7-1-2003

Forum : Vol. 27, No. 02 (Summer : 2003)

Florida Humanities Council.

Jack E. Davis
Kristin G. Congdon
Tina Bucuvalas
Gary Monroe

See next page for additional authors

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE FLORIDA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

FORUM

SUMMER | 2003

FOULK CULTURE
Eclectic and Unexpected – Just like Florida
FLORIDA HUMANITIES COUNCIL
30 Years of Exploring the Florida Experience

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FHC FORUM / Vol. XXVII, No. 11, SUMMER 2003
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The magazine of THE FLORIDA HUMANITIES COUNCIL
599 Second Street South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701-5005
(727) 553-3801
Website address: www.flahum.org

The Florida Humanities Council is a non-profit organization, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the state of Florida, and private contributors. FHC FORUM is published four times a year and distributed to the friends of the Florida Humanities Council and interested Floridians. If you wish to be added to the mailing list, please request so in writing. Views expressed by contributors to the FORUM are not necessarily those of the Florida Humanities Council.
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AS A HISTORIAN, I TEND TO SEE FLORIDA as an ongoing journey from the past to the present. Literary scholars, on the other hand, explore our state through written words. Art scholars look at it through fine art and music. Philosophers ponder its place in the universe, while ethicists muse about its values.

Once in a while, however, we manage to break through the boundaries of our disciplines or perspectives to catch a glimpse of Florida from a different vantage point. That’s what folk art does for me. Whether it’s the vibrant paintings decorating “Ms. Ruby’s” Highway 60 produce stand or the intricate patchwork of the Seminoles, folk art shows me Florida through the lens of someone else’s life and culture. As Kristin Congdon explains in this issue, Florida’s multicultural environment has produced folk artists from all walks of life and all mediums. Their creations, from cracker whips to clown shoes to surfboards, “help define us as a state.”

Nowhere was Florida better defined for me than at the Florida Folk Festival, held recently in White Springs on the banks of the Suwanee River. Because of the festival’s emphasis on state heritage, the Humanities Council decided this year to become a sponsor of the annual event. I spent a weekend at the festival and experienced the sights, sounds, music, and traditions of Florida. I left feeling like a Floridian for the first time since arriving here in 1990. It actually seemed as if Florida had a real identity and a distinctive sense of place.

“Just let it sink in,” someone told me, as I tried to analyze what I was feeling. So I did. As I listened to the stories and music and watched the craft demonstrations, I began to understand that magical connection between artist and place. I could see how one might be inspired to paint a view of the landscape, make fanciful animals from old car metal, or turn seashells into flower arrangements. Florida’s exotic settings and cultural complexity, the superabundance of natural and cultural interactions that seem larger than life, inspire folk art that could be created in no other state.

If folk art helps define our state, then it is clear that Florida is bursting with a unique blend of culture, color, and creativity. After attending the Folk Festival, a member of FHC said it best: “Our folk traditions speak to all of us and touch our common humanity.”
Florida Conference Slated for October

Tallahassee sits just 20 miles from the Georgia border and 500 miles from Miami. Key West lies just 90 miles from Cuba but 800 miles from Pensacola. Is Florida the southernmost tip of the United States or the northern region of the Caribbean?

A two-day conference—October 16 to 18 at USF-St. Petersburg—will examine this question. Entitled, “A Sunshine State of Mind: Florida’s Place in the Americas,” the conference will be presented by the St. Petersburg Times Festival of Reading and sponsored by the Florida Humanities Council, the USF Florida Studies Center, the Tampa Bay History Center, and the USF-St. Petersburg Florida Studies Program.

The conference is designed for teachers, students, scholars, and the general public. It will look at various aspects of Florida’s culture and heritage and discuss our state’s distinctive contributions in such areas as art, architecture, literature, and music.

Governor Jeb Bush recently appointed three new members to the FHC Board of Directors:

- Ena T. Diaz is an associate in the law firm of Fowler White Burnett in Miami, where she specializes in the area of labor and employment law representing management. She received her B.A. degree in political science and Spanish literature from Duke University and her J.D. degree from Southern Methodist University School of Law in Dallas.
- Roger Kaufman is a professor at Florida State University, director of FSU’s Office for Needs Assessment and Planning, and director of Roger Kaufman & Associates. He received his B.A. from Purdue and George Washington universities and his Ph.D. in communications from New York University.
- Ian S. Caddie is a vice president with Jacobs Engineering Group, a global architecture, engineering, and construction group. Born in England, he has lived and worked in the Caribbean and Africa and currently resides in Winter Springs. He holds B.A. and M.S. degrees from National-Louis University.

All were appointed to four-year terms. The governor also appointed current FHC board members, Sheila McDevitt of St. Petersburg and Jeanne Godwin of Pensacola, to their second four-year terms.

FHC Seeks Board Nominations

FHC is currently seeking nominations for three board positions to be elected in September. In addition to participation in four board meetings each year, members work on committees, evaluate grant proposals, make funding decisions, participate in fundraising, set policy, promote public humanities activities, and direct the future of FHC.

Letters of nomination should include biographical information on the nominee, a resume, an explanation of the special qualities this person would bring to the board, and an indication of the nominee’s willingness to serve.

Nominations should be sent to Fran Cary, Executive Director, FHC, 599 Second Street South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701 or emailed to fcary@flahum.org. The deadline for nominations is August 4.

New Everglades City Publication Available

A new publication of walking tours of Everglades City is now available from the Museum of the Everglades. Historic Buildings around Everglades City: Walking Tours describes some of the town’s most historic buildings, including the Rod & Gun Club Lodge, the Bank of the Everglades, and the Ivey House. Everglades City, the county seat of Collier County from 1923 to 1962, was developed by flamboyant entrepreneur and developer Barron Collier and served as the headquarters of his company as he attempted to complete the Tamiami Trail from Naples to Dade County. The book can be purchased by sending $6.50 to Friends of the Museum of the Everglades, PO. Box 677, Everglades City, FL 34139.

Thanks to our Supporters

FHC would like to thank the following businesses and organizations that have made contributions to enable Florida’s best teachers to attend a Florida Center for Teachers seminar this summer:

- New York Times Company Foundation and the Gainesville Sun
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listen,” I tell myself as I relax my paddle. But there is no sound. Then a flash of gray catches my eye as a bird hops away across the flying-buttress roots of red mangroves. I guess by its size, color, and silence that it is a little blue heron. Then it’s gone.

As I resume paddling, my kayak slips deeper into the natural tunnel formed by the tangled canopy of mangroves. The tunnel’s end is unseen through dim light, and the still air smells of rotting detritus. Coming in here I sometimes imagine having paddled into the vaulted gullet of a blue whale. Miles of natural tunnels vein this flat, sandy landscape given over to scrub and mangroves—a forest of red, black, and white species.

I’m paddling through Weedon Island, a wildlife sanctuary in Pinellas County where birds and otters and raccoons share their cramped habitat with an electric power plant, the belching byproduct of civilization. How the tunnels came into being is a mystery to most people who encounter them. They are canals, actually, and they are not altogether natural. They originated during the Great Depression as a mosquito-control project with human-centered purposes: to provide employment and to eradicate vector-borne diseases. But the project failed when, ironically, the canals turned into breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Mangroves eventually reclaimed the canals’ banks and concealed the island’s scars. Today, the mangroves screen out the concrete and plastic of the modern world.

This is the real Florida to me, the Florida behind kitschy facades, the Florida of wetlands and wildlife. To me, wetlands represent Florida even more than the popular crystalline beaches that trim the state’s shoreline. Look at the landscape paintings of our state’s native beauty, those of Winslow Homer or the Highwaymen, and you will see the pale shades of green and brown and the life of wetlands brushed on canvas more often than you will see a sand-white beach beneath a painted blue sky.

When I explore wetlands like Weedon Island, I see much from the vantage point of a kayak. Spiders, of various sizes in pursuit of various destinations, have usually been ballooning from mangrove to mangrove, spreading silken ribbons that are invisible to the paddler and usually face-high. When the tide pulls back into the bay, fiddler crabs emerge from burrows in the mud and, with single giant claws defying centers of gravity, move in waves across the flats and around the aerating roots of black mangroves. As I paddle through freshwater swamps, turtles—the Florida cooter or yellow-bellied slider—hoist their shelled humps over the side of half-submerged flotsam. They are not a curious lot, willing to indulge my own curiosity and content to watch me pass by. Water moccasins, camouflaged by their woody colors, occasionally drop from a branch above and disappear behind the reflection of gin-clear water.

Snakes and the swampy environment are not to the liking of the average tourist. Wetlands generally are too serene and slow-paced. They’re buggy and steamy, too—unburnished settings that challenge conventional temperaments for manicured comforts. But some tourists will venture as far as a wetlands boardwalk, guided by interpretive markers and Cuban brown lizards that skitter ahead on sun-faded planks. In a place like the Big Cypress, visitors can watch wood storks, white ibises, and roseate spoonbills foraging the shallows for food. If they’re lucky, they’ll spy an osprey portaging a fish back to its stick nest, or a bald eagle riding a thermal. Tourists typically want to see an alligator, and Florida rarely disappoints them. If they go to Shark Valley Slough in the Everglades, they can walk within inches of the reptiles warming their cold constitutions along a paved hiking-and-biking trail, which was originally a wheel-rutted access road for an oil-exploration site.

I can’t say that I have a favorite wetlands. In North Florida, the tidewater marshes—cradles of marine life—break up the landscape with open views unfolding out to the Gulf and the Atlantic. The Green Swamp in the center of the state promises alligators, turtles, and a rainbow display of birds. Myakka River State Park combines wetlands with scrubland, where colonies of altogether different life thrive in the dry veldt of saw palmettos and slash pines. The Everglades are the grandest of all wetlands in the western hemisphere with their saw-grass savannas, cypress swamps, freshwater sloughs, and hardwood hammock islands. Something is always on display there—a bank of clouds pulling a dark curtain of rain across the distant horizon, an anhinga perched on an old cypress stump spaying its wings to dry, or the yellow light of the setting sun softening stark contrasts in the landscape.

Whenever I’m away from Florida and feeling melancholic under a sunless sky, the sight of a cypress swamp in Alabama or saltwater marsh in Massachusetts will restore my sense of home. There is something comforting about the definitive flatness of the wetlands landscape. And there is always the ubiqui-
uitous great blue heron, contemplative and alone, staring at the water. I like to think the bird followed me to wherever I may be. I always greet it as a friend, verbally and unabashedly, and ask why, shackled only by its obligation to food, it has left Florida.

But it hasn't left really. Wetlands are its familiar place, too, lodged in the bird's ancestral memory as home. Wetlands are the original home of us all, at least to us evolutionists. They are the places where our scaly ancestors strayed from the swamp and then slowly evolved to walk upright. We forget, or don’t know, or don’t care, that whenever we drain or fill wetlands, as we are wont to do, we are destroying the very place of our origins.

School children now learn that wetlands are nurseries and habitats for biota that are important links in the chain of being; kids are taught that wetlands recharge the groundwater, which eventually makes its way to our faucets; and they learn that wetlands divert flood waters away from dry, vulnerable areas. In the worldview of a younger generation, nature and culture are complements, not antagonists. In spite of the new education, however, we often fail to accept wetlands for their inherent value.

I wonder about my own presence in a place like Weedon Island. To what extent does the thrust of my paddle or the impact of my footfall disturb the work-a-day world of the wetlands population? What setbacks are suffered by a spider when I entangle myself in the gossamer web it busily spun the night before? Does the disrupted creature react similarly to my late grandmother, who would shake her boney fist at unseen varmints that rooted up her vegetable garden year after year?

A respected environmental scholar writes that nothing on our planet is natural, that everything is an artifact of human life. A tree, a river, a mountain—even the most wild of wild things—exists only because we have made the decision not to destroy it; our sentiments or priorities allow it to be. The Weedon Islands of the world, in other words, are nothing more than created enclaves in the township of civilization.

But when I relax my paddle and listen, I think differently. Nature is larger than all human history, with a past and future that extend beyond our own. We cannot accurately measure nature from the human perspective, and Florida’s wetlands are not just about what we do and don’t do to them. They, and the infinite life stowed within, are natural. Humans could not exist without wetlands, and yet when humans disappear from the Earth, the wetlands will live and breathe better.

JACK E. DAVIS will join the faculty at the University of Florida in the fall as an associate professor of history.
FLORIDA FOLK CULTURE

ART FROM THE HEART AND HEARTH

IN PAINTING, SEWING, CARVING, AND BUILDING THEIR DREAMS, FOLK ARTISTS DEFINE FLORIDA.

By Kristin G. Congdon

When you look at Florida's folk art, you see Florida in all its diversity. Different religions, occupations, ethnicities, and regional identities are all represented. You see people seeking to fulfill dreams or to vacation or retire. You see sunshine, beaches, water, flowers, and foliage—as well as billboards, theme parks, trash, and car culture. Florida's folk art reflects it all:

- Consider the work of Cardell Evens, who owns a car body shop in Orlando; he crafts masks out of car hoods that are too damaged to fix.
- Nadia Michael's creations grow from her origins in Palestine. Now a Jacksonville resident, she embroiders gowns and linens with stories of ancient times and other places.
- Well-known artist Purvis Young paints on scrap wood about his Miami community, which has been ravaged by crime, drugs, and racism.
- Tampa resident Taft Richardson constructs sculptures from old animal bones, and uses these in his community work with local youth.

These creations and hundreds of others by people across Florida comprise the eclectic, unexpected, original mix that we call folk art. No wonder our most difficult task as students, scholars, and appreciators is in defining this art category—figuring out where to draw...
Clockwise from top: Well known artist Purvis Young paints about his Overton, Miami community, which has been ravaged by crime, drugs and racism. Dina Knapp is a textile artist working in Miami Beach. Jimmy O'Toole Osceola, from Hollywood, sews colorful Seminole clothing that both adheres to traditional patterns and experiments with new designs. Henry Ohumukisi, a 2001 Florida Folk Heritage Award winner from Orlando, makes hula drums.
boundaries around it and how to frame it for others.

Even defining the term “art” is an unwieldy task, but most people agree that it generally involves an object that in some way evokes an aesthetic response. Building on that idea, in the 1930s noted authority Holgar Cahill claimed folk art was “art of the common man,” thinking it was art made by rural, non-literate, poor, and isolated individuals. This was an approach that grew out of a European way of thinking, relating it to art made by peasants. But this connotation didn’t resonate with many scholars who felt uncomfortable classifying art by economic status. Americans don’t like to dwell on class systems, since we prefer to believe that everyone has the right and, hopefully, the opportunity for education and upward mobility.

The idea of folk artists being isolated was also called into question as the United States became more urban, and mass media, especially television, developed and expanded. No one in the United States is very isolated anymore. Consequently, folk art began to be distinguished by other terms like simplistic, provincial, childlike, copied, antique, unsophisticated, naïve, primitive, and grassroots. It’s also been called a dying art form. However, all these terms are problematic for numerous reasons and aren’t employed much anymore in scholarly circles.

Today, perhaps the three most common descriptors used to delineate folk art are ‘outsider,’ self-taught,’ and ‘traditional.’ While the term ‘traditional’ seems to be acceptable to many (especially folklorists who study cultural traditions), used alone, it doesn’t do justice to the innovative, dynamic, and changing aspects of the art it describes. The terms ‘self-taught’ and ‘outsider’ are also problematic. They propose an erroneous idea that there are fine artists who learn only in art schools, and folk artists who don’t learn their art form anywhere except by teaching themselves. Because of this, they are ‘outside’ the academic art world and therefore ‘outsider.’

The struggle to adequately define folk art in the United States has been going on for nearly a century. Many who have spent decades studying it have concluded that folk art can be viewed as both innovative and rooted in cultural values and traditions. Folk artists are self-reflective; they understand the aesthetic they represent; their artwork is often community-based and is best understood within their cultural context.

The problem is that we might say the same things about any artist. So perhaps we should move beyond our efforts to delineate creators of folk art as anything other than as ‘artists.’ What we can be sure of is that, collectively, these artists help to define Florida. They are diverse, dynamic in the ways that they interpret their worlds, and connected to one or more aspects of their cultures. And they speak to us in ways that help us understand Florida’s many communities.

In Florida we have numerous ethnic groups who help define our collective identity. Henry Ohumukini, a 2001 Florida Folk Heritage Award winner from Orlando, makes hula drums. Although he is far from his Hawai’i homeland where he learned his skills from generations of expert craftspeople, he continues his dancing and drum making while adapting the traditions to his new environment.

Jacksonville resident Nadia Michael, native of Palestine, also learned her needlework skills from elders. Some of the common patterns she embroiders are the Road to Hebron and Old Man’s Teeth. Like quilt patterns, these designs can be both serious and humorous. While Seminole patchwork has traditionally been more associated with women than with men, Jimmy O’Toole Osceola, from Hollywood, sews colorful Seminole clothing that both adheres to traditional patterns and changes as he uses...
The struggle to define folk art in the United States has been going on for nearly a century.

Clockwise from top: Ginger Levoile is an expert Polynesian quilter who came by her skills by studying 30 years in Hawaii. Nadia Michael, of Jacksonville, does needlework on gowns and linens, often telling tales related to another time and place. Talt Richardson constructs sculptures from old animal bones. For him, both his social work and his artwork are about the Resurrection. Melvin Thayer of Seville explains he doesn't need money because he can make anything he wants, like this motorcycle created from his piles of "junk."
Clockwise from top left: Homestead’s Japanese-American ikebana artist Mieko Kubota adapts her art form to the local landscape, creating flower arrangements from Florida foliage. Sylvia Thompson, from Long Boat Key, creates beautiful flower arrangements from seashells. Car hoods too damaged to fix become elaborate masks at the hands of Cardell Evans, who owns a car body shop in Orlando. Eusebio Escobar, a formally trained artist and clothing designer, creates rope de santo and alabas for religious ceremonies in Miami and in other American cities. Here one of his crown designs is modeled.
new kinds of fabrics and experiments with new designs.

While Henry Ohumukini, Nadia Michael, and Jimmy O'Toole Osceola can all trace their traditional artistic expressions back generations in their own families, Ginger Lavoie is an expert Polynesian quilter who came by her skills by studying with Hawaii's Polynesian quilters for 30 years. Returning to her hometown of Kissimmee, she tells Polynesian folklore through her quilts as she invents new patterns and ways of telling a story. Many artists meld their cultural heritage with Florida's landscape. As with Henry Ohumukini's drums, now made from the Queen's palm logs, Homestead's Japanese-American ikebana artist Mieko Kubota adapts her art form to local foliage, thereby inventing new forms and ways of creating flower arrangements.

Florida's landscape is featured in numerous other ways, too. Bill O'Keeffe, an ironworker from Crystal Springs, uses his welding skills to sculpt the framework for a bird that sports palmetto leaves for wings. The Florida artists known as the Highwaymen, originally centered in Fort Pierce, are also inspired by the local landscape as they quickly paint nature scenes.

But Florida's landscape isn't only about its natural beauty. It is also about our population explosion and throwaway culture. Creative Floridians are constructing marvelous works of art from a variety of used and discarded items. Florida Keys resident Stanley Papio, now deceased, used his skill in car bodywork to piece together old metal parts into fanciful animals and human-like figures. Orlando resident Cardell Evens uses similar skills to create masks out of car hoods. Perhaps one of the most amazing recyclers is Melvin Thayer from Seville. Brought up in Appalachia, he explains that he doesn't need money since he can make anything he wants. Feeling rich with his piles of "junk," he constructs whirligigs about transportation systems. His work delights those who pass by his home on Highway 17.

Sometimes Florida's folk art reflects an occupational tradition associated with an artist's ethnicity. Ramón Puig has a guayabera business in Miami. His traditional Cuban shirts are regularly worn by residents of Little Havana, but are also sold to dignitaries, Hollywood stars, and everyday people. Like other folk artists, Puig innovates; he experiments with various colors and fabric, even creating a stylish guayabera-like dress for women. Beginning in his 80s, Jesse Aaron, one of Gainesville's best-known artists, carved wooden sculptures to make a living after he was forced to sell his nursery to pay for an operation for his wife. And Peruvian Nicario Jiménez, now of Naples, makes a good living making both traditional and innovative retablos. The more original ones reflect his travels in the United States.

Florida's residents also belong to other kinds of communities that inspire their work. Taft Richardson of Tampa preaches to young people about his religious beliefs when talking about his sculptures made from old animal bones. This extraordinary man works to guide young people to live productive lives. For him, both his social work and his artwork are about the Resurrection. When he talks about his sculpture, he is really talking about God, and art criticism becomes preaching.

Some folk artists' work is rooted in a particular place and way of living. For Margot Warren, it is rural and small town. Peaceful and pleasant, her paintings reflect her life in Winter Haven. Well-known artist Purvis Young paints about Overtown, Miami community, which has been ravaged by crime, drugs, and racism. Using old wood found on neighborhood streets, Young's work tells about the history of a place he loves and sees struggling to survive.

No essay on Florida folk artists would be complete without mentioning beach-inspired art. In Cocoa Beach George Robinson sculpts and sands custom-made, balsa-wood surfboards that are used all over the world. And because Florida's west coast offers so many spectacular seashells, shell artists flourish. One of the best is Sylvia Thompson who searches for shells on Long Boat Key. Her finds end up in beautiful flower arrangements.

What we can say about all the artists mentioned here is that their stories are rich and complex. They are not primitive, naïve, self-taught, outsider, or unsophisticated. Instead they are what all noteworthy artists are: creative individuals who come from communities that somehow inspire them to make objects that delight and define us. In the case of these artists, they also help define us as a state.

KRISTIN G. CONGDON, currently a professor of art and philosophy at the University of Central Florida, will join UCF's Film Department in the fall.
Twin sisters Haydee and Sahara Scull insert themselves into one of their playful, three-dimensional scenes of 1950s Havana.
CULTURE WITH CHARACTER

VISIT A FEW OF FLORIDA’S CULTURAL ENCLAVES, AND YOU’LL FIND WHIMSICAL PAINTINGS OF OLD CUBA, HANDMADE ICONS FOR GREEK WORSHIP, AND COUNTRY QUILTS IN WEST AFRICAN STYLE.

STORIES BY TINA BUCUVALAS

Cubans Reflecting Their New Horizon

Take a whimsical stroll, back through time, to old Havana. Walk among the street vendors, along the Malecon (sea wall), and near the bars and cabarets. Meet an eccentric old poet and some costumed carnival celebrants, neighborhood characters, and lottery-ticket hawkers.

Your fun-loving guides are middle-aged, twin sisters wearing form-fitting sundresses, and a young man with a blond pompadour. You’re taking their playful tour of 1950s Havana by viewing their art—images painted on canvas and supplemented with attached wire, papier mâché, and other objects that combine to make three-dimensional scenes.

Meet the artists: Haydee and Sahara Scull and Haydee’s son, Michael. They are among the many talented folk artists in South Florida’s Cuban community. While the Sculls depict humorous street scenes that the sisters recall from hours of sitting on their Havana balcony, some of the other Cuban-American artists carve wooden sculptures of Cuban life in South Florida, create items used in religious practices, and tailor traditional clothing. All of them reflect the cross-cultural experiences that make Cuban-American folklife unique.

The Scull sisters, both formally trained in art, began creating their three-dimensional painting style after arriving in Miami (Haydee and her children in 1969, and Sahara in 1973). In Giselle Batido’s book Cubantime: A Celebration of Cuban Life in America, Haydee Scull recalls, “When we came on the Freedom Flights, we discovered a new world, a new horizon that gave us everything we needed to develop the most unlikely ideas, like the bottom of the sea or the
stratosphere. Our art is everything that’s new.”

Their art embodies cultural values, concerns, and history—as evidenced by its acceptance in Cuban Miami. Many Cuban Americans dwell fondly on these scenes of old Havana, which stir memories of their former lives and provide a platform from which to teach their children about their collective past. The Sculls’ artwork has been featured in many exhibitions and has been collected by numerous museums and private owners.

The sisters appear (in form-fitting sun dresses) in each painting, as does Michael (in his signature suit and blond pompadour). In addition to old Havana street scenes, the three artists occasionally depict such fantastic patriotic syntheses as a gathering of the Pope, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Jose Marti, Marilyn Monroe, and other famous Cuban and American personalities. They sometimes also make freestanding three-dimensional figures.

However, these are not the Sculls’ only creative media. By dressing in highly colorful and somewhat exaggerated clothing styles evocative of 1950s Havana, they present themselves as a part of the artistic world they have created. In Batido’s book, Haydee Scull says she and her sister “try to dress like the vedettes [nightclub dancers] of the 1950s, who had big hips. Here in Miami Beach, you can wear anything you want and people will applaud you.”

Artist Mario Sanchez also depicts scenes in his work—but his are carved in wood and usually illustrate the places and events that made old Key West distinctive. Born in 1908 on the upper floor of his family’s Key West bodega (grocery store), Sanchez lived most of his life in the neighborhood called El Barrio de Gato after the prosperous cigar manufacturer Eduardo Hidalgo Gato.

Sanchez creates the Key West of his childhood: Bahamian funeral parades, children flying Cuban kites and playing games, diablo dancers, the daily catch, cigar factories, the Cuban piruli (lollipop) vendor, Bota’s comparsa dancers, and other local activities, buildings, docks, and businesses.

He would begin his works by drawing a scene in pencil on a brown grocery bag—then uses chisels to carve the image on a pine, cypress, or cedar board. When the carving is completed, he paints the scene with vibrant colors characteristic of Key West. Much of his work has been created in his “Studio Under the Trees,” part of an extended-family compound in Key West. His work has received acclaim in Key West, Tampa, and throughout Florida.

While Sanchez and the Sculls create historical scenes, some Cuban-American artists in South Florida focus on making objects for the Orisha religion. Also known by the Spanish name Santeria, this Afro-Cuban folk religion is practiced by an estimated 100,000 Cubans and others in South Florida. Based primarily on Yoruba religious beliefs brought by West Africans, it uses Yoruba language and features such practices as divination and the use of stones, herbs, and sacrifices. Music and dance are essential features of the religion.

Luis Ezequiel Torres makes and plays batá drums used in the Orisha religion. The voices of the batá drums are said to speak with the orishas (deities). Born in Havana in 1955, Torres apprenticed himself at age 16 to some of the city’s master batá drum makers and players. In 1980, he came to Miami and established himself as a drummer and craftsman. In addition to playing regularly in the Miami area, he plays in Houston, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

In his backyard workshop, Torres makes drums, beautifully beaded gourd instruments, and beaded covers for the drums. The drums are usually made from dried almond and mahogany logs with stretched animal skin for the drum cover. Gourds must be ordered from Georgia to find the right size and strength. Today, instruments by this award-winning instrument maker are in demand by collectors, museums, and
Eusebio Escobar's art background allows him to expand beyond the traditional parameters and create more innovative clothing designs. Luis Esequiel Torres makes and plays drums used in his Orisha religion. Mario Sanchez carves elaborate tablos from wood which depict the Key West of his childhood.

Sanchez creates the Key West of his childhood: Bahamian funeral parades, children flying Cuban kites and playing games, diablito dancers, the daily catch, cigar factories, the Cuban piruli (lollipop) vendor, Boza's comparsa dancers, and other local activities, buildings, docks, and businesses.

Another devotional object created for Orisha ritual events is ropa de santo, special clothing worn only three times: when worshippers become initiated, when they are presented to the drums, and when they die.

Eusebio Escobar, a formally trained artist and clothing designer, creates ropa de santo and altars for religious ceremonies in Miami and in other American cities. While most artists rarely push the boundaries of the usual patterns, colors, and styles, Escobar's background in art and design enables him to expand the traditional parameters and create more innovative pieces.

Culturally traditional clothing is also in demand in Miami. The guayabera, a short-sleeved dress shirt with decorative tucks and embroidery, is one such garment. Suited to tropical climates, it replaces the coat and tie and is worn by men throughout the Caribbean, Mesoamerica, Central America, and parts of South America. Husband-and-wife team Ramón and Juana Puig own the only South Florida shop that makes beautifully crafted guayaberas for special orders.

Puig, who apprenticed with a tailor in Las Villas, arrived in Miami in 1968, with a sick wife and an 8-year-old son in tow but "no scissors, no fabric, and no money." He worked hard at menial jobs and was able to save enough money to open his first small workshop in Little Havana. He trained his wife in the craft, and they toiled long hours to build the business into an international success. Today he is known as El Rey de las Guayaberas, or the King of the Guayaberas.

The Puigs create a special pattern to fit each client. They cut out the guayabera, but rely on their staff of seamstresses to sew the shirts. They have made some innovations, such as the guayabera-style linen dress for women. And they are proud that their clientele includes not only presidents and aficionados from throughout the Americas, but also people from all social classes.
Keeping Greek Traditions Alive

Some of the sponge divers in Tarpon Springs still wear handcrafted copper-and-brass diving helmets more common in an earlier era. Dancers at the local community festivals perform in authentic costumes to Greek music performed on handmade instruments such as lyras. The area's Greek Orthodox churches feature religious icons formed and painted in centuries-old style.

Such handmade works of art bring a touch of the old country to a Florida community that values and preserves its Greek heritage. Stretching from Port Richey to Clearwater, the larger Tarpon Springs area celebrates its ethnic character and maritime traditions as it continues to grow.

Since 1905, men recruited from sponge-diving communities in Greece have been diving for sponges in Florida waters, which provide the only U.S. habitat for sea sponges. In recent years, Greek immigrants and Greek Americans from throughout the United States have continued to relocate to this area along Florida's central Gulf Coast. The community maintains its rich cultural heritage through strong ties to family, the Greek Orthodox Church, and a variety of other social institutions.

Residents skilled in traditional Greek arts and crafts make important contributions to this effort:

- Nick Toth learned how to fashion diving helmets by watching how it was done in his grandfather's Tarpon Springs machine shop. Toth's grandfather, Antonios Lerios, left the Greek island of Kalymnos to follow his own father to Tarpon Springs in 1913. He made diving helmets and maintained and produced the hardware (propeller guards and shafts, air pumps, etc.) for sponge boats.

- Toth has continued the diving helmet tradition. He begins the process by hammering a malleable copper sheet against a cast-iron frame made by his grandfather more than 80 years ago. This creates the shoulder piece. He then gives specifications for the main helmet section to a machine shop, where it is spun from copper. Back in his shop, he machines the openings. Next he makes the remaining parts—from the wing nuts to the precision air valves—and assembles the entire helmet. Each helmet takes about 120 hours to produce, but it may last for 30 to 40 years with daily use.

- Despite widespread use of scuba equipment, Toth's helmets are still purchased by some members of the local sponge industry and by industrial divers for use in the rougher waters off California. In addition, the helmets' beauty and historical significance have made them an attractive display item for maritime and cultural organizations, museums, and individual collectors.

- While Toth crafts traditional equipment for an occupation, others are creating objects for more light-hearted cultural activities.

Konstantinos Maris and his father learned how to make traditional Greek lyras by disassembling several of the violin-like instruments and studying each part.

Kalliope Peppes tailors traditional Greek clothing styles. To learn how to do this, she traveled throughout Greece and studied costumes in museums and books. Peppes was born and raised in Athens by Kalymnian parents and came to Tarpon Springs in 1979. She noticed that the costumes worn by local dance groups did not accurately reflect regional Greek traditions. Although never formally trained as a seamstress, she volunteered to make the costumes for Tarpon Springs's Levendia dance group in 1980. Community members admired them. Now, after more than 20 years, she estimates she's made more than 200 costumes.

- Peppes purchases the necessary scarves, belts, and jewelry for the costumes from Greece. She also seeks fabrics that give the costumes an authentic look, though she makes some adaptations to Florida's hot, humid climate. The embroidery incorporated into Greek folk costumes is extensive and elaborate. Women started making a girl's traditional clothing at birth because it took years to complete the complex needlework. But, with so many costumes to make, Peppes has learned to use a machine that effectively scans and duplicates the most intricate embroidery patterns. She believes the results look elegant and virtually handmade.

- Konstantinos Maris and his father learned how to make traditional Greek lyras by disassembling several of the violin-like...
disassembling several and studying each part. The lyra is the most popular melodic instrument on the Greek island of Crete. A bowed instrument, it has three strings tuned in fifths. Musicians play it in an upright position, resting it on the knee when seated. If standing, they place a foot on a chair and rest it on the thigh. In an unusual fingering technique, musicians press against the sides of the strings with the tops of their fingernails instead of pressing the strings with fingertips.

Mans, born in Athens, loved the music played by his father and other Cretan musicians there. At age 12, he began learning how to play the lyra. About 10 years later, in 1967, he moved to New York and worked in the construction industry. Before long, however, he became known as one of the best Cretan lyra players in the United States, performing at Carnegie Hall and other venues around the country.

When Konstantinos and his father began making lyras in 1969, there were few lyra makers in Greece and none in the United States. They disassembled several lyras in order to see how they were made—then spent years learning to build good instruments. In the process, they acquired a great deal of knowledge about woods, sound reproduction, and other technical aspects of the process. Maris also visited violin workshops in New York, where he learned how to create the scroll and more about the properties of different woods.

Cretan lyras are made primarily from mulberry to ensure the sound quality. The preferred wood for the top is katran, possibly a type of cedar, which is found today in or near Turkey. People search old, abandoned houses to find katran cut hundreds of years ago. Maris believes that the aged wood gives a distinctive Cretan sound to the lyra that other woods cannot duplicate.

Elias Damianakis was born in New York, trained as an artist, and worked as a fashion illustrator. But he tired of the fast-paced lifestyle and, seeking a more spiritual life, traveled to Greece. He spent eight months there studying classical and Minoan art styles. Then he discovered Byzantine art; he went on to serve 12 years of apprenticeship with iconographers in Crete, Athens, and New York. He also visited many Byzantine monuments and holy sites in Greece before establishing his own studio in 1991 near Tarpon Springs to create religious icons.

An essential Orthodox belief is that icons, depictions of the saints and Holy Family, are vehicles of divine power and grace. In Greek Orthodox churches, icons are displayed on walls, on the proskynetarion (the stand that holds the day's icon), and on the iconostasis (the screen that separates the chancel from the nave). Greek families display icons in the private areas of the home.

Creating an icon is a spiritual as well as a creative undertaking. Before and during the process of painting, Damianakis prays, meditates, and fasts: “I keep my mind clear and simple, always in continuous prayer. As I'm praying, I'm writing the icon. For me, it's a ministry.”

Icons can be small and portable or enormous and stationary. For example, Damianakis completed the iconography for a dome that was 110 feet in diameter. Icons made for such large surfaces are created on cotton canvas covered with three coats of sanded white paint. The background is sometimes a layer of 23-karat gold leaf. Damianakis usually creates icons in his workshop, then takes them to the church where he glues them onto the wall or ceiling. He also cleans and restores icons, paints frescos and wall murals, and creates mosaics. His work is in churches in Florida, California, New York, and Greece.

Damianakis adheres to strict Orthodox prototypes and standards, yet infuses his work with a warm personal style. He maintains traditional practices by mixing his own paints each day and making the brushes and quills. He uses fine-quality pigments from around the world that result in enduring and luminous colors. He often mixes raw egg yolks into the paints, which then dry very hard onto the canvas. With such care and caring, he joins the other folk artists in Florida's Greek communities as they work to preserve their heritage.
Creating in the Countryside

To find the South, go north—to the rural areas of North Florida. There you'll find folk arts that have more in common with those in Alabama and Georgia than in Miami. But you'll also find evidence of the diverse heritage that is distinctly Floridian.

Carrine Porter, who lives in the tiny Florida community of Bascom, uses an African-American quilting style that many scholars believe is linked to West African textile traditions. This includes contrasting color combinations, vivid hues, multiple patterns, strip and asymmetrical piecing, large or uneven stitches, appliqué, large design elements, and even protective charms.

"I learned to quilt from my mother, Mamie Pollock," Porter says. "I always watched her quilt, and told myself if she can do it, I can too. She would give me the leftover scraps to put in my playhouse, so I took those scraps and sat down and put them together and made a baby quilt out of them. I started quilting at the age of 12."

Porter's quilt designs are often large, bold, and colorful. A particular favorite is a sunflower quilt she designed in startling yellow, green, and black. Porter uses cotton batting and pieces by hand on a quilting frame. If the weather is good, she positions the quilting frame on the porch to enjoy the fresh air. Quilting is part of a long-established rural way of life. In her younger days, Porter farmed with her husband, then turned to quilting after the harvest. During the periods she worked at the local peanut mill, she would quilt only in the afternoons.

In addition to quilting, Porter also enjoys preparing foods associated with the rural South. She specializes in mouthwatering pecan, hickory nut, and sweet-potato pies. Her canning is impressive: row upon row of jewel-like preserved vegetables and fruit line the shelves in her shed and workshop.

Porter's Florida home is near the Alabama and Georgia state lines. But those geographical distinctions were blurred in artist Woodie Long's life. As one of 10 children in a family of sharecroppers and migrant workers, he grew up working farmland in both Florida and Alabama.
Long, who was born in Plant City, depicts the world of his childhood in his paintings. His subjects include sharecroppers enjoying a Sunday afternoon, women carrying their purses, musicians performing, people dancing, children flying kites or playing games, couples courting, farmers plowing, workers picking cotton, girls wearing new homemade dresses, or folks riding bikes. Having grown up in a racially mixed community, Long's paintings convey a message about a harmonious, racially integrated, and natural existence that is reflected in his own life.

Before he started painting about his childhood, Long worked for 25 years as a house painter. But even then, he used to arrive early at his jobs and paint scenes on the houses before he covered them with new paint. When he retired from house painting in 1987, he took up his wife's paintbrushes and, in doing so, launched a new career as a folk artist. Now he is a key figure among southern community-based artists—many of whom he counts as close friends. Overall, he has produced more than 15,000 paintings on paper, tin, and Masonite. Many of his works have graced the covers of magazines, books, and CDs, as well as the walls of a dozen museums, countless galleries in the U.S. and Europe, and even a bus in Central Florida's Lynx system.

While Long paints about a rural life on the land, other North Florida folk artists create works that relate to the sea. Stuart Pacetti preserves the art of making English and Spanish cast nets that achieve a high aesthetic level in terms of both form and function. Pacetti is from a St. Augustine family who brought their fishing traditions from the Spanish Mediterranean island of Minorca in the 18th century.

Pacetti first learned to use cast nets at age 12, when his father taught him to throw them from standing, kneeling, and sitting positions. They cast for mullet on the beach—a practice followed by the Minorcans more than 200 years ago—and for shrimp in the shallows of the St. Johns River. In 1955, an uncle taught Pacetti to make cast nets.

The basic design has remained relatively unchanged since the Spanish first introduced it to Florida. It consists of a circular piece of net rimmed with a rope called a lead line, which is threaded through small lead weights. The line is connected at the center to the hand line, for retrieving the net after it is thrown. When thrown skillfully, the net floats through the air to spread beautifully in a full circle upon the water—trapping fish within its perimeter as it settles to the bottom. As the fisherman pulls, it forms a bag that holds the fish. Today most cast nets are made from manufactured net, but they are bulky and do not cast as well as the handmade ones. Pacetti estimates that it takes about 160 hours and 74,000 knots to make an 8-foot shrimp net. He makes most of the netting tools: wooden needles (or shuttles) from dogwood, hickory, or mulberry; flat cow-bone gauges to ensure consistency in the weave; and lead sinkers made from molds. He has introduced innovations, too, such as the use of PVC pipe to create the “ring” or “horn” through which the hand line passes. Pacetti’s efforts and those of many other folk artists in North Florida pay homage to the hard work and survival skills of rural people who contributed so much to Florida’s culture.

TINA BUCUVALAS, who coordinates the Florida Folklife Program, was appointed State Folklorist in 2000.
In the late 1950s, several black teenagers in Fort Pierce taught themselves to paint Florida scenes. It was a moneymaking venture, a way they hoped to make a living, a better way than toiling in the citrus groves or doing the other menial labor available at that time to African Americans. They painted fast and, just as quickly, sold their framed oils from the trunks of cars, mainly on highways along the state's East Coast. A fertile market existed for affordable and original art about Florida as families established themselves during the state's postwar population boom. This artistic enterprise went strong for 25 years, until the culture shifted and tastes changed.

Who could have guessed that, decades later, these entrepreneurs would be considered the visual artists of their time and place? Who could have known that they would leave a testimonial in the form of perhaps 200,000 oil paintings that would become the markers for the tropical version of the American Dream?

Some 40 years after they started their venture, this loosely organized and nameless association of what grew to be 25 men and one woman became known as the Highwaymen. As their art began to be recognized as something special, stories circulated about them.

The stories were little more than rumors when, in 1998, I met with three of these artists—Mary Ann Carroll, James Gibson, and Hezekiah Baker. What they told me about their work didn't jibe with the few existing accounts about the Highwaymen. One of the myths, for example, held that several artists contributed to the production of each of the paintings. It was claimed that each artist specialized in producing certain images, with one painting in the birds, another painting water, another painting trees, etc. But the artists said this was not true. They each painted their own complete pictures. The artists also took issue with the notion that they were part of a school or movement. They didn't even have studios; they just worked in their backyards “like shade-tree mechanics,” Carroll said.

The unfolding story was intriguing, ready-made, and ripe for the telling. It needed only a sympathetic intermediary. I decided to uncover their story and to tell it.

It begins in the mid-1950s, when young Alfred Hair took painting lessons from A. E. Backus, a prominent white regionalist painter. Florida's tropical beauty provided Backus ample inspiration; his time-tested aesthetic yielded paradisiacal images. Owning a Backus canvas was tantamount to claiming the land.
PAINTING ALONG THE ROAD TO SUCCESS

BY GARY MONROE
But Hair read the images differently; to him they provided a means to escape a bleak future and become wealthy. He decided to devise a way to use his painting skills to make money.

Another African-American painter named Harold Newton likely served as a role model, showing Hair how this could be done. Newton, a natural-born artist, sold his paintings door-to-door while Hair was still in school. Newton painted in the manner of Backus, rivaling the esteemed artist, in fact. Newton painted with more contemplation and greater formal resolve than would Hair. But Newton still painted fast—applying paint wet-on-wet with deft skill bordering on the magical, epitomizing what would become Hair's ideal—making glowing, exemplary images that seemed to form themselves effortlessly.

When Hair was preparing to graduate from high school, he left Backus' studio and gathered a few of his friends. He suggested they join in a creative effort that might help them all rise above the inferior status to which "Negroes" were relegated at that time. By teaching them the conventional painting formulas that he had learned, he gave the others a way out of "Blacktown."

Hair devised a system to mass-produce paintings and thereby be able to sell them relatively cheaply. This involved working on multiple boards—developing certain areas in phases—to minimize labor and material, and hence maximize profits. Each artist was able to complete a group of paintings during the group's customary nightlong painting fests. In this way, by shedding the established modes in favor of mass production, he and his associates developed a fresh form of landscape painting. They created images that seemed almost like picture windows overlooking an idealized Florida landscape, a place where dreams would likely come true.

The quickness with which the core group painted altered the classical pictorial strategies that Backus, like other academic artists, incorporated. They arrived at their fluid style by necessity—time meant money. Hair's fast painting led to the distinguishing characteristics of the Highwaymen's art. Their facile process yielded images that linger in the memory, just as an image lingers after glancing at an expanse of land through the side window of a vacation-bound car. Florida-in-passing looked sketchy, half realized—ripe for people to lend their own meanings.

Instead of charging a price in accord with a Backus canvas, of say $250, Hair opted to charge $25 for one of his own paintings. He'd produce 10 paintings in less time than it took Backus to complete a single painting—and earn the same money. One might fairly reason that the Highwaymen's haste would have resulted in inferior paintings. Ironically though, the speed—their painting in the moment—freed these artists to paint intuitively, allowing their ideas to flow along with their brushstrokes. The paradox was that their need for money (which required them to paint fast) contributed to, rather than corrupted, their art.

The painters were "transparent," not wanting to draw attention as they traversed the state offering their wares for sale. They did business without having occupational licenses, but that wasn't the primary reason for their transparency. Rather, it was a calculated part of the fantasy they sold to their customers. People were attracted to the swift, free-flowing quality—the suggestiveness—of their paintings. Viewers could feel empowered by such surrogates for their own wondrously dreamt experiences, such metaphors for their ideal relationship to the land. Removed from its context, the landscape's significance was rendered mysterious, ephemeral and up for grabs—just like Florida itself at that time.

The transitory nature of their imagery offered an intimacy that would have been lost in a more formal treatment. It left a void that compelled viewers to provide their own interpretations. Viewers were co-authors, "finishing" the pictures in
They created images that seemed almost like picture windows overlooking an idealized Florida landscape, a place where dreams would likely come true.

Al Black, one of the Highwaymen, observed, “Alfred [Hair] could paint as good as he wanted and as fast as he wanted.” Hair preferred his production mode. He was driven, determined to be a millionaire by his 35th birthday. He had to paint fast and paint a lot. To him and the other Highwaymen, a painting wasn’t finished until it was sold. No painting was sold dry! With “wads of dough” in their pockets, everything was going better than planned.

Charismatic Alfred Hair may have acquired the wealth he desired. Cash rolled in, and he and other painters sported the high life. But just shy of being 35 and on top of the world, Hair took a bullet during an argument over a woman in a juke joint. He died later that night at the Fort Pierce Memorial Hospital. He had succeeded in forming the unlikely atelier that was responsible for the creation of Florida’s visual legacy.

The remaining Highwaymen continued painting during the ‘70s. Shop owners and professionals were among their best customers. They approached people in their offices to make one-stop multiple sales. The paintings weren’t necessarily cheap, but at $25, they were affordable. And, to many people, they were irresistible. Curtis Arnett, another of the Highwaymen, said, “People waited for us to come by.” Always the clever entrepreneurs, the artists showed up on paydays.

Their customers were people who didn’t generally purchase art—people who, from all accounts, didn’t know much about art but knew what they liked. These paintings were perfectly suited for them. The Highwaymen arrived at the archetypes of the landscapes by stripping bare the artifice that distinguished traditional landscape painting—the approach that objectified the land, yielding it foreign to the people who flocked to Florida then. The artists’ imagery was as fanciful as it was realistic; it was enticing enough to sanction the consumers’ beliefs about Florida. The images engaged people to look at the Sunshine State as paradise-attainable.

Maybe the Highwaymen’s picture-window paintings didn’t celebrate unspoiled nature as much as they reflected the consumers’ aspirations. Their paintings were made for folks wanting assurance, not for those desiring high art. In that their heyday coincided with the settling of contemporary Florida, these paintings commemorated the homesteading of the region and the state. By extension, the paintings acknowledged the broader ethos that established Florida as Eden.

The Highwaymen moniker was assigned to the group in 1994, after the paintings came to light in thrift stores, yard sales, and flea markets. People recognized that something special had happened. Now, after more than a decade of dormancy, having served their purpose as banners proclaiming one’s arrival, the paintings have been dusted off, reconsidered, and made into commodities. But the resurgence of Highwaymen paintings is, in part, a reprieve from our technologically driven and often alienating society. The ancient wilderness is viewed with increased enthusiasm as the land gets paved over. The presence of the land so portrayed transcends change and all it brings—fast-food drive-throughs, strip malls, traffic jams, and even the threat of terror.

The slower times that the paintings suggest may offer stability as we face our uncertain post-World Trade Center future. Or perhaps these paintings provide solace because at the heart of the images are disenfranchised blacks who had suffered through “Jim Crow” Florida and escaped their own bleak destinies. There’s satisfaction in seeing the oppressed prevail. There is more to these paintings than meets the eye.

GARY MONROE is author of The Highwaymen: Florida’s African-American Landscape Painters.
Cowmen Crack Whips, Ride Into State Lore

Some folks believe the term “Cracker” originally referred to cowmen like George “Junior” Mills, who cracked whips as they drove cattle across Florida’s rangelands. The animals responded to the loud “cracks” without being struck.

Mills, one of the last of the Florida cowmen who grew up tending livestock during the Great Depression, became an expert at making the hand-plaited leather whips. He estimates he crafted hundreds of them—and sold them to fellow cowmen who valued his high-quality handiwork. It was a way to make some extra money in a job where the pay was short and the days were long.

Mills made whips and rode herd on the range for 70 years, even though he was handicapped. “I had polio when I was 2 years old as you can see—that little foot there and the drewed-up arm. But I’ve been determined I could do some of what someone else could do a whole lot of.” He chuckles at his understatement. “Sure have. I’ve never made no big money, but I’ve enjoyed what I did.”

The Okeechobee cowman is now 89. Recently, while relaxing in his favorite chair, he reflected on the job he did for so many years. At one time or another he worked on most of the ranches throughout Central Florida: Goose Egg, Dixie, Buck Island, Cow Creek, and Bright Hour, to name a few. Florida was—and still is—a major producer of beef cattle east of the Mississippi, and cowmen still ride horses and use whips and dogs to control the cattle.

When he was 15, Mills began making cow whips from leather he cut from discarded boots. The resourceful youngster soon figured out the finer points of cow-whip construction on his own and began to make well-crafted, durable whips from buckskin hides.

The Florida cow whip is characterized by the way the whip body is attached to a hollow wooden handle by means of a leather thong. Many whip makers use lathe-turned handles they purchase from supply houses. Always the improviser, Mills often carved his from hardwood with a pocketknife, then used a piece of glass to scrape them to a smooth finish. He fashioned the graceful handle of his personal whip from the thick end of a broken billiard cue stick.

Florida rangeland, often flooded, and dotted with dense hardwood and cabbage-palm hammocks, requires cowmen to employ work methods that differ considerably from those of their western counterparts. In addition to their use of whips, they’re known for their extensive use of dogs, usually in pairs. Mills prefers a breed he calls “yellow cur dog,” a mix of hound and bulldog. Dogs keep cattle from roaming into hammocks or swamphy areas, and flush out those that have. Combining work and play, they run and romp through the water and scrub, all the while barking and generally giving the cattle a hard time. To the cowmen, they are invaluable.

“If you’re working on a very big place at all,” Mills says, “two dogs is worth as much as three men, especially if them three men ain’t up on their Ps and Qs as to know what they are supposed to be a-doing. Them two dogs can save a lot of horsepower.”

In reminiscing about his years riding the range, Mills tells a story that illustrates how tough and indefatigable the dogs can be. In ’49, his horse fell into a sinkhole that had already swallowed a dog and a steer. As he and a fellow cowman winched the horse from the hole, the animal heaved one last breath and died. The steer’s back was broken by the weight of the horse. Only the feisty cur survived, and it had been at the bottom of the pile. Mills fished a rope down to the dog. “He just reached down and bit it and shut down on that rope,” he recalls. He hauled the dog out of the hole by the strength of the animal’s jaws.

As venerated cowmen like Mills vanish from Florida rangelands, a new generation continues the traditions and occupational arts unique to their trade. Even in these high-tech times, hardy men still work cattle from horseback with a pair of good dogs and a hand-plaited whip. And in recent years, the term “Cracker” has become an emblem of pride—not only among cowmen, but also among white native and long-time-resident Floridians.

— Robert Stone
Meet Some of the folks

FROM FARMERS TO SURFERS TO GLADESMEN, FLORIDIANS OF ALL TYPES INNOVATE AND CREATE TO SURVIVE, TO EXPRESS IDEAS, AND TO SHARE INSPIRATIONS.

Celebrating Farm Life

The sight of men gathered around a steaming syrup kettle was certainly welcome on the cool fall morning that I arrived at Renaissance Park. It was still early when I drove up, certainly before 8:00, but based on the amount of activity, it was clear that these folks had started at daybreak. The locally grown sugar cane had already been ground, its sweet juice extracted, and now it bubbled away in a large cast-iron kettle. Nearby, several large hogs stood contained, behind steel bars. By the end of the day, they will be rendered into various cuts of meat, spicy sausage, “cracklins,” and cooking oil. “Nothing wasted” may as well be the unofficial motto for small farms, and here at the park, that adage was ably illustrated.

Renaissance Park is located in Greenwood, a historic African-American farming community. Neighbors gather during their annual Fall Festival to celebrate the folk life of the Panhandle. Those versed in the traditions of farm life share their skills and histories with others. Aside from syrup-making, there are demonstrations of quilting techniques, country cooking, wagon rides, corn-shucking contests, storytelling, and gospel singing.

The area’s folk life revolves around local farming occupations and is expressed by a deep appreciation for the region’s rural landscape. Many area farmers grow peanuts as their cash crop—a crop that has been important to the region since the early 20th century—as well as cotton, tobacco,
vegetables, and pigs. Older farmers recall the difficulties of growing peanuts, or "pea," during the harsh years of the Depression. Unable to afford mechanized equipment, farm families depended upon the labor of their children, "one mule per forty acres," hand plowing, and the vagaries of price and weather. Even so, many older land owners look back on this period with mixed feelings, appreciating the self-sufficiency that allowed them to get through the "hard times" when landless farm workers and sharecroppers were in much tougher positions.

One afternoon, I sat talking with Jessie and Emma Borders on the front porch of their Greenwood home, on a site farmed by their family for more than a century. As they explained to me, succeeding at small farming, particularly in the early years of their marriage during the 1930s, required the cooperation of the entire community. Folks lent each other wagons and tools, sat up all night with the recently bereaved, and helped each other bring in their crops. If you had some extra meat or canned vegetables, you passed it along. "You help one another," Jessie Borders said. "You had to have plenty of help. It would swap around. It would work like that, from one to another."

The festivals at Renaissance Park celebrate that way of community life and survival. The park also serves as a place where kids can come together and reconnect with their traditions and the outdoors. Local resident Danny Sylvester spends most of his weekends at the park, clearing fallen tree limbs and debris with his children often in tow, and getting ready for the next event. The park encompasses 40 acres of timber and natural forest intersected by nature trails. Facilities include an outdoor classroom, a cane syrup barn, and a museum. Many of the facilities have been constructed using recycled materials and donated labor.

Currently, the park holds two annual events: the Fall Festival and a Labor Day festival. Throughout the year, Sylvester holds weekend retreats for area children. "Kids need a place to be in nature," he says. The kids hike, ride bikes, sleep outside, and cook for themselves—all while learning the community tradition of self-sufficiency.

- Laura Ogden

Seminole Patchwork Unique

Seminole patchwork, with its intricate stitching and arresting designs, may be one of the few art traditions that originated in Florida. Its juxtaposition of fabrics, kaleidoscopic colors, and patterning certainly rivals any art form exhibited in national museums.

Cultural anthropologists appreciate artistic aesthetics, but are also interested in the historical context that helps to shape local traditions, including the complicated political and economic influences that transform local culture. Patchwork can be seen as a tradition that speaks to the resilience of Seminole people. In adapting to changing economic opportunities in South Florida, they created an art form now valued as a symbol of tribal identity.

Mikasuki-speaking Native Americans, also referred to as the Seminole or Miccosukee Tribes, found refuge in the Florida Everglades during the destructive conflicts of Indian removal early to mid-1800s. As one would expect, the dress style of these early settlers is substantially different from that of contemporary tribal members. Historians suggest that the Seminole clothing style remained fairly constant for most of the 19th century, with both women and men wearing hand-sewn plain cotton clothing.

Beginning in the late 1880s, when Seminole women acquired sewing machines, seamstresses gradually began to elaborate on clothing design—inserting calico strips and other ornamentation. The historian Patsy West suggests that Seminole women preferred the smaller hand-cranked sewing machine models, as these could be easily packed into a canoe and then set up under thatch chickie shelters at Everglades backcountry camps. Responding to demand, trading posts throughout the Everglades began to stock these
machines. This evolution in Seminole clothing took place at the same time that the Everglades was becoming dramatically compromised. During this period, agricultural and developmental interests guided our policies toward the Everglades, resulting in the drainage of millions of acres. This greatly reduced available game, such as alligators, wild turkey, otter, and various fish. Further exacerbating the situation, drainage policies encouraged an unprecedented number of people to move into South Florida. Many of these new settlers also hunted in the back-country, increasing competition for the remaining game. These changes made it difficult for Seminoles to support themselves through hunting and fishing, as they traditionally did. The Seminole responded to this altered economic and environmental climate by becoming active participants in the region’s burgeoning tourist economy.

At various attractions along the Miami River and the Tamiami Trail, Seminoles demonstrated their culture to visiting tourists. In addition to staging weddings and alligator-wrestling events, Seminoles sold crafts, including patchwork clothing, baskets, and palmetto-fiber dolls.

The patchwork tradition blossomed at these sites, with the clothing becoming increasingly ornamented with patchwork inserts. Seamstresses produced patches by first sewing together numerous vertical strips of cloth of different colors. Next, the strips were cut into pieces and recombined at angles to produce a square patch. The patches were then sewn together to form a band that was incorporated into a skirt, jacket, cape, or blouse.

For tribal members born after the 1920s, patchwork clothing came to represent not only an economic activity, but also an essential component of tribal identity.

— Laura Ogden

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#### Skating the Surf in Style

Florida's Space Coast is home to some of the world's top surfers—like Kelly Slater of Cocoa Beach, who is the only person to win the men's world championship six times, and Flagler Beach resident Frieda Zamba, who has garnered the women's world championship four times.

But few people know it's also home to several world-renowned surfboard makers. Among the best is George Robinson of Melbourne, who sculpts strikingly beautiful, extra-long surfboards from balsa wood.

Most popular contemporary surfboards stand about six-and-a-half feet tall and are made from polyurethane foam blanks covered with a polyester and fiberglass laminate. Robinson’s custom-made specialty boards are closer to 10 feet long and are made of featherweight balsa. They are celebrated by surfers all over the world.

A lifelong surfer, Robinson is part of a folk community of surfboard makers in Florida. They fashion boards in small shops, often employing a half-dozen or fewer workers. They all know each other; many have worked together at one time or another. They've learned the craft informally, often by observation and imitation, and they use a specialized vocabulary. Over the years, they’ve developed aesthetic values, which continue to change over time.

Robinson, 50 and still surfing, has a small shop in Melbourne. He was introduced to balsa longboards at the age of 13 while visiting relatives on the coast of Ecuador. There he discovered the locally made lightweight wooden boards. He surfed on them everyday during a summer visit and developed an affinity for them that would blossom into a lifelong creative passion. Before he was 20, Robinson had achieved a reputation for making quality, high-performance balsa longboards. (He also makes polyurethane foam boards.)

The process of creating a custom surfboard begins with a dialog between the maker and the prospective client. Factors they consider include the surfer’s height and weight; the kind of surf in which the board will be used; overall board length; the shape of the nose and tail; the amount of “rocker,” or arch, along the length of the bottom of the board; the shape, placement and number of fins; the number of “stringers,” or board stiffeners; the type of wood used for the stringers; and the type of finish and decoration.

At the top of the board-making hierarchy are the shapers—those who masterfully form the sleek, functional shape of the boards for optimum performance. Many venerated Florida shapers have been making surfboards for three or four decades. Shaping is the most critical stage of surfboard making because the shape determines the performance characteristics of the board.

“If the shape is no good, it ain’t going to ride,” Robinson quips. Robinson begins crafting a longboard by gluing together several full-length balsa boards, each averaging about four inches square. He then roughly shapes the surfboard using a hand-held electric planer. Then he cuts the surfboard along the length, between glue joints, into six or seven long pieces. After that, he carves away about 25 percent of the total mass of the balsa from
Meet Some of the folks

Berry Clever Art

To know what Ruby Williams thinks, just read her fence. And her goat pen. And, of course, her produce stand. And any other plywood surface where she can paint her view of the world, share her heartbreaks, and profess her lifelong creed. It’s all there, in dazzling reds, greens, yellows, oranges, and blues, at the end of a dirt road in rural west-central Florida.


Hundreds of such paintings line the fences and decorate the ramshackle buildings at Williams’s produce stand, located just off Highway 60, east of Tampa. The signs were originally designed to advertise the produce, but they’ve become the main attraction for folk-art lovers. In fact, they’ve brought Williams fame in folk-art circles. Her signs have been featured at New York gallery shows, with some selling for almost $500. She’s also on the internet, has been featured on television and in newspapers and magazines, and has sold paintings that now hang in Europe. “Ruby Say Folk Art Hot Hot,” says one of her signs.

Williams started painting the signs when she built the produce stand some 20 years ago. She had just returned to her family homestead in Florida following the breakup of her marriage in New Jersey. The family farm where she was born is part of the historic African-American settlement that her great-grandmother helped found, a nine-square-mile rural community situated between Mulberry and Plant City.

Williams started painting the produce signs to attract drivers speeding by on Highway 60. She installed a series of small red watermelon signs along the highway and created other signs that made such announcements as “Blackeyes,” “Collards,”

the core of each piece. This “chambering” process considerably reduces the weight of the board with virtually no reduction in strength or stiffness. After chambering, Robinson glues the board together, sandwiching thin redwood or cedar stringers at a number of the new glue joints. The stringers give the board strength, and the contrasting dark color of the redwood or cedar provides a pleasing design. He then performs the final shaping using rasps and sandpaper.

Robinson’s balsa-board clients prefer an unadorned clear finish, which allows them to enjoy the natural beauty of the woods. He completes the process by final buffing and hand polishing to a mirror finish. The result is an impressive, functional artwork, built to provide many years of enjoyment as human, board, and wave become one in the graceful, exhilarating sport of surfing.

Foam boards are often decorated, using techniques ranging from rather austere geometric striping to complex airbrush designs, inlaid textiles, metal flake paint, decals, or any combination of processes. Decorating boards is a form of expression through which several Florida surf artists have achieved international renown. Among the best-known Florida surf artists is Michael Nemnich of Indialantic, who signs his work “Nemo.” Working in the Space Coast area from 1975 through 1987, he graced more than 30,000 surfboards with striking airbrush designs before moving on to printmaking, sculpture, and textile design.

Many top-rated surfers can be seen skating across the waves off the Space Coast on locally crafted boards (especially at Sebastian Inlet, where some of Florida’s best waves break). Robinson, who won the United States East Coast Championship in 1978, is still out there too, though he no longer competes. But you can bet he’ll be making artful moves through the surf on his own works of art.

— Robert Stone
but her signs evolved into art that reflected more about her than her okra. “Honey my husband broke my heart,” says one with a red heart pierced by an arrow. “I like to tell the world about God creation,” says another. Williams became a minister at a church not far from her produce stand. “It hurts to hate,” a sign says. “I thank God for my healing,” says another. “Fly Right,” directs one of her birds.

Over time, encouraged by friends and admirers like Florida photographer Bud Lee and folk artist Rodney Hardee, she began to explore new topics. Her artwork expanded to include various people, birds, alligators, and animals—like a piano-playing cow or an African-American cowgirl. A couple of her characters are named “Bonnie Bon Bonnie” and “Clever.” These have become three-dimensional, soft-sculpture dolls sewn by her daughter and painted by Williams. The character Bonnie has become such a favorite that Williams often takes a well-worn Bonnie doll with her when she leaves home.

A visit to Williams’s produce stand, or folk-art environment, depending on how you see the space, could include any number of experiences. It might be a meal cooked on an outdoor smoker during her November art opening; a spiritual healing; or a walk through her small farm complete with vegetables, fruit trees, and animals such as turkeys, goats, chickens, and an ornery cow.

Indeed, Williams’s life and her art are so intertwined that some of her paintings have tooth marks from a goat. Some of them also reflect the essence of “Miss Ruby.” Says one, “My name is Clever.”

— Kristin G. Congdon
Meet Some of the folks

Gladesman Glen Simmons, 87, is one of the last of his generation still constructing traditional Everglades skiffs.

Skiffing Through the 'Glades

Gladesman Glen Simmons slowly planes the edges of a cypress board, working alone in a big barn amid the detritus of several decades. Hundreds of handsaws, in various stages of usability, are precariously balanced along one wall of the barn. An antique iron bed frame, coated with dust, hangs from the ceiling. Cast iron skillets, washing-machine motors, and a pack of dogs compete for crowded floor space. Simmons, who lives in the country near the main entrance of Everglades National Park, is hard at work building an Everglades skiff. At 87, he is one of the last of his generation still constructing these boats.

Simmons, like other gladesmen, is a descendent of settlers who moved into South Florida in the mid-1800s. They came to Florida for various reasons. Some were fleeing the difficulties of post-Civil War Reconstruction, while others were simply lured southward by the untapped potential of this largely undeveloped state. Families lived in isolated enclaves, with few neighbors and far fewer conveniences. They homesteaded along the margins of the Everglades interior, around the shores of Lake Okeechobee, and on various coastal islands. The Simmons family was no different. "My mother's folks raised eight healthy young'uns and lived on a dozen or more shores in the Keys and the Ten Thousand Islands from 1885 on—until the young'uns were of marrying age, and they scattered out," Simmons said.

Like frontier folk throughout the United States, gladesmen relied upon hunting and fishing to provide for their families. Deer, wild turkey, turtles, and birds (white ibis or "curlew" being a favorite) were staples on their dinner tables. To earn a little cash, gladesmen hunted for otter, raccoon, and alligators. Alligator hunting, in particular, provided the most reliable source of income; alligators could be hunted year-around. Hunters sold alligator hides through a loose network of dealers and middlemen. This lifestyle remained viable until the late 1960s, when the Federal Lacey Act was amended prohibiting the sale of alligator hides in the United States.

For gladesmen, making a living required spending weeks at a time in the Everglades backcountry, battling the region's notorious mosquitoes and making the best of the summer's daily rains and unrelenting heat. On these trips, gladesmen loaded their skiffs with "groceries," usually corn meal, lard, and coffee; minimal camping gear; sacks of salt, which were used for hide preparation; and ammunition. They would then push off into a marsh or slough, poling their boats across the Everglades. Each evening, camp was set up on whatever high ground was available. There, gladesmen cleaned and
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stretched the day's hides, lit a fire, and prepared dinner before falling asleep under an aptly named "skeeter bar."

It would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of skiffs to this lifestyle. The boat's design accommodated both the needs of the hunter and the constraints of the landscape. During the summer months, when the water level was high, gladesmen hunted alligator holes in the interior glades. A skiff's flat bottom allowed access to the region's shallow marshes, and the boat's pointed bow enabled the poler to ease the boat through dense saw-grass thickets. During the winter months, when the water was low, gladesmen hunted from various lakes and in the brackish waters of the mangrove swamps. The skiff's square stern, with its slight uplift, could be pushed backward through tight spots.

Early boats were constructed out of heavy cypress planks. Today, Simmons fashions the skiff's gunwales and transom from cypress and uses marine-grade plywood for the bow. Though a simple design, forming the boat's bow takes patience and perseverance. Using a single piece of plywood, Simmons manipulates the wood by first splitting it, then soaking it in water. He uses clamps to bend the wood until it buckles up and meets, thereby forming the skiff's unique pointed bow. The bow is held together with pieces of copper wire and is finished with fiberglass resin.

The days when gladesmen could set off alone into the backcountry to hunt alligators and enjoy the solitude of the vast Everglades are long gone. Today the roaring thunder of motorized airboats has all but replaced the quiet grace of skiffs. Back in Simmons' barn, it feels as though time has stood still.

Laura Ogden

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On a gray stretch of highway just outside of Leesburg, there's a brilliant spot of color. Welcome to Dr. Fergie's produce stand—a yellow, red, orange, pink, green, blue, striped, and maybe even polka-dotted place where fruit, vegetables, and faith are offered in equal measures.

The roadside stand and its whimsical signs are so colorful that the City of Leesburg once considered it a garish eyesore. Now, however, it's promoted as a famous landmark, a must-see example of local color for visiting celebrities. The band Arrowsmith and former U.S. Vice President Dan Quayle are among those who have visited.

Donald Ferguson, popularly known as "Dr. Fergie," has been selling produce for the past 20 years at his current location, and for another dozen years at a previous site. He is constantly changing signs and decorating his space with new items such as rubber alligators, strategically placed figurines, and plastic oranges and grapefruits that he hangs from a huge oak tree. He explains that he likes to recreate his environment as the seasons come and go. It makes sense to him that as produce has seasons, so too should his displays.

Numerous hand-painted signs advertise produce and God. Some signs do both. Says one: "God is love—Fruit is love—Is never out of season." When he sells melon or grapefruit or any of his other offerings, he may also give an impromptu sermon and some words of wisdom. "I'm into fruit. It's my culture. God gives me this talent."

For many years he collaborated with sign painter Wade Tompkins on the content and design of the paintings. Five years ago Tompkins died, and Ferguson began working with Susan Laurance who lives in Gainesville. His most recent installation is a Bahamian set; he wanted to create a feel for his native islands.

Born in the Bahamas in 1949, Ferguson came to Leesburg with his parents when he was 19. His father was a farmer who also sold produce. Following his father's lead, Ferguson took up the business. "My father planted the seed, and I watered it," he says. Selling produce is so connected to his love for his father that he says, "When he dies, the fruit business might lose its flavor for me. I do it for him."

Kristin G. Congdon

"Dr. Fergie's" colorful roadside fruit stand beckons travelers along a gray stretch of highway just outside Leesburg.
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A Clown Makes Circus History
By Bringing the Big Top Home

For decades, Diamond Jim Parker toured the country as a circus clown. He took pies in the face, buckets of water over the head, and banana peels under his feet. When he retired, he missed the action.

“We have sawdust in our blood,” he says.

So, he figured out a way to bring the big top home. He started constructing miniature circus models that are accurate down to the last peanut. His home now is filled with these meticulously detailed three-ringed worlds of lions and tigers and elephants; tightrope walkers and sword-swallowers; and, of course, clowns. He has trunks full of original circus posters, costumes, photographs, and clippings given to him by retired circus performers.

All of this, plus his collection of upbeat circus music—especially the trombone-punctuated clown tunes—makes him feel as if he’s back in the middle of the color and drama and fun of the circus.

“You can be so low, and you hear the band leader whistle, and everything changes,” he says. “When I get to work on my models, it’s my world.”

Parker, 65, works from memory but says he also researches various historical aspects in order to tell the story correctly. He is considered a circus historian.

His love for the circus was sparked when he was a child in Hastings, Nebraska. The Shriners’ Circus would come to town once a year. His father was a Shriner, so young Jim would go to every show. Back then, the arrival of the circus engendered such excitement that Midwest schools would close so everyone in town could attend. Jim loved the animals and the action. That attraction eventually drew him into a life that would define him as an adult.

After a stint in the Navy in the late 1950s, Parker met a friend who was a circus stilts-walker. One day, at his friend’s request, Parker dressed as a clown and sold tickets to the circus. His clown career grew from that moment. He developed clown acts and traveled with various circuses throughout the United States. Eventually he worked for the famous Ringling Bros Barnum & Bailey Circus. He was a whiteface clown who did slapstick, and his clown name came from the diamonds he painted on his face.

Circus life on the road was hard, but he loved it. “You have to love it. You don’t make any money,” he said. “If you have a day off from performing, you must drive. You become like a family unit.”

Since retirement, Parker has discovered that this sense of family unity continues. When he underwent heart surgery several years ago, a neighbor who was also retired from the circus nursed him for a month after he was released from the hospital. Parker hardly knew this neighbor before the surgery.

No wonder Diamond Jim Parker lives and relives his life in the circus, as he visually tells a story that is filled with music, laughter, and the best of times.

— Kristin G. Congdon
Meet Some of the folks

A Door Opens the Way To Healing and Love

Mary Proctor has created a spiritual refuge within the large fenced yard that is her American Folk Art Museum and Gallery in Tallahassee. She limits her visitors to those she feels possess positive energy, and she believes that God gave her the gift of a healing touch to help people of all backgrounds. "Love is more powerful than any evil spirit. I dwell in love," she says. "Hate kills. It destroys. I know, because I've been there."

Earlier in life Proctor suffered many physical injuries, and the resulting anger came close to destroying her. She began to heal physically and spiritually when she decided to follow her grandmother's teachings and concentrate on love. Her grandmother raised Proctor and four sisters in a small rural Jefferson County community. After her grandmother's death in a fire, Proctor said she prayed under a tree for 30 days, then saw a radiant light, and heard a sweet voice say, "Paint the door." Proctor explains: "I believe that was her way of telling me from heaven, 'You got to do something. You can't sit here and worry about me.' I think the art is spreading her love.

Proctor uses doors, plywood, and found objects as the base of her paintings. The doors, however, are particularly important in her art, as they represent passages to new life. In addition to painting them, she adorns them with objects such as beads, mirrors, coins, small toys, fabrics, and even S&H green stamps. She usually incorporates verbal narratives, too.

Proctor deals with themes of love, spirituality, respect, non-violence, and self-esteem. Some of her paintings depict a woman whose body has experienced great pain. Yet one of her favorite creations is an angel cut from a piece of plywood, then embellished with glittering paint, jewelry, beads, and a mirror. Proctor says that when she asked God to show her an angel, he directed her to a mirror and said, "Look and see the angel is you."

Since beginning to paint in 1995, Proctor has earned a national reputation; her work has appeared in numerous publications and exhibitions nationwide. — Tina Bucuvalas

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Ann Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Owner
By Daniel L. Schafer
$24.95

Reviewed by Philip Levy

Sometime late in 1806 Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley first saw Florida. She did so as a 13-year-old Wolof slave from Senegal recently sold and transshipped at Havana. By the time her aging eyes closed some six decades later, Kingsley would have been a slave, a freedwoman, a wife to her former master, a mother to mixed-race children, a Northeast Florida plantation mistress, and a slaveholder. Like the many Floridas she knew, Spanish, American, and Confederate, her life took many tacks and turns.

Her story as retold by the University of North Florida’s Daniel L. Schafer is a compelling one, largely because Kingsley’s experience of the ante-bellum South was so at odds with that of most African-American women. Her master-cum-husband gave his enslaved wives considerable latitude to control their own fates. Kingsley ran portions of his estate and resided in a large and comfortable home, which today the National Park Service maintains. She owned property and slaves in her own right, used her unique position to work tirelessly to protect and provide for her children, and was a prestigious figure in her community. Kingsley had her world uprooted when Spanish Florida’s northern Anglo-American neighbors came rampaging south to annex the land and steal people to work Georgia’s plantations. In American courts, she fought her husband’s sister and secured the property his will left to her and their children, despite the huge obstacles free blacks faced in the law. During her lifetime and afterwards, people said of her that she was descended from a West African royal line. Visitors talked of having chatted with the “African Princess.” Later generations of tourists and tour

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guides delighted in the idea of the noble African woman ruling her north-eastern Florida roost and retold stories of how she disciplined her slaves through word and deed. Even as recently as a few years ago, Kingsley's story was the subject of a pop song in her Native Senegal. Clearly people have found something intriguing about this woman, and with good reason. Kingsley's unusual life raises many important questions, including those about the options and struggles confronting both enslaved and free African Americans, the complex shape of 19th-century southern society, the nature of race and gender, the often-hidden intimate relationships between blacks and whites, and the differences between the Spanish and American tenures in Florida.

Schafer manages to keep Kingsley and her family front and center throughout the book. This is no small feat considering the thin relevant documentation and the prodigious shadow cast by master/husband Zephaniah Kingsley, a man who could lay claim to having been a slave trader, plantation owner, twice expatriated American, polygamist, and abolitionist. Yet in some ways he cannot reside too far in the background; after all, his quirks were what helped create the conditions allowing Anna Kingsley to lead the life she did. One wonders if the same 13-year-old Wolof girl sold to owners of a South Carolina rice plantation or a Caribbean sugar cane field would have risen so high? This touches on the central historical question of Kingsley's life: Was she an exceptional woman, or a very fortunate one? The answer is probably some combination of both her natural abilities and the unique conditions created by an atypical master. Also coming into play were the ways in which slavery and race relations played out differently in different places. Nevertheless, Schafer's relating of Kingsley's exceptional life is a valuable addition to the growing literature on the complexity of American slavery, the shape and struggles of southern free-black communities, and the interconnectedness of black and white worlds. Anna Madjigine Jai Kingsley indeed found ways to survive and thrive despite oppression. But her story also makes us wonder how many other uncommon people were ground down and rendered anonymous by America's long era of slavery.

PHILIP LEVY is an assistant professor of history at the University of South Florida. His work focuses on colonial Indian relations and the material dimensions of the rise of slavery in Colonial Virginia.

Making Waves: Female Activists in Twentieth-Century Florida
Edited by Jack E. Davis and Kari Frederickson

Reviewed by Betty Jean Steinhouer

Gary Mormino and Ray Arsenault call this 24th volume in their History and Culture Series a “departure” in Florida studies because of the “scant attention” that has heretofore been paid to women in the written history of the state. This is the first of what they hope will be several efforts by Florida scholars toward “redressing this neglect.” As such, it is an important effort worthy of note.

Most of the women mentioned in Making Waves will not be known to the average reader. They are unsung heroes who tried to improve Florida by focusing on the problems of slums and air pollution as well as on larger civil rights and environmental issues. Of 13 chapters, seven are concerned with individual women, and of those, two or three will be recognizable by name. Lillian Smith and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings are mentioned in the foreword, but neither is included in the book. Few women did more to change race matters in the South than these two—Smith, by writing Strange Fruit about lynching, and Rawlings by waging personal, important battles against Jim Crow and unequal education. But Florida-born Smith spent most of her writing/activist years in Georgia, while Rawlings has had more written about her than any other Florida author than Zora Neale Hurston. Therefore, this volume is focused on the hands-on activists. Two of them were also writers: Lois Lenski, who wrote about the plight of migrant children, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas.

Making Waves moves several times between the general and the specific. Although it is arranged into five categories (Political Planners, Rural Reformers, Environmentalists, Post World War II Activists, and Freedom Fighters), some sections have chapters addressing only the general subject matter, while others have chapters about specific women, without addressing the overall theme. The result is an unevenly textured book, which requires that the reader be patient with the chapters wherein a great deal of generalizing is done. Conversely, the reader may simply prioritize reading those chapters that present strongly defined individuals who can fairly be expected to carry the book. Most readers will likely do the latter and gravitate toward the three most recognizable names in the book: Mary McLeod Bethune, Ruth Bryan Owens, and Marjory Stoneman Douglas. Their photographs are on the cover, along with three other women unrecognizable except to the few who happen to know their identities: Eartha White, Betty Mae Tiger Jumper, and Marjorie Harris Carr.

The reader who goes looking for the chapter about Mary McLeod Bethune will have to turn to the index to find
her, for there is no Bethune chapter. She is lumped together with Eartha White, Blanche Armwood, and others in a chapter on Florida's African-American Female Activists, "Without Compromise or Fear."

To say that the book has faults is not to discount its overall importance. That it is in print at all is the greatest statement that University Press of Florida could make about its willingness to "remember the women." As it turns out, the chapters a reader naturally turns to first (because they are about familiar figures) are not the most important chapters in Making Waves. We already knew the importance of figures such as Owens and Douglas. What we didn't know were the stories of the women who truly suffered for their activism—women such as Bette Wimbish, the first black women on St. Petersburg's City Council, who dealt with the many racist threats against her after her election in 1969 by learning to shoot a rifle and keep it nearby.

This book also contains a litany of the mostly horrible life of Betty Mae Tiger Jumper (including remarkably honest information about what Florida intended for the Seminoles), as well as a chapter on a white woman named Ruth Perry who was almost assassinated for defending the NAACP against Charley Johns (Florida's Joe McCarthy) and his committee against school integration.

Making Waves should be on the shelf of every family with daughters, in hopes that they might pick it up some day and discover an important part of their heritage. As any woman knows who has had to make her way in a man's world, a woman's life, political or personal, is full of strife. This book begins the telling.

BETTY JEAN STEINSHOER has portrayed Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings on the Chautauqua circuit since 1991 and has written a volume of literary lore that contains chapters on both Douglas and Rawlings.
Florida’s Vanishing Attractions

They closed another tourist attraction in Florida this spring. The death of the old Cypress Gardens signifies a familiar trend: Florida is losing something special, an innocent charm that once made it an American Dreamstate.

Long before Lake Buena Vista anointed itself as “the happiest place on earth,” long before Shamu and Space Mountain, Cypress Gardens was Florida’s best known and most-beloved tourist attraction. How did this Lake Eloise muck land and swamp become a theme park rather than a cornfield or paper mill? Lacking a spectacular beach, bubbling springs, or even location on a busy thoroughfare funneling motorists north and south, Winter Haven held one great advantage: Dick Pope Sr.

He was pure promoter. A mythic figure, part Zig Ziglar and part John Gruden, Pope played an indispensable role in creating, packaging, and selling Florida. The populist founder envisioned a place where shivering Midwesterners could luxuriate in nature and validate dreams.

Since its opening during the glum days of the Great Depression, millions of visitors appreciated Pope’s love of spectacle. He improved upon nature’s imperfections, draining the swamp and carving canals between lakes. He plastered “See Cypress Gardens” signs on birdhouses and bumper stickers and encouraged Esther Williams to make movies on location.

Places like Cypress Gardens, Silver Springs, and Weeki Wachee were some of Florida’s leading tourist attractions in the quarter century following World War II. Nature was the draw. Visitors gawked at exotic orchids and monkeys that Tarzan movies left behind. If Wallace Stegner said that the West represented “the geography of hope,” places like Sunken Gardens and Tiki Gardens expressed Florida dreams of individual happiness amidst tropical splendor. Promoters who later added gewgaws and gimmicks—mermaid shows and piano-playing water skiers—created Florida’s signature kitsch.

Cypress Gardens succeeded because it offered something for everyone. To sober Midwesterners, it supplied clean-cut family entertainment; to the middle classes who could not afford Paris or would not tolerate French waiters, it was America’s Versailles Garden; to a public not yet saturated by cable television and technological wizardry, Pope entertained crowds with aquamaids and hoop-skirted southern belles. He richly earned the nickname, “The Swami of the Swamp.”

Throughout the 1950s the gift shop sold more Kodak film than any place in America. Pope hired eight full-time photographers simply to help guests load and shoot film. He berated local weathermen when they reported a “partly cloudy” day. To Pope, it was “partly sunny.” When asked in 1963 to name their favorite American tourist destination, travel editors selected Cypress Gardens and the Grand Canyon in a first-place tie.

In 1950 Roy Disney paid a visit to Winter Haven. Following a burst of dazzling creativity and financial success in the 1930s, the Disney mystique seemed spent in the years immediately following World War II. The Disney studio lost money in 1949. Disney peppered Pope with questions about attendance figures and overhead costs. Later he called his brother in California. “Walt,” he began, “I’m down here with a guy named Dick Pope back in the woods of central Florida and all he has is some flowers and girls and he’s drawing 2,500 to 4,000 people a day!”

In the history of tourism, the opening of Disney World in 1971 represented Florida’s Biggest Bang. The Magic Kingdom imposed its will upon a state still associated with honky-tonk gyp joints and roadside alligator farms. The Disney Empire promoted a commercial vision and corporate model that redefined tourism: managed fun, dazzling technology, simulated reality, and hegemonic control.

Today, oligopoly rules the tourist industry. Mega-theme parks strangle the weak. Nature is not enough. “People don’t want to walk the Appalachian Trail,” lamented the grandson of Arthur McKee, the founder of Jungle Gardens (1932–1976). “They want to ride it!” Family-run parks became anachronisms, unable to compete against Busch Gardens and Universal Studios. Who remembers Dog Land and Dupree Gardens, Casper’s Ostrich Farm and Bongoland, Midget City and Serpentarium?

Dick Pope created something special. As the Book of Ecclesiastes intoned, “Let us now praise famous men.”

GARY R. MORMINO holds the Frank E. Duckwall professorship in Florida history. In the fall, he will join the newly created Florida Studies Program at USF-St. Petersburg.
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