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WHO DO YOU THINK is Florida's most unforgettable character? That is the question we put to some of our state's most distinguished scholars, writers, and public servants. Their choices, which appear in this issue, are as diverse as our state. From "beach lady" MaVynee Betsch, who spent her early years as an opera singer and now fights to preserve her home of American Beach, to the controversial former chief of the Seminole Tribe, Jim Billie, Florida's people are as colorful and exotic as the landscape.

A quick perusal through this issue will tell you immediately that you are not in Kansas—or New Hampshire or Oklahoma. A closer study will certainly provoke questions about the connections between people and place. Just what is it about Florida that attracts such a fascinating potpourri of unforgettable characters?

When Florida historian and frequent FORUM contributor Gary Mormino and I first discussed doing this issue, we struggled with how to frame this question. Were we looking for famous people? Florida's heroes? Floridians with national reputations? In the end we came up with the word "unforgettable." The ironic twist is that many of our writers chose to profile Floridians whom most of us have forgotten—if we ever knew about them at all. Few of our subjects can be found in history texts. Most are not household names. They are all, however, people who left an indelible stamp on the people who wrote about them.

In many cases these essays reveal as much about our authors, and their relationships with Florida, as about the subjects themselves. In his essay, Al Burt, a writer who has defined the "real" Florida for many of us, takes us deep into Moccasin Swamp to meet the Crews brothers, a hermetic two-some who cling tenaciously to a lost way of life. State folklorist Tina Bucuvalas, whose job is to document our state's rich folk life, introduces us to Henry Ohumukini, a hula master, musician, craftsman, and advocate of Pacific Island culture in Florida. Veteran St. Petersburg Times political columnist Martin Dyckman, one of our most astute Tallahassee observers, writes about former Gov. LeRoy Collins, the man the 1991 Legislature called "man of the century."

A magazine consultant once told me the subject people like to read about most: other people. That comes as no surprise to any of us who have perused our supermarket magazine racks. Most of us know much more about Kobe, Britney, and J-Lo than we'd ever admit. On the other hand, most of us Floridians probably know far too little about the pioneers and plain folk, movers and shakers, and all the other history makers who have shaped our state. We hope this issue will begin to change that.

—Janine Farver
FORUM Wins Statewide Awards

The Florida Magazine Association recently honored FORUM Magazine with four statewide awards for excellence. FORUM won the following awards in the category for magazines of associations:

- Best Special Theme Issue: 1st place, for “Sunshine State of Mind”;
- Best Special Theme Issue: 2nd place, for “Music in the Key of Florida”;
- Best Feature Article: 2nd place, for “South but not Southern,” by John Shelton Reed;
- Best Written Magazine: 3rd place, for overall excellence.

FHC Receives ‘We the People’ Grant

The National Endowment for the Humanities recently awarded a “We the People Grant” to fund a series of public programs in Florida on the Harlem Renaissance. These FHC programs will explore the historic significance and cultural contributions of the writers, artists, and musicians of the Harlem Renaissance, with an emphasis on Florida’s contributions to this cultural movement.

“We the People” grants are designed to explore significant events and themes in our nation’s history, and to share these lessons with all Americans.

The $139,000 grant will fund five daylong workshops for teachers, a weeklong teachers’ seminar, and 10 public programs. These programs will feature Chautauqua-style performances featuring Harlem Renaissance luminaries Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, and Langston Hughes. If you are interested in bringing this program to your community, send an email to iberlin@flahum.org.

Public Humanities Grants

FHC funds public humanities projects that bring together scholars with the general public. Since its origin in 1971, the FHC Grants Program has awarded more than $8 million in support for programs that help preserve our state’s rich cultural heritage, promote civic engagement, and foster connections among humanities scholars, cultural organizations, and community groups.

The next application deadline for major grants is Nov. 6. Mini-grant applications are due by Feb. 20. To learn more about our grants program and to download a proposal form, visit our website at flahum.org.

Road Scholars Tours

FHC has renamed and redesigned its Speakers Bureau. Now known as “Road Scholars,” our speakers will continue to present programs about Florida history and culture to nonprofit organizations in communities throughout Florida. Upcoming Road Scholars tours will be announced in a brochure, which will be available on Oct. 1, and on our website at flahum.org. If you would like to be added to our Road Scholars mailing list, please send an email to rreno@flahum.org, or write to us at FHC, 599 2nd Street South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.
HERO TODAY...

DO YOU REMEMBER THOSE GREAT FLORIDANS, JOHN GORRIE AND EDMUND SMITH? NO?
WELL, HOW ABOUT WANKARD POOPER?

By Gary R. Mormino

"Let us now praise famous men and our fathers that begat us," instructs the Book of Ecclesiastes. “Their seed shall remain forever, and their glory shall not be blotted out.” How we honor our past and present heroes tells much about our society.

In Florida, where 10 years is eternity and where roots are as shallow as an Australian pine’s, yesterday’s heroes too often reside in the dustbins of history. One generation’s exemplar of gallantry may become the next era’s trivia question, or, worse, embarrassment. The distance between marble and clay is time—and timing.

Enshrining heroes used to be easier. Imbued with a deep love of country and eager to record the accomplishments of Americans on the southern frontier, Floridians named places in honor of the early pioneers: Jackson, DuVal, Gadsden, Taylor, Brooke, Dade, Harney, Brevard, and Worth.


In the half-century after Appomattox, the United Daughters of the Confederacy dedicated countless statues of Johnny Reb in county squares and cemeteries. When the Bay County town of Lynn Haven erected a statue of Billy Yank, Aunt Pitty-Pat fainted once again.

Motivation, however, stemmed not from a deep yearning for national harmony; rather, local leaders sought to sell real estate to aging veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic.

The Gilded Age ushered in a new era of steel and steam, creating Robber Barons, men of fabulous wealth and influence. It was an age of Henrys. The names Henry Flagler, Henry Plant, along with lesser luminaries, Col. Henry Haines and Henry Sanford, soon adorned cities and counties, colleges and churches.

In 1923, Suniland Magazine asked its readers to name “the greatest men in Florida.” Julia Tuttle, Ivy Stranahan, and May Mann Jennings need not apply. The winning list included the aforementioned Flagler, Plant, and Haines, but also U.S. Sen. Duncan Fletcher, U.S. Rep. Stephen Sparkman, University of Florida President J. A. Murphree, and bridge-builder George Gandy.

Washington, D.C. became a permanent home to two of Florida’s most revered figures. In 1864, Congress invited the states to select two persons “illustrious for their historic renown or distinguished civic or military service.” In bronze and marble, states began to dispatch favorite sons (and occasionally daughters) to the Capitol’s Statuary Hall. From the beloved (Oklahoma’s Will Rogers), to the exotic (Hawaii’s King Kamehameha), to the obscure (Arkansas’s Uriah Rose), the august Hall has functioned as an American Pantheon.

In 1914, Florida proudly dedicated a bronze statue of Dr. John Gorrie, the “almost sacred” Apalachicola physician who in 1851 patented a “machine for the artificial production of ice.”
Recognising the undying legacy of the “War between the States,” Floridians commissioned a statue in 1922 to recognize Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith, the St. Augustine native and commander of the Confederate Army in the West. The last Confederate general to surrender, he was also the last southern general to die.

With all due deference to these 19th-century heroes, their chances of re-election today would be, at best, remote. In truth, the statues of Gorrie and Smith have proved longer lasting than their historic significance. Gorrie, “the father of modern air conditioning,” is now blamed for making Florida so comfortable in the summer that millions of Yankees live here year-around. As the Grand Ole Opry’s Uncle Dave Macon might have said, “I’d rather ride in a wagon and go to heaven than hell in an air-conditioned automobile.” Smith, the unreconstructed rebel who spent his final years teaching mathematics at the College of the South, spent little time in Florida after his youth.

Revisionist historians and poll-watching politicians have suggested that it might be time to replace some of the Hall’s aging heroes, arguing that each generation deserves the heroes it selects. One shudders at the prospects of a muckraking press in a politically correct climate judging yesterday’s heroes by today’s standards. This historian suspects that only the West Indian manatee and the Florida panther could survive the vetting process.

Attacked by New England Brahmins as the very embodiment of Spanish cruelty and the black legend, Hernando de Soto was described by St. Augustine historian George Fairbanks in 1871 as a “gallant adventurer.” In 1992, during the vexed debates over the meaning of Columbus and 1492, de Soto was equated with Hitler and Stalin.

Consider Andrew Jackson, the most revered American of his generation and Florida’s first military governor. A steadfast patriot and hero of New Orleans and Horseshoe Bend, Old Hickory’s legacy was only burnished by lively quarrels and deadly duels. But Jackson’s views toward Native Americans and slavery make him so controversial today that Florida’s first military governor and president no longer rides the lead mount in Springtime Tallahassee’s parade. One might add that Jackson’s beloved but outspoken wife Rachel simply loathed Florida.

Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, once lionized as a Cuban freedom fighter and a “Fighting Progressive,” is now depicted as a gunrunning sheriff who advocated draining the Everglades and proposed expelling
With all due deference to these 19th-century heroes, their chances of re-election today would be, at best, remote.

the state's African Americans.

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, whose 1938 novel The Yearling won the Pulitzer Prize, and whose prose ennobled poor whites and the Big Scrub, has drawn criticism because of her use of the "n" word.

Not everyone has experienced a decline or reversal of historical reputation. Osceola, the son of a Scottish father and a Creek mother, battled U.S. troops in the Second Seminole War (1835-42), becoming the most reviled and hunted person on the peninsula. Today, a county boasts his name, while millions of Floridians cheer lustily for sports teams with the Seminole insignia.

This might be the time to resurrect the memory of Wankard Pooser, the Jackson County state legislator who was elected and re-elected on a simple campaign promise: He pledged to vote no on every single bill placed before him. Pooser—who a journalist remarked looked just like someone named Wankard Pooser—broke his solemn vow only once, and voters rejected him in the next election.

Politicians—or statesmen—once dominated the ranks of American heroes. Alas, they now rest somewhere between aluminum siding salesmen and telemarketers. How does one explain the public's disaffection with politicians? Like Longfellow's Evangeline looking for her lover, Floridians have waited a long time for good government.

Perhaps in a post-9/11 world, we look for heroes outside the courthouse or statehouse. In Florida, the "unforgettable character" seems preferable to the heroic. In Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, Cassius—he of "the lean and hungry look"—may have understood the modern mind best. "The fault dear Brutus," states the Roman, "lies not in our stars, but in ourselves."

GARY R. MORMINO, the Frank E. Duckwall Professor of History, teaches at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg.
Forty years after a bomb exploded beneath the bedroom of Harry T. Moore, I revisited the scene in the small Brevard County town of Mims. I spotted an elderly man sitting in the shade of an oak tree and asked if he remembered the bomb blast of Christmas night, 1951.

"Remember?" he replied. "How could I ever forget? Sounded like a cannon going off. 'Strange sort of way for anybody to be celebrating Christmas, I said to myself.'"

Strange indeed. Moore died on the way to the hospital, and his wife Harriette died several days later.

There aren't many who remember this dark moment in Florida's history. In fact, there aren't many who have even heard of Moore, an activist and organizer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Florida starting in 1934—well before the civil-rights movement was advanced.

Moore began his career as a schoolteacher in the 1920s and served as principal of Titusville Colored School. In the ’30s and ’40s, he traveled around the state organizing NAACP branches; fought in court to bring the salaries of black teachers in line with those of white teachers; and organized voter-registration for blacks. He also defended his people against the home-grown racist terrorists who were rampaging all across the South in a last-ditch effort to maintain white supremacy by keeping blacks from voting.

Every time another person was lynched, Moore personally investigated and demanded that the perpetrators be brought to justice. Alone, he drove all over Florida, urging his people to register and to vote, as the only means for bringing terror to an end.

He spoke out against police brutality, and became known around the state for his statements regarding a rape case filed by a white woman against four black men in Groveland, 1949.

Moore's death caused an outcry that reached all the way to the United Nations, where protests were registered. The FBI investigated, but no one was charged with the murder of Moore and his wife. He was largely forgotten until recent years, when some historians have turned their attention to him.

Moore was a martyr in the fight for racial equality. He was Florida's Medgar Evers—the Mississippi civil-rights activist whose murder (12 years after Moore's) received national attention. Evers was guilty of the same "crime": trying to get America to practice the democracy it preaches.

Moore is quoted as saying: "Freedom never descends upon a people. It is always bought with a price."

— Stetson Kennedy

STETSON KENNEDY collected folklore for the WPA, Florida Writers Project. He is the author of several books, including Palmetto Country and The Klan Unmasked.
When Al Burt gets an X-Ray, the fragments of shrapnel in his body shine like stars in the night. Dime-sized, quarter-sized, these bits of the car he was in on the morning of May 6, 1965 in Santo Domingo still glow within his frame even after 39 years. They are reminders of the time some trigger-happy U.S. Marines opened up with their machine guns and changed Burt’s life.

It happened when Burt, then a reporter for the Miami Herald, was covering a coup in Santo Domingo. As he and photographer Doug Kennedy pulled up to an intersection, the Marines loosed a burst of “friendly fire.” No one was ever disciplined.

“I could feel fragments of metal hitting me all over. I thought, ‘Just one hit in the head, and that’ll take care of it,’” Burt recently recalled.

After the shooting, Burt learned to live with chronic, painful injuries while he took on a new assignment for the Herald. He began writing a weekly column chronicling life in a state that hadn’t changed much since the 19th century, but was suddenly rushing towards the 21st.

 Armed with a series of walking canes, Burt wore out a tremendous amount of shoe leather. He developed powerful shoulders as he compensated for his disobedient legs while maneuvering his patched body. He wrote his column for 22 years, living all the while with pain and determination, feeling sorry for others but never himself.

Gently, cheerfully, wistfully, ruefully, and yet somehow optimistically, he captured parts of Florida that are today irretrievable. He described scarecrows in cornfields and retirees in condominiums, Burma-Shave signs and fireflies, undeveloped beaches where lots went begging for $25 down and $10 a month, old orange-juice stands, hallelujah-river-baptisms, sponge divers, and the “sugared world” of Walt Disney. He reported the memories of pioneers who have long since died. Because of Burt, their experiences didn’t die with them.

His column, “Al Burt’s Florida,” was praised by former Gov. LeRoy Collins as “rising to the realm of sheer poetry,” Marjory Stoneman Douglas, famed author of The Everglades: River of Grass, called it “the single most important piece of news copy of any paper in the state.”

Burt, now 77, lives in retirement near Melrose with his wife, Gloria, on a six-acre lakefront paradise that he bought in 1974 for $50,000. It’s a sandy, shabby, gnarly-oaked patch of the dry scrubland he adores. Deer pass by his front window, and the occasional snake still moves liquidly among the fallen leaves.

“I’ve swum in his lake, slept under his roof. I’ve even gotten him to read to me his own words. He has a curious, haunting, plain voice, a little creaky, very Southern-accented. He casts an unforgettable spell describing how Florida can steal your heart away:

“For some, the smell of an orange blossom triggers it. For others, the sight of Spanish moss hanging off the twisted black limbs of a live oak. For a few, reminders of the wild bring it alive—the roar of a bull gator, or maybe the leap of a dolphin between a swimmer and the shore, or a rattlesnake defensively coiling under a palmetto and flicking its forked tongue and angrily rattling its tail. The oddly sweetish taste of a fresh muscadine grape might do it, or the shock of a dive into the exhilaratingly cold waters of a deep spring where thousands of bubbles trail across the body and curious fish swim close to see the intruder.”

Al Burt came along in time to preserve in his pages a Florida that someday may seem as distant as the stars shining in the night.

-Michael C. Browning
When former Gov. LeRoy Collins died in 1991, the Legislature memorialized him as “Floridian of the Century.” That was one time the lawmakers got something just right. Collins didn’t merely govern; he led. Above all, he helped lead the entire South out of the wilderness of racial discrimination. What is easily and unfortunately forgotten is how hard Collins had to struggle to change what he thought about race. Many other southerners made the same difficult journey, but none so far and so swiftly as he.

For the truth is that Collins, like all of his peers, had been raised to take segregation as much for granted as he did his religion. Yet it was his Christian faith, more than any other influence, that eventually convinced Collins that the two were irreconcilable.

Nearly half a century later, I still recall disputing with one of my Florida State University professors what we had heard in Collins’s second inaugural address on a glorious Tallahassee morning in January 1957. The professor was disappointed that Collins had strongly renewed his campaign promise to keep the public schools segregated for “the foreseeable future.” What impressed me was that Collins had also admonished the mostly white audience not to hate, to remember that Supreme Court decisions are the law, and to “see wrong on their side as well as right.” Blacks were boycotting the Tallahassee bus system at the time. Collins strongly disapproved of that and of the white violence that resulted. He said he didn’t think white people really minded sharing bus seats with blacks—which was his way of saying that they shouldn’t mind it. Moreover, he said whites should admit their responsibility for denying blacks equal opportunities.

Few people knew just how conflicted his heart was. The year before, Collins had drafted a statement conceding that segregation in schools, buses, and public places was inconsistent “as a matter of principle with Christianity or the basic American ideal of equality before the law.” Publication of that statement almost certainly would have resulted in the election of a rabid segregationist in his place, so it went to the archives with a notation, “Not issued.”

His conscience was not so easily filed away. That inaugural address was unlike anything a Deep South governor had ever dared to say. Subsequently, Collins vetoed “last-resort” legislation to close the schools; and he quietly encouraged the first token—but peaceful—integration of Florida’s public schools and universities. Amid lunch-counter desegregation demonstrations that threatened to provoke riots, Collins went on statewide television to say that while it was legal, it was also “unfair and morally wrong” for merchants to discriminate. To wish that blacks would “just stay in their place,” said the governor, was unchristian, undemocratic, and unrealistic. “We can never stop Americans from struggling to be free,” he said.

Collins never won another election. When Congress passed a civil rights bill to desegregate public accommodations, President Lyndon Johnson insisted that Collins lead a new agency to mediate disputes. That duty took him to the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery voting-rights march. There, Collins was photographed negotiating—and wrongly reported as marching—with Dr. Martin Luther King and other civil-rights leaders. That insured his U.S. Senate in 1968. Even his native Tallahassee rejected him.

That brought pain, but no regrets. Collins was content to have gone where his faith, convictions, and sense of duty led him. At Selma, he mediated a truce that prevented a second bloody confrontation between Alabama troopers and civil-rights marchers. All his life, he would say, was preparation for Selma. Had he done nothing else but save the lives he saved there, his would have been well spent.

-Martin A. Dyckman

martin a. dyckman is an associate editor and columnist for the St. Petersburg Times, and the author of a forthcoming biography of LeRoy Collins.
MaVynee Betsch, widely known as "The Beach Lady," is one of the most visually stunning characters in Florida. She sports a hairdo modeled after the Horn of Africa. She describes her massive pile of hair as the longest dreadlock in the world. She carries it around in a ball decorated by buttons indicating her myriad interests as an African-American-heritage activist and an environmentalist. She also has foot-long fingernails on her left hand, which is contained in a plastic bag. Her attire consists of colorful cloths wrapped around her body.

Grown-ups and little children follow her around and ask questions. She always responds with a wealth of information about her heritage and her ancestral links to the early days of Florida. She also talks about the Jim-Crow era of racial segregation and about present-day issues, like the ongoing conflict between developers and conservationists.

Betsch's story is a uniquely Florida tale. She is a descendant of a slave and a slave trader of the early 19th century—Anna and Zephaniah Kingsley, the state's most famous interracial couple. They left what has become a significant historic site and tourist attraction, Kingsley Plantation, located on Fort George Island, east of Jacksonville. Another of her ancestors was A. L. (Abraham Lincoln) Lewis, one of the state's first black millionaires. He was a founder of the first insurance company in Florida, the Afro-American Insurance Company. He was also the leading founder of one of Florida's last remaining "black beaches," American Beach. It stretches along a half-mile of shoreline near the middle of Amelia Island, off the coast northeast of Jacksonville and just south of the Georgia line. Established in 1935, it was one of the few beaches where blacks could legally go during the days of segregation.

Betsch, 69, has lived most of her life there—aside from a few years of classical voice training at Oberlin Conservatory of Music and a decade as a soprano performing operas in Europe. She vows to stay on the beach forever. She has watched as massive, upscale developments—the Amelia Island Plantation and the Ritz-Carlton Hotel—have mushroomed on two sides. Developers have eyed rustic American Beach for a long time, but Betsch's efforts have kept them out.

She has led a successful one-woman campaign to preserve 10 acres of it as a historic site, and, over the years, she has conducted tours—guiding many visitors through the beach's complex history. She has also been featured in numerous magazine and newspaper articles, television and radio shows, and in photographs and other visual arts. She has also enlisted the aid of scholars, scientists, and activists to preserve the beach's natural treasures—including turtles, butterflies, wildflowers, and, most of all, her beloved dune, which she affectionately calls "NaNa." This dune was recently given to the National Parks Services to maintain and preserve.

Her work has inspired others to tell the story of this historic beach. Floridian Marsha Dean Phelts has chronicled the African-American experience there. Freelance writer Russ Rymer has provided an insightful treatise on the struggle between historic preservation and economic development. Director John Sayles created the film, Sunshine State, which dramatizes this struggle. And Floridian Kathy Donaghy produced the documentary American Beach, which chronicles its history.

Betsch's army of recruits is dedicated to carrying on the work of preserving and promoting the heritage and natural beauty of the beach and of North Florida. That will be her legacy—along with a hair museum that she hopes will be created to house her famous locks. Her ashes, she said, should be equally distributed over the ocean and over her beloved NaNa.

Carolyn Williams
And there were giants in the earth in those days; and there were men of renown. 

On Mount Dora, Florida's Olympus, heroes dwell. I admire Gov. LeRoy Collins and Sen. Claude Pepper, statesmen who made a difference; I adore Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, authors whose lyrical prose soared across the River Styx and the Land of Diddy Wah Diddy. But I care most about heroic plainfolk, the men and women who felled cypress trees, tilled the fields, gutted the mullet, rolled the cigars, cut the sugar cane, sweated in pre-air-conditioned September, and made Florida home long before it became fashionable.

Loren C. "Totch" Brown was one of these. He strode the Ten Thousand Islands like a Colossus. When he died in 1996, Florida lost a most authentic and unforgettable citizen. He may not have been a hero, but he had accomplished more with less than almost any other Floridian. He was a man's man in vanishing Florida.

Born in 1920, Brown called Chokoloskee Island home. This was a combustible part of southwest Florida, notorious for its frontier violence and backwater individualism. Brown lived his life to the fullest, testing the boundaries of primal nature and human will.

When the Great Depression drove the price of mullet to a penny a pound, his father moved the family to the mangrove-choked, mosquito-infested Ten Thousand Islands. Survival demanded ingenuity, and the Browns distilled moonshine, sold bird plumes, and trapped coons and gators.

Totch Brown admitted to killing and skinning thousands of bob gators, feasting on loggerhead turtles and white ibis ("we called 'em Chokoloskee chicken"), and cutting down forests of mangrove and buttonwood. He was master and surveyor of a world that, even today, few could spot on maps: Watson Prairie, Liquor Still Bay, Possum Key, Sand Fly Island, and Lostmans Beach.

When his country called in 1944, he kissed his beloved Estelle and children good-bye, and marched to war. He received the Bronze Star for valor at the Battle of the Bulge.

Brown also admitted his imperfections, as he demonstrated when he got caught for smuggling drugs in 1982. He had endured poverty most of his life and, even though he was prospering in the 1960s and 1970s as a legendary commercial fisherman and tour guide, he wanted more. He agreed to help smuggle boats loaded with "square groser"—bales of marijuana—through the labyrinth of the Ten Thousand Islands. When federal agents raided his Everglades City home, he admitted his crimes, paid the government $2.3 million in fines, and accepted a 15-month prison sentence.

There may be no second acts in American life, but notoriety simply burnished his reputation. He was a folk hero, part Robin Hood, part Natty Bumpo. "I wouldn't trade the free life I've had for anything," he said. He wrote a best-selling autobiography, Totch: A Life in the Everglades.

Fittingly, he also played a bit part in a 1950s movie that exemplified his life. When Hollywood came to Everglades City to film Wind Across the Everglades, Brown played One-Note, a bird plumer who cavorts with a notorious gang led by a villain named Cottonmouth. In the film's final scene, Cottonmouth (Burl Ives), realizing that his way of life is doomed because he has killed an Audubon agent, plunges his fist into the Everglades muck and finds a water moccasin. Holding the snake inches from his face, he announces, "Bite deep, Brother Moc, bite deep." Giants know how to stage an exit.

—Gary R. Mormino
The puddled road to the Crews brothers' house led through the wondrous quiet of Moccasin Swamp almost to the state line. From there, on a good day, a healthy hog-caller might be able to lure porkers down from Georgia.

The tin-roofed, darkly aged clapboard house with split-rail fences rose up like a Cracker memory. A long-handled water pump graced the front porch. There was a barn, an outhouse, and the classic sand yard. Flies and mosquitoes buzzed about.

The brothers—in their bib overalls, glasses, hats, and long-sleeved shirts—looked like walking tintypes. They greeted us with southern cordiality, but cautiously narrowed eyes.

They explained later that they did not fear snakes, alligators, or any other wild animals that might be skulking about their swamp, or even the neighboring Pinhook and Okefenokee swamps. They did have concerns, however, about women, electricity, the devil, and crowds.

That first visit with them, in June 1976, had the formality of a summit meeting. Messengers from the certain past were meeting with visiting representatives of a wildly uncertain future, an encounter of another kind.

When the elder brother Daniel (70) offered a handshake, McKinley (65) followed suit. Thereafter, McKinley did most of the talking, with Daniel offering intermittent commentary.

Both brothers had been born right there on the 160 acres their daddy had homesteaded. McKinley was the more worldly of the two, because during the Great Depression he spent five months away working with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). He saw enough to know that he liked home better.

Except for that, they stayed at the old home place, just the two of them, after their parents died, without any conveniences—with neither wives nor electricity nor refrigeration nor screens on the doors or windows nor telephones nor indoor plumbing.

“We ain't got none of 'em,” McKinley said. “Reckon it's not so much livin' as it is stayin'.” He had a way of saying it with both dignity and humor. He understood that strangers tended to patronize them, and he had the grace not to bristle over it.

“Never got married, we didn’t,” he went on. “We was always skeered of 'em [women]. We like 'em, though. Always liked 'em fine.” He grinned.

When electricity came into the area, they declined it. “I let it come through (power poles and wires across their land), but I don't want it,” McKinley said. “You can't tell about electricity. It's scary. Does funny things. I don't feel good with it around. Almost everybody that's got it tells me they don't like the way them refrigerators and things keeps the rations.”

A kerosene lamp gave them light at night. Instead of a refrigerator, they built a “safe” to keep their food—a kitchen cabinet with a screen door held shut by a wooden latch.

“Keeps the flies off the food,” Daniel said. “The other day a roach got in through a little hole. See? Maybe it'll go back out the way it came in.”

For other food storage, they had a smokehouse, where they spread Irish potatoes across a rack, and where they hung cured meat. Other outbuildings housed a black 1951 Chevrolet pickup truck and a tractor.

They shared the chores. McKinley did the driving, when they had to go to town for something, and also did the cooking, except on Sundays when Daniel took over. Daniel also milked the cows. McKinley washed the dishes; Daniel dried.

They raised corn and okra and potatoes and cattle. Their pet cat had free run through the house, which was liberally ventilated with cracks between the boards in the walls. To keep warm in the freezing cold of winter, they piled their beds high with quilts.

The brothers took comfort, even pride, in the old ways. They thought it was strange how the rest of the world lived, maybe a little sad. They had peered out there, at the outside world, and did not care for it.

- Al Burt

AL BURT spent 22 years as a roving Florida columnist for the Miami Herald. His latest book is The Tropic of Cracker.
I will always cherish Lois Lenski for transporting my two young daughters beyond the condos and shopping centers of their suburban life to the vanished world of their Florida forebears, where woods and wild creatures provided constant adventures, livestock roamed free, and shoes were optional for most of the year. In her 1945 Newbery Award-winning novel *Strawberry Girl*, Lenski produced a Florida version of *Little House on the Prairie* that continues to enchant readers like my daughters even today.

Like many remarkable Florida women, Lenski was born elsewhere. Originally from Ohio, she lived in Connecticut for many years. She began visiting Florida to escape New England’s cold. Lenski was already a successful author and illustrator when she came to Lakeland in 1945 and fell in love with the people and landscape of this subtropical state.

Intrigued by the children who worked the Polk County fields all winter and attended special “strawberry schools” during the summer, Lenski interviewed older Florida natives, took extensive notes, and filled numerous sketchbooks. She shaped her material into the story of Birdie Boyer’s adventures in a pioneer farming family in 1890’s Florida. Along with alligators and rattlesnakes, the Boyers encounter the Slaters, a classic clan of shiftless barefoot Crackers. Pa Slater bitterly resents Mr. Boyer and his attempts to keep Slater’s free-ranging pigs and scrawny cattle out of his strawberry fields. Conflicts ensue until Slater, miraculously, has a change of heart and abandons his feckless lifestyle for the fun of working as a dynamiter in a phosphate mine.

In carefully transcribed Cracker dialect, Lenski’s novel imaginatively explored Florida history and its folkways. The proper world of 1940’s children’s literature was shocked by her use of nonstandard English and her depiction of the casual violence and frequent drunkenness of the Slater clan. Lenski won the acclaim, however, of the progressive educational movement for her realistic portrayals. The American Library Association honored her with its most prestigious award for children’s literature in 1946.

Following this success, Lenski continued to research and write juvenile novels about different regions and cultures of the United States. In 1947, she educated her young readers about the difficult lives of the children whose families followed the migrant stream from the bean fields of Lake Okeechobee to the orchards of the Northeast. With the assistance of the National Council of Churches, Lenski did meticulous research at the troubled migrant camps in Belle Glade. The result of her observations and interviews of migrant families was *Judy's Journey*, a novel describing a year of privation, social ostracism, and dangerous, unending work in fields and packinghouses until Judy’s displaced tenant farming family achieves the happy ending of a home of their own in rural Florida. Later, with musician Clyde Robert Bulla, Lenski produced three children's plays, including *The Bean Pickers*, another treatment of the Florida migrant lifestyle.

Following the death of her husband in 1960, Lenski became a full-time Floridian. She moved to the waterfront Tarpon Springs home that she and her husband built in 1951. She cultivated beautiful gardens, taught Saturday art classes, and read to children in an all-black public school. Until her death in 1974, she reached out to teachers and librarians who shared her lifelong passion for children and their stories.

Influenced by the philosophies of Schweitzer, Tolstoy, and William James, Lenski wrote sensitive and imaginative stories designed to awaken the compassion and understanding of her young readers. This is her enduring legacy to her adopted Florida home.

-Kathy Arsenault
The most unforgettable man I ever met—a man who had an impact upon my life, my future, and my profession—was Victoriano Manteiga, a courtly intellectual, whose influence was felt in every corner of Ybor City for the first half of the 20th century.

At that time, Ybor was a growing immigrant enclave of Spaniards, Cubans, and Italians. Manteiga established a system of lectores (readers) for the cigar factories. Lectors were the CNN and Masterpiece Theater of their day. They informed, instructed, and entertained—thereby providing the mostly illiterate cigar workers with a broad education.

For two decades Manteiga was the undisputed leader of the cigar workers. In 1931, the owners demanded that the lectors stop reading union materials and communist/socialist triads in their factories. The owners felt that this practice incited workers to make economic demands that could not be met. The lectors refused to stop; they were not paid by the owners, but by the workers. When the owners literally ousted the lectors, the workers arose in protest and walked out. They stayed on strike for 10 months. When the dispute was settled and the strike ended, the lectors were out of a job.

Undaunted, Manteiga published La Gaceta, a newspaper written in English, Spanish, and Italian. In effect, he continued to be the dominant voice in Ybor City life. No event of any significance could occur without his presence. His approval and approbation was sought. He was, in short, "the man."

My exposure to his grand presence began at an early age. I lived my first 10 years with my grandfather, Gus Jimenez, consul from Spain. The Spanish Civil War was heating up, and Manteiga was the loud insistent voice of Loyalist Spain, so he ate Sunday dinners at our house. Spanish Sunday lunch starts at noon and goes on until 8:00 at night. People would come and go, and so would the food. Manteiga, the guest-star of these consul dinners, would come early and stay late. He could be found in the parlor, holding forth eloquently about the Loyalist cause. He helped raise funds. (We sent two new Ford ambulances to Spain—and tons of old clothes and scrap metal.) He also recruited energetically for the American International Brigades. As a child, I sat on my grandfather's lap, listening hour after hour to the brilliant oratory. I remember wishing I could grow up to speak as eloquently as don Victoriano Manteiga, to mesmerize and enthrall an audience, to move people to action with my words.

In 1938 the Loyalists collapsed. The war was over; and my grandfather, having no more reason to live, did the only thing he could do: He died.

Imagine my surprise in 1943 when I came home from high school to find don Victoriano Manteiga, with bag and baggage, on my porch. He was renting half an apartment in our upstairs three-bedroom quarters. I went on to spend many afternoons talking with him. He was always ready to speak, no matter if the audience was one (me) or hundreds. It was during a month-long reading of Don Quixote that I began to understand he was undertaking the task of shaping my intellect in his mold. Those after-school hours were golden. I learned Spanish history and how to speak, read, and write Spanish correctly. We studied philosophy, and his thumbnail descriptions of religions broadened my narrow Roman Catholic viewpoint.

His influence on me and on our community continues to this day. La Gaceta, which has been in the family for three decades, is still published in three languages. And, although I may never be the intellectual he was, because of him, I am an aspiring intellectual and a cultured man.

-- Ferdie Pacheco
All historians need teachers, and my best ones have not been Ph.D.s, but people who lived through, and made, history. As I think over my past quarter-century in St. Augustine, one name in particular comes to mind: Kat Twine.

She was born in Tallahassee in 1925 and moved as a child to St. Augustine, where she remained until her death in 2002. In her last years she was, without doubt, the most important figure in American history residing in the nation's oldest city.

Kat and her husband, Henry Twine (1923-1994), were involved heart-and-soul with the civil-rights movement that shook and shaped the nation in the 1960s. St. Augustine was a major battleground: Events there led directly to passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964—one of the two great legislative accomplishments of that era.

There was a time, during the civil-rights days, when Mrs. Twine kept a bag packed by the door. She wanted to be prepared. The police liked to arrest people at night, to spread a little terror.

The huge number of arrests during the spring and summer of 1964 vastly exceeded the capacity of the jail. Many people were kept outdoors in the stockade, a fenced enclosure behind the jail where there was not a single tree to shade people from the scorching Florida sun.

After experiencing the stockade once or twice, and watching others collapse from exposure, Mrs. Twine bought a large-brimmed palmetto hat. On it she wrote the slogan of the movement: “FREEDOM NOW.” Pinned to the top of the hat was a button from the 1963 March on Washington where Martin Luther King, Jr. made his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. She wore this hat whenever she went to demonstrate and thought she might be arrested, so that when she was put in the stockade she would have her own personal shade. In later years she would show her “Freedom Hat” to visiting groups of schoolchildren. It is one of the great artifacts of the civil-rights movement in St. Augustine.

She lived long enough to see her own street renamed in honor of her and her husband. (He had gone on to serve a decade as city commissioner and became the first black vice-mayor of St. Augustine.) In front of their house, an official state marker proclaimed the late Henry Twine a “Great Floridian.” Around the corner was Henry and Katherine Twine Neighborhood Park.

People referred to her as the “Rosa Parks of Florida,” one who had gone to jail early and often in the cause of freedom.

In her later years, when she was our great icon of the civil-rights movement, I was always surprised that the steps to her house did not collapse from the endless stream of historians, journalists, and activists from the old days who made their way there.

I remember going by one day with J. T. Johnson, an aide to Martin Luther King in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He had not been back to St. Augustine in nearly four decades, but on his first visit he had been captured in the most famous photograph ever taken in the Ancient City—one showing the manager of the Monson Motel pouring acid in the pool while a group of civil rights workers were swimming there.

Johnson told Mrs. Twine, “I was trying to remember where I stayed when I was here in 1964.”

She didn’t miss a beat: “You stayed with Willie Mae Bell on Central Avenue.” That was the kind of mind she had.

At her funeral I recalled Alex Haley’s remark that when an old person dies, it’s like a library burning. With Mrs. Twine’s death, we lost the equivalent of the Library of Congress.

— David Nolan
For the ultimate tour of the Everglades, Guy Bradley would have been your man. He could have shown you the egrets, herons, roseate spoonbills, ibises, maybe an occasional flamingo, the gators, crocodiles, cottonmouth moccasins, and, of course, the mosquitoes. But Bradley also could have given you a glimpse of the moonshiners, smugglers, fugitives, plume-hunters, and their cohorts who skulked around in the tall grasses.

Bradley was an Audubon warden who earned his living by trying to stop hunters from dooming whole species of America’s birds to extinction. Plume-hunters earned cash by killing protected birds and selling the plumes to decorate women’s hats.

In carrying out his job, Bradley became America’s first martyr to the cause of environmentalism. Nearly a century ago, Bradley was killed in the line of duty, shot to death while trying to arrest a plume-hunter. He was then and is now the true hero of the Everglades.

I first met him on the pages of Marjory Stoneman Douglas’s The Everglades: River of Grass. It was just six paragraphs, but that was enough to hook me. I thought he might make a good story—or even a book, if I could uncover more about him. To find such information, I had to track down descendants of his family or locate some of his surviving friends. A man like Bradley doesn’t leave a paper trail.

He lived in a frontier world except for his earlier days on the banks of Lake Worth. Sickly as a youth, he found it hard to keep up with his more robust friends. He grew up feeling he had a lot to prove.

Surprisingly, he proved himself first as a violinist with the Hypoluxo String Band. He and his fellow musicians played for dances at Palm Beach’s first hotel until 3:00 in the morning; then they returned home via boat across the lake. Henry M. Flagler ended their musical triumphs by importing society bands to play at his ritzy hotels.

Flagler also changed the lives of the Bradleys when he hired Guy’s father as land agent in the primitive settlement of Flamingo at the tip of the Everglades. There, Guy skippered the family boat, surveyed for Flagler, hunted, fished, and farmed. He also met Fronie Vickers Kirwin and married her in 1899.

Opposites, they say, attract, and his wife proved a fun-loving opposite to the serious Bradley. She was known to put on a pair of boxing gloves and take on all comers, according to the widow of one of his best friends. On at least one occasion, Bradley set up a match between his wife and his pal Loren Roberts. Roberts found himself reluctant to hit Fronie. She, on the other hand, showed no hesitation in belting him. Bradley roared with laughter.

A 1902 offer to serve as Audubon warden and Monroe County deputy sheriff gave Bradley the chance to wear the badge of a lawman. This was something he had always wanted to do, because he was descended from Chicago law enforcers.

His tour of duty lasted just three years. On July 8, 1905, he paddled his small rowboat out to Oyster Keys to arrest a young plume hunter caught in the act. The young man’s father shot Bradley to death.

Even though Bradley lost his life, history shows that he and the environmentalists who replaced him eventually won the fight. A century later not a single endangered species that was under Bradley’s protection has become extinct.

Next summer, the 100th anniversary of his death gives Florida a chance to honor Guy Bradley, the true hero of the Everglades.

— Stuart McIver
The late Pat Paulsen, a comedian who spoofed politicians, did a classic takeoff by pounding the table with a strident demand—except his fist stopped an inch short of the table. Some newspaper editorial writers tend to be that way. Their favorite phrase often is “on the other hand,” meaning that if you don’t agree with what is being advocated, it is okay to do just the opposite.

That was not case with H. G. “Buddy” Davis, Jr., who wrote editorials in the Gainesville Sun for 21 years. Readers always knew where he stood. Davis, a moonlighting journalism professor at the University of Florida, arrived at a position through hard research and soul-searching. He wrote with humor, passion, common sense, and a dash of history. There really wasn’t room left for indecision. And he didn’t just ruminate; he offered practical, constructive solutions, frequently naming the officials who should take the action. He never left readers with the idea that the problem was insurmountable and they might as well jump off a cliff.

Davis’s editorials were not only inspiring; they were fun. For example, when UF started spinning off academic enclaves—like black studies, women’s studies, and Jewish studies—Davis proposed a redneck-studies program, which, of course, would serve a large minority the one from which he came. He also used invented characters to show how issues would affect average people—creating the everyman he called “Joe Sixpack,” (with an everywoman wife named “Minnie”).

On a more serious note, Davis (who died in August at age 80) used logic and psychology to help persuade rioters, both black and white, to back off during the 1960–75 racial conflicts in Gainesville, and he won a Pulitzer Prize for this work. Later, he helped cool Vietnam-era fury that led UF students to almost clash with police guarding the administration building.

When he was accused of importing alien ideas to Crackerland, Davis gleefully pointed to his North Florida–South Georgia roots. He was devoted to this area and turned down the offer of a better-paying job at the Atlanta Constitution. There was also talk of an invitation to join the New York Times editorial board, but he would have shivered in that ivory tower. His rollicking prose lacked the elegance of a William Allen White or Walter Lippmann, and his mixed metaphors, misspellings, and misuses could be painful. Phrases like “bleating bellicose brethren” and “the incoming concept” were frequent.

But, while Davis’s editorial career was admired, his enduring legacy will come from his work as a UF journalism professor, a job he held for 31 years. He would do almost anything to instill in his students a passion for factual accuracy, self-discipline, and diligence. Sometimes he used drama. Every semester, he simulated a newsroom emergency—a train wreck or plane crash—and, as his students frantically wrote their stories on deadline, he constantly changed facts. Finally, just as they were finishing up, he staggered into the classroom in the role of “Mort the Reporter,” covered by fake blood and torn clothing, and gasping out the latest break in the story.

Instead of writing comments on story-assignments, Davis would record half-hour, taped critiques to give to the students. Some of these became legend. One such tape consisted of a recording of an actual telephone call Davis made to a local judge. Davis is heard asking if the judge had said what was attributed to him in the student’s paper. The judge is heard denying that he said such a thing—and declaring that no student had contacted him. Davis is heard thanking the judge and hanging up. Then Davis’s voice is heard again, saying, “Your grade for this assignment: ‘F’”

Considering how norms in newspapers and universities have changed, it’s difficult to imagine another Buddy Davis coming along, just when we need him most.

—Robert N. Pierce

ROBERT N. PIERCE, a University of Florida professor emeritus of journalism, was a colleague and friend of Davis’s for many years.
What makes a person memorable? For me, it is the recognition that a person’s spirit or knowledge far exceeds the ordinary. One of the most unforgettable Floridians I know is Henry Ohumukini, Jr., who has earned the informal honorific title of “Uncle Hank” among Florida’s Pacific Islanders.

Ohumukini is a respected hula master, talented musician, highly skilled craftsman, and tireless advocate for Pacific Island culture. Like most of us, he is from somewhere else. He was born in Honolulu, where his family excelled in many Hawaiian arts. He was only 6 when his father taught him to make kukui nut leis. Ohumukini attended the Kamehameha School, where students of Hawaiian ancestry learn traditional arts in addition to the standard curriculum. He worked for six years at the school’s famed Bishop Museum, demonstrating Hawaiian arts for visitors. After high school, he earned a degree in education and later married talented Tahitian dancer Aroariitetara. In 1983 they moved to Orlando to work as entertainers at Sea World. Since that time, Ohumukini has become a pivotal and highly respected member of the Polynesian community in Florida.

Ohumukini’s father advised him never to take the same job twice so that he would always continue to learn. Perhaps that accounts for the amazing range of occupations that Ohumukini mastered during his working life: professional musician, middle-school teacher, dancer, panolo (Hawaiian cowboy), undercover detective and karate instructor for police in Japan, security guard, gardener, and business owner. There have been many other fascinating twists to his life—including winning an award for Hawaiian falsetto yodeling, performing and socializing with Elvis Presley, and serving as a dispute mediator for his clan.

In his retirement, Ohumukini devotes himself to many arts learned in his youth. At 8 years old, he learned to fish and make octopus lures from his uncle and granduncle. Today he again produces the old-style makau iwi (bonefish hook), makau laau (wooden fish hook), and octopus lures prized by Pacific Islanders and now worn as neck ornaments. Ohumukini creates a variety of Hawaiian instruments, including the ipu heke (gourd drum), ulu’uli (feathered gourd shaker), bamboo nose flute, hula pahu (log drum), and hula puniu (coconut knee drum).

Hula is taught within a halau hula, or hula school, by a teacher (kumu hula) who serves as an important source of information about Hawaiian culture. Ohumukini is the highest-ranking hula teacher in Florida. Hula movements are visual embellishments of an extensive body of chants (mele) that preserve Hawaiian history and culture, and Ohumukini shares this knowledge with his students. He also organizes a highly successful annual hula competition to stimulate interest in the art and to provide a means for Pacific Islanders from throughout the Southeast to meet and express their culture.

In recent years, Ohumukini has been a master artist in the Florida Folklife Apprenticeship Program (1999–2000 and 2001–2002) and has presented numerous demonstrations and performances of traditional arts. He was recognized for his excellence and devotion to Hawaiian arts with a Florida Folk Heritage Award in 2001, and his instruments were featured in the exhibition Florida Folklife: Traditional Arts in Contemporary Communities. But his greatest satisfaction is in knowing that his dedication to Hawaiian arts has resulted in the preservation and flowering of Hawaiian culture in Florida.

The most remarkable thing about Uncle Hank, though, is his wisdom. His friendly and unassuming manner instantly puts everyone at ease; but as conversations deepen, it is clear that he possesses extraordinary talent and knowledge. Even more importantly, he demonstrates the wisdom of knowing when and how to use that talent and knowledge for the common good. He makes it seem simple, but the truth is that nothing is more difficult.

—Tina Bucuvalas

TINA BUCUVALAS, State Folklorist, coordinates the Florida Folklife Program in Tallahassee.
In the waning years of her extraordinarily long life, Marjory Stoneman Douglas was unabashed about pulling her 5-foot-1-inch frame atop a bar stool and ordering a Desmond & Duff scotch. Friends claimed that her ritual evening cocktail, usually taken at home and preferably with an interesting companion, was the secret to her longevity. She thought differently. Having purpose in life, she maintained, kept her going for so long—108 years to be exact.

Douglas had many purposes over the years, and all were related to Florida in some way. She loved Florida from the moment she stepped off Henry Flagler's train in Miami in 1915. She was 25, and Miami was still a teenager. She hit the platform running and kept a steady pace on the ground until she was 100. At an age when most people are settled in retirement, she founded an environmental organization, won national recognition for her efforts to restore the Everglades, published her autobiography, and wrote a two-volume work on the naturalist William Henry Hudson. At 83, she told a reporter, “I have practically no life expectancy and so many things left to do.”

After moving to Florida she was emotionally and professionally reborn. More than anything, she wanted to write; and for eight decades she made a living at it. She got her start at the Miami Herald, where her father was editor. Twenty years of short-story writing for the Saturday Evening Post followed. She then went on to write several books. Her first, and the one that defined her public life, was The Everglades: River of Grass (1947). Florida provided an array of characters and settings for her fiction and subjects for all but one of her nonfiction books.

It also drew her to selfless purposes. Her fealty to a cause—from public health to social welfare and education—ran long and deep. She had been on the job as society-page editor for only three days, for example, when she began publishing the Herald’s first articles on the Florida suffrage movement. A year later, when her father took a leave and left her in charge as interim editor, she made women’s equality front-page news. Turning words into action, she traveled to Tallahassee to lobby for the ratification of the 19th Amendment, and in the 1920s she called for the adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment, both of which legislators unceremoniously rejected. When the ERA re-emerged in the 1970s, Douglas took to the hustings once again.

She was in her 80s by then and full of purpose as never before. She had come of age with modern Florida, and the issue that preoccupied her most was the environment. From the age of 79 until she was 100, Douglas worked full time trying to save the Everglades—stumping the state, writing articles, giving interviews, and admonishing policymakers—as she did at the ceremony dedicating the headquarters of the Florida Department of Natural Resources in her name. She was a formidable speaker, whom Herald columnist Al Burt dubbed “the elocutioner” for her capacity to fluster opponents with her superior knowledge, perfect diction, and popular appeal.

Floridians loved her. She was the first to be named Floridian of the Year; Governor Chiles declared April 7, her birthday, “Plant a Tree for Marjory” day (175,000 were planted the first year); and Bill Clinton awarded her, at age 103, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Douglas pitied retirees who filled their days with mindless activities. “There’s no reason you have to be soft in the head,” she said at 96. She had the time of her life in the last years of her life. If evening cocktails contributed to her preservation, she in turn used her longevity to try to preserve Florida’s natural heritage.

—Jack E. Davis

JACK E. DAVIS is associate professor of history at the University of Florida.
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my favorite Floridian is Asa Philip Randolph (1889-1979). Admirable, influential, and unforgettable—the legendary black labor and civil-rights leader was all of these things and more. Blessed with an unpretentious charm and unconcerned with his own celebrity, Randolph would appreciate the irony of his inclusion in a pantheon of Florida heroes. The Florida he knew was dominated by white-supremacist ideology. Like so many other native sons of African-American heritage, he had to leave the state to have any hope of realizing his full potential as a human being.

He was born in Crescent City and raised in the impoverished Oakland section of Jacksonville, the youngest son of an AME minister. His family encouraged him to develop a strong sense of self but he learned the bitter lesson that even the most talented and resourceful members of his race had few options in a society that practiced racial discrimination with ruthless efficiency. After graduating first in his class at Cookman Institute in 1907, he became profoundly discouraged by the limited economic opportunities and stultifying social atmosphere of Jim Crow Jacksonville. Determined to find a greater measure of freedom, he headed north to New York in 1911, never to return except as a visitor.

Making the most of a keen intelligence and an indomitable will, Randolph found what he was looking for in New York, first as the founding editor of the socialist newspaper, The Messenger, and later as the organizer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP). During the 1920s, he challenged the traditional boundaries of race and class, promoting a humanistic brand of socialism that balanced collective welfare with the dignity of the individual. And during the Great Depression that followed, he staked out a principled position between the left-wing authoritarianism of the Communist Party and the mainstream liberalism of the New Deal, pushing relentlessly for economic and social justice.

For more than a decade, the BSCP struggled to survive; but in 1937 the Pullman Company signed a landmark union contract that made Randolph the most powerful black labor leader in the nation. Four years later he extended his influence with a threatened mass march on Washington that forced President Franklin Roosevelt to issue an executive order creating the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), a watchdog agency charged with prohibiting racial discrimination by defense contractors.

Both during and after the war, Randolph used his unique position to press for racial equality, urging his followers to demand the immediate desegregation of American public life. He was a leading advocate of nonviolent direct action, embracing the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56, as well as the sit-ins and Freedom Rides of the early 1960s. Indeed, by the close of the Kennedy Era, he was widely acknowledged as the father of the civil-rights movement, a special status confirmed by his coordination of the 1963 March on Washington. Later in the decade, he fell out of favor with Black Power advocates who branded him an “Uncle Tom.” But in many circles he continued to command respect and even awe.

When he died on May 16, 1979, the eve of the 25th anniversary of the Brown decision, a front-page story in the New York Times lamented the passing of one of the 20th century’s towering figures. Ten years later, the Wall Street Journal’s centennial issue placed him in the “Gallery of the Greatest,” noting that he was one of the people who “made a difference” in the ways modern Americans lived and worked.

Florida benefited immensely from all of this, of course. The civil rights revolution that Randolph helped to bring about transformed the social and political fabric of the Sunshine State just as it transformed every other corner of the nation. One of Florida’s greatest gifts to the world, his extraordinary career was a ringing testament to the power of grass-roots democracy and enlightened leadership. For too long he has been a prophet without honor in his own land. It is time to welcome him home.

- Raymond Arsenault
When Jim Billie was born on the grounds of the Dania Chimp Farm, the Seminole Indians were a damned and forgotten people. In the mid-'40s they were a downtrodden curiosity, a single generation past being hunted with dogs and shot on sight. The impenetrable mysteries of the swamp saved Florida's first people from the first explorers—and saved their descendents from the U.S. Cavalry. The toll was cultural devastation, racial alienation, and human isolation.

No longer fierce, pride beaten down, they emerged from the swamps and glades to a world of airplanes, cars, light bulbs, and radios. They became curiosities in thatched-hut swamp ghettos along the Tamiami Trail or, like Jim Billie's family, "real Indians at work and play," conducting their lives on display in the back corner of a garish tourist trap in full view of ticket-buying voyeurs of the strange: endangered species behind ropes, featured along with monkeys and alligators. Eyes down, sad, ashamed, they were subjects for photos tacked up on restaurant walls.

There was something about that Jim Billie, though, the elders said. The boy was into everything. Every Seminole could catch alligators, but he could rassle 'em. Tourists threw pennies at other Indians, but dimes at Jim Billie. He stood out. "I knew he was going to make it good," said wise old Frank Billie, a tribal leader.

When Jim Billie went to Vietnam, it reminded him of home. He looked at helicopters and saw buzzards; he gazed at the killing fields and saw the Big Cypress Swamp; he saw his grandpa in the eyes of an old Viet Cong. A voice told him at night: "The old ways must survive." He came back to Florida to make that happen.

His people elected Jim Billie their chief five times. In 22 years, he took a bleeding tribal treasury that had never seen a smudge of black and built it into a $650 million annual budget. He constructed entire neighborhoods, a school, a museum, and the first casinos Indian country had ever seen. He began throwing money and lawyers at legislators and rule-makers. He gave every Indian who wanted one a job, an education, and a monthly dividend. Today his people have houses, cars, vacations, and hope.

He refused toxic dumps, landfills, and fighter-plane maneuvers over his lands. He strengthened the concept of sovereignty for every Indian in the Americas. He played his guitar and sang his Seminole songs on stages around the world. The government termed him uncooperative, and the same people looking for bin Laden trailed Jim Billie for a decade. His phone calls, his receipts, his liaisons, his songs—all were examined for a sign of weakness. They never charged him with even a parking violation. But he blinked, and an alligator took his finger. He paused, and greed caught him from behind. Thrown out of office by the leaders he handpicked to share the load, the most famous American Indian of modern times is now building chickies for a living in the hot Florida sun.

Like a bull gator, with only eyes and snout above the waterline, he waits to make his move. There is more to come, and every Seminole Indian knows it.

"Jim Billie has a shield," the late medicine man Sonny Billie once told me. "When you do something to him, it might bounce back on you. If you want to hurt Jim Billie, it hurts you. Some day he might do medicine."

That compelling dynamic has surrounded the last of Florida's first peoples, the Seminole Indians of today, since the day Jim Billie was born. Oseola, Wildcat, Mikanopy, Sam Jones are in the air he breathes. That's what I call unforgettable.

— Peter B. Gallagher

PETER B. GALLAGHER, a freelance writer who lives in St. Petersburg, was operations manager for the Communications Department at the Seminole Tribe of Florida.
Stephen Cornelius O’Connell was born in West Palm Beach on January 22, 1916; president of just about every student organization at the University of Florida, where he earned baccalaureate and law degrees; Southeastern Conference middleweight boxing champion; executive officer of a U.S. Army Air Forces bombardment group in the Pacific during World War II; justice and chief justice of the Florida Supreme Court (1955–1967); and sixth president of UF (1967–1973), the first alumnus to hold that office.

With the student body at Gainesville the new president enjoyed an instant and friendly bond. Within a matter of months he knew perhaps a thousand students by name. But it was not to be expected that the campus, traditionally a placid and conservative environment, would escape the disruptive social movements of the late Sixties and early Seventies. The Vietnam War, the Kent State killings, and the disappointment of African-American students with the pace of university integration led to campus protests, marches, and, in spring of 1971, a forced occupation of the president’s office.

In the last-named incident O’Connell applied exactly the procedures prescribed in the campus demonstration policy that had been enacted the year before by the university and student senates. In other, potentially more dangerous, moments he took creative and conciliatory steps to defuse the anger. As a result, during the student activist period of 1970–72, no person was seriously injured, no property was significantly damaged, and no academic course offerings were harmfully interrupted. O’Connell had kept his head, or, as the students said, his cool.

One notable legacy that remains from his six years in office is a more open and welcoming environment for minority students and professors. By the spring of 1971, O’Connell had established three major programs for academic assistance to African-American students in general, and three others for minority students in arts and sciences, medicine, and agricultural sciences; had hired nine new African-American faculty members, including an assistant dean of academic affairs; and had approved funding for the establishment of a Black Culture Center.

A measure of the university’s progress in the area of minority opportunities is provided by the following numbers: In 1967, when O’Connell arrived on campus, there were no black faculty members; when he retired in 1973 there were 19. In 1967 there were 61 black students; in 1973 there were 641. Twenty-seven years after O’Connell retired from the presidency, a former provost and acting president of the university, Robert A. Bryan, declared in a formal address: “Stephen C. O’Connell was the first great promoter of equal opportunity and diversity on this campus.”

In later life O’Connell continued to expend his life force in service to his university and to the people of Florida. As I stated in my eulogy on the occasion of his funeral on April 18, 2001: “Steve’s retirement labors were unremitting and unsparing. When did he ever complain? When did he ever say no? Perhaps we took him for granted. He was always there, a part of our landscape—until last Friday, when we looked up to see a gaping hole where a mighty oak had gone down.”

Steve and I were close friends. We golfed together, hunted together, and traveled together. More important, when I needed him he stood up for me, and when he needed me I stood up for him. One of our favorite biblical passages was from the Book of Ecclesiasticus: “A faithful friend is a strong defense, and he who has found him hath found a treasure. Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend, and no weight of gold and silver is able to counterbalance the goodness of his fidelity.”

—Michael Gannon
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