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Whole and True Discoverye of Terra Florida

Jean Ribault

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Early Visions of Florida

Poetry • Stories • Chronicles from an American Borderland

Jean Ribault, The Whole & True Discouerye of Terra Florida

Juan Ribault was among the first Europeans to colonize Florida. He was a naval officer, navigator, and a colonizer of what would later become the southeastern United States. As a Huguenot (or French Calvinist) and officer under Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, Ribault led an expedition to North America in 1562 that established the outpost of Charlesfort, on today's Parris Island. After two years, he took over command of [Fort Caroline](#), the first European settlement in what is now Florida.



Ribault was sent by Coligny to Fort Caroline in an attempt to relieve the 300 colonists that had gone with Laudonnière. However, Ribault did not expect Spain to engage in war with the Huguenot faction of France. The war resulted in the cutting of the supply line and travel route for Ribault to return to France. He and many of his followers were killed by Spanish soldiers near St. Augustine in 1565. The Spanish regarded the Huguenots as illegal trespassers. Catholic Spain's official position on the Huguenots in Florida was that they must be driven out because they were heretics. Also, their very presence in Florida was considered a threat to Spanish shipping in the Atlantic.

After his death, Ribault's account was found and purchased in 1563 by Thomas Hacket, an Englishman who used the French document for his writing over French occupation. Only a few copies of the document were issued and printed in English. In 1875 the title was changed to Histoire de l'Expedition Francaise en Florida by Paul Gaffarfel. Finally in 1875 The Whole and True Account, a reprint of the 1563 London edition was published in New York. There are very few histories of Jean Ribault. The selection below retains the original spelling.

Edited by Valerie Lanham, University of South Florida St. Petersburg

Further Reading

Bennett, Charles. *Laudonnière & Fort Caroline: History and Documents*. Tuscaloosa: U Alabama P, 2001.

Biggar, H.B. "Ribaut's Discoverye of Terra Florida." *The English Historical Review* 32:126 (Apr. 1917). 253-70.

Jean Ribaut, *The Whole & True Discoverye of Terra Florida* [1563]. Jeannette Thurber Connor (ed.). Gainesville: U P of Florida, 1974.

.... So yt is come to passe, that God, by his only goodnes, hathe geven us grace to make the furthest cut and travers of the seaes that ever was made in our memorye or knoweledg in longitude from the east to the west, and therefore was it comonly said bothe in France and Spayne and also amonges us, that it was impossible [for us] to come and safely arrive thither where the Lord did conduct us, all which proceeded but of ignoran[ce] and lacke of attempting that which we have not byn afraied to give thadventure to prove, albeit that in all marryne cardes, they sett fourthe the coast with shippwrackes, withowt portes or rivers which we have found otherwise as yt ffollowithe.

Thursday the last of Aprill at the breke of the daye we discovered and clearly perceived a faire cost, stretching of a gret lenght, covered with an infenite number of highe and fayrc trees, we being not past 7 or 8 leages from the shore, the countrye seming unto us playn, withowt any shewe of hilles, and approaching nearer within 4 or 5 leages of the land, we cast ancre at ten fadom watter, the bottom of the sea being playn with muche oose and of fast hold. On the southe side as far as a certen poynt or cape, scituate under the latitude of 29 degrees and a half, which we have named the cap Francoys, we could espie nether river nor baye, wherfore we sent our boates, furnished with men of experience, to sound and knowe the coast nere the shore, who retourning agen unto us about one of the clocke at after none, declared that they had found, amonges other thinges, viij fadom watter at the harde bancke of the sea. Wherupon, having dilligently wayed up our ancre and hoist up saile, with wynd at will we sailed and veewed the coast all along with an inspeakeable pleasure of thoderiferous smell and bewtye of the same. And bicause there apeared unto us no sine of any porte, about the setting of the sonne, we cast ancre agayn, which don, we did behold to and fro the goodly order of the woodes wherwith God hathe decked everywhere the said lande. Then perceving towards the northe a leaping and breking of the water, as a streme falling owt of the lande unto the sea, forthewith we sett agayn up saile to duple the same while it was yet daye. And as we had so don, and passed byonde yt, there apeared unto us a faire enter [ye] of a great river which caused us to cast ancre agen and tary there nere the lande, to thende that the next mornynge we myght see what it was. And though that the wynd blewe for a tyme vehemently to the shore warde, yet the hold and auncordge is so good there, that one cable and one ancre held us fast withowt driving or slyding.

The next daye in the morninge, being the ffirst of Maye, we assaied to enter this porte with two rowel barges and a boate well trymed, finding littell watter at the entrye and many surges and

brekinges of the water which might have astuned and caused us to retourn backe to shippborde, if God had not speedely brought us in, where fynding fourthwith 5 or 6 fadom water, entered in to a goodly and great river, which as we went we found to increse still in depth and lardgnes, boylling and roring through the multytute of all sortes of fishes. Thus entered we perceived a goods numbere of the Indians, in-habytantes there, coming alonge the sandes and seebanck somewhate nere unto us, without any taken of feare or dowbte, shewing unto us the easiest landing place, and thereupon we geving them also on our parte tokens of assuraunce and frendelynes, fourthewith one of the best of apparance amonges them, brother unto one of there kinges or governours, comaunded one of the Indians to enter into the water, and to approche our boates, to showe us the easiest landing place. We seeing this, without any more dowbting or difficulty, landed, and the messenger, after we had rewarded him with some loking glases and other prety thinges of small value, ran incontenently towardes his lorde, who forthwith sent me his girdell in token of assurance and ffrendship, which girdell was made of red lether, aswell couried and coulored as is possible. And as I began to go towardes him, he sett fourth and came and receved me gentlye and reoised after there mannour, all his men ffollowing him with great silence and modestie, yea, with more then our men did. And after we had awhile with gentill usage congratulated with him, we fell to the grownd a littell waye from them, to call upon the name of God, and to beseche him to contynewe still his goodnes towardes us, and to bring to the knoweledg of our Savior Jesus Christ this pooer people. While we were thus praying, they sitting upon the grownd, which was dressed and strewed with baye bowes, behelde and herkened unto us very attentively, without eyther speaking or moving. And as I made a sygne unto there king, lifting up myne arme and stretching owt one fynger, only to make them loke up to heavenward, he likewise lifting up his arme towardes heven, put fourth the two fynges wherby it semed that he would make us tunderstand that thay worshipped the sonne and mone for godes, as afterward we understode yt so. In this meane tyme there number increased and thither came the kinges brother that was ffirst with us, their mothers, wives, sisters and childern, and being thus assembled, thaye caused a greate nombre of baye bowes to be cutt and therwith a place to be dressed for us, distant from theires about two ffadom; for yt is there mannour to parle and bargayn sitting, and the chef of them to be aparte from the meaner sorte, with a shewe of great obedyence to there kinges, superyours, and elders. They be all naked and of a goodly stature, mighty, faire and aswell shapen and proportioned of bodye as any people in all the worlde, very gentill, curtious and of a good nature.

The most parte of them cover their raynes and pryvie partes with faire hartes skins, paynted cunyngly with sondry collours, and the fore parte of there bodye and armes paynted with pretye devised workes of azure, redd, and black, so well and so properly don as the best paynter of Europe could not amend yt. The wemen have there bodies covered with a certen herbe like unto moste, wherof the cedertrees and all other trees be alwaies covered. The men for pleasure do allwayes tryme themselves therwith, after sundry fasshions. They be of tawny collour, hawke nosed and of a pleasaunt countenance. The women be well favored and modest and will not suffer that one approche them to nere, but we were not in there howses, for we sawe none at that tyme.

After that we had tarried in this northe side of the river the most parte of the daye, which river we have called by the name of the river of Maye, for that we discovered the same the ffirst day of that mounthe, congratulated and made alyance and entered into amytye with them, and presented there kinge and his brethem with gownes of blewe clothe garnished with yellowe flowers de luce,

yt semed they were sorry for our departure, so that the most parte of them entered into the watter up to the necke, to sett our barges on flote, putting into us soundry kindes of ffishes, which with a marvelous speed they ran to take them in there parkes, made in the watter with great redes, so well and cunyngly sett together, after the fashion of a labirinthe or maze, with so manny tourns and crokes, as yt is impossible to do yt with more cunning or industrye.

But desiering to imploye the rest of the daye on the other side of this river, to veue and knowe those Indians we sawe there, we traversed thither and without any diffycuty landed amonges them, who receaved us verry gentelly with great humanitye, putting us of there frutes, even in our boates, as mulberies, respices and suche other frutes as thay found redely by the waye.

Sone after this there came thither there kynge with his brethern and others, with bowes and arrowes in there handes, using therewithall a good and grave ffashion and bihavior, right souldier like with as warlike a bouldnes as might be. They were naked and paynted as thothers, there hear likewise long, and trussed up with a lace made of hearbes, to the top of there hedes, but they had neither there wives nor childern in there company.

After we had a good while lovengly intretayned and presented them with littell giftes of haberdasherye wares, cutting hookes and hatchettes, and clothed the king and his brethern with like robes we had geven to them on the other side, [we] enterd and veued the cuntry therabowte, which is the fairest, frutefullest and plesantest of all the worlde, habonding in honney, veneson, wildfoule, forrestes, woodes of all sortes, palme trees, cipers, ceders, bayes, the hiest, greatest and fairest vynes in all the wourld with grapes accordingly, which naturally and without mans helpe and tryming growe to the top of okes and other trees that be of a wonderfull greatnes and height. And the sight of the faire medowes is a pleasure not able to be expressed with tonge, full of herons, corleux, bitters, mallardes, egertes, woodkockes, and of all other kinde of smale birdes, with hartes, hyndes, buckes, wild swyne, and sondery others wild beastes as we perceived well bothe then by there foteing there and also afterwarde in other places by ther crye and brayeng which we herde in the night tyme. Also there be cunys, hares, guynia cockes in mervelus numbre, a great dele fairer and better then be oures, silke wormes, and to be shorte it is a thinge inspeakable, the comodities that be sene there and shalbe founde more and more in this incomperable lande, never as yet broken with plowe irons, bringing fourthe all thinges according to his first nature, whereof the eternall God endued yt.

About there howses they laboure and till there ground, sowing there fildes with a grayn called Mahis, whereof the[y] make there meale, and in there gardens the[y] plant beans, gourdes, cowekcumbers, citrons, peasen, and many other simples and rootes unknou unto us. There spades and mattockes be of wood, so well and fyttely made as ys possible, which they make with certen

stones, oister shelles, and mustelles, wherwith the[y] make also ther bowes and smale lances, and cutt and pullishe all sortes of woodes that they employe abowt there buldinges and necessarye use. There grovith [also] many walnuttrees hazeltrees and smale cherytrees verry faire and great, and generally we have sene there of the same symples and herbes that we have in Fraunce and of like goodnes savour and tast. The people are verry good archers and of great strenght; there

bowe strynges are made of lether and there arrowes of reades which the[y] do hedd with the teathe of certen ffishes.

As we [nowe] demaunded of them for a certen towne called Sevola, wherof some have wrytten not to be farr from thence, and to be scituate within the lande and towardes the southe sea, they shewed us by signes which we understode well enough, that they might go thither with there boates by rivers in xxtie dayes. Those that have wrytten of this kingdom and towne of Sevolla, and other towns and realms therabowtes, say that ther is great aboundaunce of gould and silver, precious stouns and other great riches, and that the people hedd ther arrowes, instedd of iron, with [sharpe] poynted turqueses. Thus the night aproching, and that it was conveynient for us to retire by daye to ship board, we toke leve of them muche to their greif and more to oures without comparison, for that we had no meane to enter the river with our shippes. And albeyt it was not ther custome either to eate or drynke from sonne rising till his goyng down, yet there kyng openly would nedes drinke with us, praying us verry gentelly to give him the cupp wherowt he had dronke. And so makyng him understand that we would see him agen the next daye, we retired agayn to our shippes, which laye about vj leages from the haven to the sewarde.

The next day in the morning we returned to land agayne, accompaned with the captayns, gentilmen, souldiers, and others of our smale troupe, carring with us a pillar or colume of hard stone, our kinges armes graven therin, to plant and sett [the same] at the entrye of the porte in some high place wher yt might be easelly sene. And being come thither bfore the Indyans were assembled, we espied on the southe side of the river a place verry fyt for that purpose upon a littell hill compassed with cipers, bayes, palmes, and other trees, and swete pleasaunt smelling shrubbes, in the mydell wherof we planted the first bounde or lymete of his majestie. Thus don, perceving our first Indians assembled and loking for us we went first unto them according to our promisse, not without some mislyking of those on the southe parte, wher we had sett the said lymete, who tarried for us in the same place where they mete with us the day before, seming unto us that there ys some ennemytie bytween them and the others. But when the[y] perceved our long tarring on this side, the[y] ran to se what we had don in that place where we landed ffirst and had sett our lymete, which they vewed a gret while without touching yt any waye, or abassing, or ever speaking unto us therof at any tyme after. Howebeit we could scant departe but as yt were with greif of mynde from theis our first alies, they runyng unto us [all] along the river from all partes, presentyng us with some of there harte skins, paynted and unpaynted, meale, littell cakes, freshe watter, roottes like unto ru-barbe, which they have in great estymation, and make therof a kinde of bevradg or potion of medyzen. Also they brought us littell bagges of redd coullours and some smale peces like unto oore, perceving also amonges them faire thinges paynted as yt had byn with grayn of scarlett, shewing unto us by signes that they had within the lande gould, silver, and copper wherof we have brought some muster; also leade like unto ours, which we shewed unto them, turqueses, and a great aboundaunce of perilles, which, as they declared unto us, they toke owt of oysters, wherof there is taken every along the river side and amonges the reedes and in the marishes and in so marvelous aboundaunce as ys scant credeble. And we have perceved that ther be as many and as faire perles found there as in any contry in the worlde, for we sawe a man of theires, as we entered into our boates, that had a perle hanging at a collour of gould and silver about his necke as great as an acorn at the least. This man, as he had taken ffishe in one of there ffishing parkes therby, brought the same to our boates, and our men perceving his great pearle and making a wonderinge at yt for the greatnes therof, one of them putting his ffynger towardes yt,

the man drewe backe and would no more come nere the boate, not for any feare he had that they would have taken his collour and perle from him; for he would have geven yt them for a lokingglasse or a knyfe, but that he dowbted least they would have pulled him into the boate and so by force have carried him away. He was one of the goodlyest men of all his company.

But for that we had no leysure to tarry any longer with them, the day being well passed, which greved us for the comodyties and great ryches which as we understode and sawe might be gotton there, desiering also to imploye the rest of the daye amonges our second allies, the Indians on the south side, as we had promissed them the day before, which still tarried loking for us, we passed the river to there shore where we founde them tarring for us quietly and in good order, trymed with newe pictures upon there faces, and fethers upon ther heddes, their king with his bowes and arrowes lieing by him, sett on the ground, strewed with baye bowes, bitwen his two brethern [whiche were] goodly men [&] well shapen and of wonderfull shewe of activetie, having about there heddes and heare, which was trussed up of a height, a kinde of heare of some wilde beast died redd, gatherd and wrought together with great cunyng, and wrethed and facioned after the forme of a diedeme. One of them had hanging at his necke a littell round plate of redd copper well polished, with an other lesser of silver in the myddst of yt (as ye shall se) and at his eare a littell plate of copper wherwithe they use to scrape and take awaye the sweat from their bodies. They shewed unto us that there was grett store of this mettall within the cuntry, abowt five or six jurnaies from thence; bothe on the southe and nourthe side of the same river, and that they went thither in there boates, which boates they make but of one pece of a tree working yt hollowe so cunyngly and fytte, that they put in one of these thus shapen boates or rather great troughes, xv or xxti persons, and go therwith verry swiftly. They that rowe stand upright having there owers short, made after the fashyon of a peelee. Thus being amonges them they presented us with there meale, dreassed and baked, verry good and well tasting and of good nurishment, also beanes, ffishes, as crabbes, lopsters, crevices and many other kindes of good ffishes, shewing us by signes that there dwellinges were far of, and that if there provision had byn nere hande, they would have presented us with many other reffreshinges.

The night nowe approching we were fayne to retourn to our shippes, muche to our greef, for that we durst not hasarde to enter with our shippes by reason of a barr of sande that was at [the] entre of the porte, howebeyt at a full sea there is two fadom and a half of water at the most, and yt is but a leap or surge to passe this barr, not passing the lengthe of two cables, and thenfourth with every where within vj or vij fadom water, so that it make the a verry faire haven and shippes of a meane burden from iijxx to c. tonnes may entre therein at all floodes, yea, of a farre greater burthen if there were Frenchmen dwelling there (that myght scoure thentree as they do in Fraunce, and where nothing is lacking for the lief of man. The scituation is under the elevation of xxx degrees, a good clymate, helthfull, of good temperaunce, marvelous pleasaunt, the people gentill and of a good and amyable loving nature, which willingly will obay ye, be content to serve those that shall with gentilnes and humanitye go aboute to allure them as yt [is] nedefull for all those that shalbe sent thither hereafter so to do, and as I have chardged those of oures that be lefte there to do, to thende that by these meanes they may ask and learn of them where the[y] take there gould, copper, turquises, and other thinges yet unknown unto us, by reason of the shortnes of tyme we soiurned there; for if any rude and rigorous meanes shuldbbe used towards this people, they would flye hither and thither through the woodes and forestes and abandon their habitations and cuntrye.

The nexte day being the thirde day of Maye, desiering alwaies to fynd owt harborough to rest in, we sett up saile agayn, and after we had ranged the coast as nere the shore as we coulde, there appeared unto us abowt vij leages on this side the river of Maye, a great oppening or baye of some faire river, whither with one of our boates we rowed and there found an entre almost like unto that of the river of Maye, and within the same as great a depthe and as large, dividing yt self into many sea armes, great and brood, streching towards the highe lande, with many other lesse that devide the countrye into faire and greate landes and a great number of smale and faire medowes. Being entred into them abowt 3 leages we found in a place vary comodyous, strong and pleasaunt of scituation, certen Indians who receved us verry gentelly, howebeyt we being somewhat nere there howses yt semed yt was [somewhat] agenst there good willes that we went thither, for at their cryes and noise they made, all therewiefes and childern and howshould stuf were fledd and carried furthewith into the woodes. Howebeyt, they suffered us to go to there howses but they themselves would not accompany us thither. There howses be fyttely made and close of woode, sett upright and covered with reed, the most parte of them after the fashion of a pavillion, but there was one [house] amonges the rest verry great, long and broode, with settelles round abowte made of reedes, tremly couched together, which serve them bothe for beddes and seates; they be of hight two fote from the ground, sett upon great round pillers paynted with redd, yellowe and blewe, well and [trimly] pullished. Some of this people, perceving that we had [in] no mannour of wise hurted there dwellinges nor gardens which the[y] dresse verry diligently, they returned all unto us byfore our imbarcking, semyng verry well contented by there putting into us watter, frute[s] and hartes skynes.

It is a place wonderfull fertill and of strong scituation, the ground fat so that it is lekely, that it would bring fourthe wheate and all other corn twice a yere and the comodities there for livelode and the hope of more riches be like unto those we found and considered upon the ryver of May, and men may travel thither through a great arme of the sea in hoyes and barkes as great as ye maye do in the river of Maye without coming into the sea. This arme dothe devide and makethe the Isle of Maye, as many other rivers and armes of the see which we have discovered devide and make many other great islandes, by the which we maye travell from one island to an other bitwen land and lande. And yt semeth that men may goo and saile without daunger through all the contrye, and never enter in [to] the great seas, which were a wonderful advauntag. This is thelandofChicorewherof some have wrytten, and which many have gon abowt to fynd, for the great riches they perceved by some Indians to be found there. It is sett under so good a clymate, that none of all our men, though we were there in the hottest tyme of the yere, the sonne entering into Cancer, were troubled with any sicknes. The people there live long and in great helthe and strength, so that aged men go without staves, and are able to do and ron like the yongest of them, who only are known to be ould by the wrynkeles in ther face and decaye of sight.

We departed from them verry frendly and with there contentation, but the flood and the night overtaking us, we were constrayned to lie in our boates all [that] night, till yt was day fliting upon this river which we have called Seyne, bycause at the entrye yt is as broade as from Havre de Grace unto Honefleu. At the breake of the daye we espied on the southe side one of the fairest, pleasantest and greatest medowe ground that might be sene, into the which we went, fynding at the verry entre a longe a faire and great lake [and] an innumerable numbere of fotestepes of hartes and hyndes of a wonderfull greatnes, the stepes [beynge] all freshe and newe. And yt semeth that the people do nurishe them like tame cattell, in great herdes; for we sawe the fotestepes of an

Indian that followed them. The channell and depthe of thisriverofSeyneis on the side of the medowe that is on the isle of May.

Being returned to our shippes, we sailed to knowe more and more of the coast, going as nere the shore as we could. And as we had sailed so all alonge abowt six or seven leages, there apered unto us another baye where we cast ancre twart of yt, tarring so all the night. In the morrowe we went thither, and fynding by our sounding at the entre many bankes and beatynges, we durst not venture to entre there with our great shippes, we having named this river Some, which within is a leage over and of viij, ix, x, and xj fadom deapthe, deviding yt self into many great river, that sever the country into many faire and great ilandes and smale goodly meadowe ground and pastures, and every where suche aboundaunce of fishe as is increadeble. And on the west northewest side there is a great river that comithe from the highe country, of a great leage over, and on the other on the northest side which retourn into the sea. So that (my lorde) yt is a country full of havens, rivers and ilandes of suche frutefullnes as cannot with tonge be expressed, and where in shorte tyme great and precious comodyties might be founde.