by Uzi Baram)



One of the Interpretative Signs by the Manatee Mineral Spring (Courtesy of Reflections of Manatee)

Piecing together the past, going beyond the simplifications and assumptions that muffle history in order to repair our understandings of what happened around the Manatee Mineral Spring is the goal of the research and studies. The individual chapters include stories of successes as well as destruction; the sweep of history illustrates the adaptations and significance of the spring to many peoples and times, but the goal is not to simply have a collection of historical facts. Rather delineating the many histories moves us to recognize the cosmopolitanism of the past, a thousand years of history of different peoples coming together at or near the Manatee Mineral Spring. Whether lives of pre-Columbian Native Americans, the Spaniards recording the coastline, the various peoples of African heritage coming together as a maroon community with help of British filibusters and Cuban fishermen, or the women and men of the Village of Manatee, the past was socially complicated and dynamic with each epoch having its own variation and several aspects of the built environment and modifications of the ecology leaving legacies for the next generation. The many histories around the spring are a reminder of those cosmopolitan eras with their diversity, and even if they are not visible on the surface now, we can appreciate the rich heritage that is beneath our feet.

For more information on the Manatee Mineral Spring,
see the Reflections of Manatee, Inc., website [http://
www.reflectionsofmanatee.org/](http://www.reflectionsofmanatee.org/)

The best history for the Manatee River and Sarasota Bay continues to be *Edge of Wilderness: A Settlement History of Manatee River and Sarasota Bay 1528-1885*, published by Janet Snyder Matthews in 1983. Other resources for the history of the Manatee River include Joe Warner 1986 *The Singing River: A History of People, Places, and Events along the Manatee River*, Lillie McDuffee 1933 *The Lures of Manatee: A True Story of South Florida's Glamorous Past*, and John Lee Williams 1837 *The Territory of Florida, or Sketches of the Topography, Civil and Natural History of the Country, the Climate, and the Indian Tribes from the First Discovery to the Present Time, with a map, views,*