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Florida Humanities Council.

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Engage your mind and spirit. Join us as we explore Florida.

Since 1996, the Florida Humanities Council has hosted trips to communities around the state. These “Gatherings” are guided by pre-eminent scholars, local cultural and civic leaders, and longtime local residents. We look at past and present issues and events that help us to understand the distinct qualities and culture of each area.

From Okeechobee to Homosassa, from Mount Dora to Fernandina, from St. Augustine to the Everglades, we’ve been getting to know Florida.

Upcoming Gatherings:

Cedar Key (November 4–6, 2005—Now full, but another planned for 2006)

Fort Pierce (February 17–18, 2006)

For more information see “The Gathering” on our website at www.flahum.org
Join us as we explore Florida

CEDAR KEY—November 4–6
(Now full, but another planned for 2006)
Once a booming port town, then a vibrant fishing village, now a quaint seaside haven for artists and writers. This jewel set in the midst of a wildlife refuge is a perfect setting for examining the dynamics of change. We will kayak with a wildlife photographer, walk the storied streets with a historian, boat among the outer islands with an environmentalist, and much more. (This date is full. Contact Program Coordinator Monica Rowland at mrowland@flahum.org or (727) 553-3803 for Cedar Key in 2006.)

FORT PIERCE—February 2006
From The Highwaymen to Zora Neale Hurston, from the Cracker Trail to the treasure troves, this East Coast town is alive with history. We will visit an old cattle ranch, hear the story of the mid-20th-century black painters who survived on their wits and their talent, relax on the banks of the Indian River lagoon, learn about the deep-sea hunt for gold, and much more. Contact Monica Rowland at mrowland@flahum.org or (727) 553-3803.

For more information see “The Gathering” on our website at www.flahum.org

LIKE MANY MEMBERS OF MY GENERATION, I grew up on stories of the Great Depression. My father, like thousands of jobless young men of that era, worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps, earning $30 a week, $25 of which was sent back to his family. His stories of wrenching poverty and backbreaking work, of teenaged boys far from home building bridges and roads, campsites, and public buildings, came to epitomize, for me, the courage, fortitude, camaraderie, and hope that brought this generation of Americans (some call it the greatest) through one of our bleakest periods.

The amazing array of WPA programs created during the Depression—programs that not only constructed roads, bridges, and public buildings, but also built our cultural infrastructure—remind me of the wonderful old labor song "Bread and Roses": "Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses." In addition to putting food on the table for the millions of Americans left destitute by the Depression, these programs also revived our national spirit through projects that collected and documented our heritage and commissioned original works of art and theater.

Through such WPA programs as the Federal Writers Project, the Federal Music Project, and the Federal Art Project, Americans began for the first time to celebrate our American heritage and define what it is to be an American. And nowhere was that work more fertile than here in Florida. The Federal Writers Project provided such now-iconic figures as Stetson Kennedy and Zora Neale Hurston with their first jobs, collecting the folklore and folk music from Florida’s jook joints and turpentine camps "and wherever Florida folks were working, living, and singing," as Kennedy writes in this issue of FORUM. He describes the experience in colorful detail: "People sometimes referred to them as the "root-hog-or-die" days, meaning that if you didn’t keep grubbing you were a goner. Lots of folks were ‘hollerin’ hungry,’ and longing for a little gravy on their grits. A black preacher on the Sea Islands prayed, ‘Hear us, Oh Lord, we’re down here gravin’ on dry bones.’"

WPA projects dug deep into the roots of America to incorporate stories theretofore left out of the narrative of American history. In his article about the slave narratives collected by the Negro Writers Unit of the Federal Writer Project, historian Gary Mormino concludes that the WPA’s “willingness to record the experiences of men and women regarded as marginal represents one of the more noble and humane acts in American history.”

While at times controversial, the scores of WPA-commissioned murals across our state “remain as the legacy of a social revolution that was America’s response to the specter of economic disaster,” writes art historian Mallory O’Connor. “…The New Deal art projects were the first to focus on explorers, Indians, settlers, farmers, fishermen, teachers, and businessmen—in short, the men, women, and children who were the unsung heroes of everyday life.”

In many ways the Florida Humanities Council carries on the work and traditions of those WPA programs. By providing writers, historians, and artists with grants to document and examine our history and heritage, by sending humanities speakers to communities across the state, by publishing the magazine that explores the culture of Florida, FHC continues to weave new stories into the fabric of our state’s collective memory, stories that define what it is to be a Floridian.

—Janine Farver
Singing Along Back Roads
Researchers scour the Florida countryside in the 1930s to record folks singing songs. Now the collection is available online.
By Stetson Kennedy

Roadmaps and Folk Tales
Federal workers gather fact, myth, gossip, and history into the Florida guidebook, an eclectic and entertaining reflection of the state.
By James A. Findlay and Margaret Bing

Giving Slaves a Voice
African-American interviewers travel around Florida to collect the memories of ex-slaves.
By Gary R. Mormino

The Art of Hope
When times are desperate, artists are hired to design New Deal murals that inspire confidence, strength, and perseverance.
By Mallory McCane O'Connor

Getting Back to Work
With the country 'poised on the hinge of history' during the Depression, President Roosevelt creates the WPA, a jobs program that gives people pride and purpose and leaves a remarkable legacy in Florida.
By Gary R. Mormino

Humanities Alive!
News of the Florida Humanities Council

Meet Three Literary Luminaries
The Harlem Renaissance

Book Briefs
An environmental history and a social history of Florida.

On the cover: Novelist/folklorist Zora Neale Hurston in the 1930s, standing next to a display of WPA publications. She was among the many Floridians hired to travel the state collecting folk songs and stories.
FORUM Wins Magazine Awards

FORUM Magazine received three statewide awards at the Florida Magazine Association's 2005 annual conference, held August 20 in Orlando. The awards, in the category for magazines of associations, include:

- "Silver Award" Second Place for Best Overall Magazine. The first-place honor in this category went to the Florida State University publication, Research in Review.
- First Place for Best Theme or Show Issue for FORUM's Winter 2005 issue, which focused on Florida's rivers and was entitled: "Our Rivers Whisper Our Story: The Past Flows with the Current."
- First Place for Best Feature for an article entitled "Creation Unfolding," which appeared in the issue on rivers. It was written by Mark Jerome Walters, associate professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg.

Colburn to Chair FHC Board

University of Florida history professor David Colburn was recently elected to serve a two-year term as chair of the FHC board of directors. A former provost and senior vice president at UF, Colburn served two terms as the chair of the UF history department and also served as the Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. He has taught at UF since 1972.

Colburn directs the Reubin O'D. Askew Institute on Politics and Society, which provides public programs to civic leaders on critical issues confronting the state. His teaching and research have focused on politics, race, and ethnicity in 20th-century America. His most recent books include Florida's Megatrends (2002) with Lance deHaven Smith, and African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City (2001).

New FHC Board Members

Lester Abberger, of Tallahassee, and Jon Ward, of Fort Pierce, have been elected to serve three-year terms on FHC's board.

Abberger, who served a previous term on the board, is managing partner of Florida Lobby Associates, a governmental affairs consulting group. He is a trustee of the National Trust for the Humanities, past chair of FHC, and past chair of the Federation of State Humanities Council. Active in numerous cultural and civic organizations, Abberger is the past chair of Leadership Florida and a board member of the LeRoy Collins–Leon County Public Library System. He is a trustee of the Florida State University publication, Research in Review.

Ward is the director of the Community Redevelopment Agency for the City of Fort Pierce. As the former director of Cultural Affairs for St. Lucie County, he spearheaded a number of projects, including the Zora Neale Hurston Dust Track Heritage Trail; a major outdoor museum exhibit on the county's boat-building heritage; and "Net Loss," a touring program focusing on the plight of Florida's small commercial fishermen.

Deadlines for Grant Applications

FHC reminds nonprofit organizations that Nov. 6 is the application deadline for grants of up to $25,000. The deadline for mini-grant applications (of up to $2,000) is Feb. 20, 2006. FHC provides funds for programs that bring humanities scholars together with the general public to explore topics and issues of concern to Floridians. Subjects for humanities programs are wide-ranging, including such areas as growth management, the environment, homelessness, medical issues, and the legal system. FHC's new grant initiative, "Florida: Exploring the State of the Future," focuses on such areas as demographic, technological, social, and cultural changes in Florida. All programs must be nonpartisan, open to multiple points of view, and free to the public. For more information, go to www.flahum.org and click on "Grants"—or email the grants director at stlockwood@flahum.org.

FHC to Honor Legislators

Florida State Sen. Mike Fasano and Rep. Don Davis will be recognized at programs this fall for their work in helping FHC secure an increase in state funding.

FHC will honor Fasano in a program on Wednesday, Oct. 26 at 7 p.m. at the Dunedin Library. Davis will be honored Tuesday, Nov. 1 in a program at Players Theatre in Jacksonville Beach.

Fasano and Davis, the chairs of Transportation and Economic Development Committees in the state Senate and House, respectively, are instrumental in making appropriations to cultural organizations through the Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs. FHC received a $215,000 appropriation in 2005, up from $161,000 in 2004.
Meet the luminaries who helped redefine black culture

The times were extreme—roaring to the heights in the 1920s, hitting bottom in the '30s. Change seemed to be the only constant between the world wars. During that time, African-American intellectuals and artists had perhaps their first real opportunity to explore possibilities.

They were part of the black migration, away from the backbreaking life of sharecropping and KKK violence in the South, to the promise of better jobs and better lives in northern cities. They reveled in self-discovery, delved into questions—and found darkness and beauty that they expressed in poems, novels, essays, music, paintings. They discovered each other, too, kindred spirits who gravitated to an area of New York City called Harlem. It was a place where they could talk and think and go to nightclubs and play music and dance—and create.

That African-American cultural explosion came to be known as the Harlem Renaissance. It was a creative whirlwind that redefined what it meant to be black in America. Many of the names associated with the Harlem Renaissance are famous now, like Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Bessie Smith, W.E.B. Du Bois.

The leading lights of that movement included some who had Florida connections. Among them: Zora Neale Hurston and James Weldon Johnson, who grew up in the state; and Langston Hughes, a friend and collaborator of Hurston's.

These three luminaries are now stepping out of the past and onto the stage in communities across Florida, transporting audiences to that razzmatazz era of some 80 years ago, telling stories and discussing their lives, their work, and each other.

Scholar/actors Phyllis McEwen, LeRoy Mitchell, Jr., and Bob Devin Jones are portraying them in live performances of "Voices of the Harlem Renaissance," a program created and sponsored by FHC.

Thanks to a grant from the "We The People" program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, FHC is presenting eight public performances, five day-long teachers' seminars on the Harlem Renaissance, and one week-long seminar for teachers.

Upcoming performances, which are free and open to the public, are scheduled for:

- Thursday, Oct. 6 at 7 p.m., Museum of Florida History in Tallahassee; Sunday, Oct. 9 at 3 p.m., Unitarian Universalist Church, Fort Myers; and Thursday, Nov. 10 at 7 p.m., Ritz Theater and LaVilia Museum, Jacksonville. Future dates for performances in Niceville and Miami will be announced upon confirmation. (Check our website: www.flahum.org.) In addition, performances were held in September at the Pensacola Museum of Art and at Central Florida Community College in Ocala.

The one-day teachers' seminars examine the historical and cultural forces that led to the intellectual flowering of a people once in bondage. Heather Andrade, assistant professor of literature at Florida International University in Miami, conducts the seminars, entitled, "The Harlem enaissance: Critical Issues in Black Literature and Culture." Teachers receive continuing-education credits for attending.

The seminars, each open to 60-75 teachers, are scheduled for Oct. 19 in Miami, Jan. 21 in Pensacola, and Jan. 27 in Volusia County. (See www.flahum.org for location.) All seminars include performances of "Voices of the Harlem Renaissance." Seminars were also held in September in Fort Myers and, last January, in Tallahassee.

Last summer, the Florida Center for Teachers conducted a weeklong seminar on the Harlem Renaissance for 25 teachers from around the state. The performance during this seminar was also opened to the public.

The performances feature McEwen as Hurston, a novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist who grew up in Eatonville, Fla. Described as witty, brash, wise, and vivacious, Hurston became one of the most famous writers of the 20th century.

Mitchell plays Johnson, a Jacksonville native who went on to become a poet, diplomat, and composer and the first black man admitted to the Florida bar.

Jones portrays Hughes, the prolific poet, essayist, and playwright who joined Hurston in Florida to collect folklore.
Under a WPA program, white-collar workers index Pinellas County records in St. Petersburg.

GETTING BACK TO WORK
WITH THE U.S. ‘POISED ON A HINGE OF HISTORY,’ FDR UNFURLS A PROGRAM TO CREATE JOBS, PRIDE, AND PURPOSE. THE LEGACY OF THE WPA ENDURES IN FLORIDA.

It was 1930, and the mood in Florida was bleak. Once a beacon of optimism, the state now lay in economic ruins. It had been pummeled by the real estate bust of 1926 and devastated by the Wall Street crash three years later. Crushed lives and dashed dreams may have haunted the Dust Bowl, but bad things weren’t supposed to happen in sunshine states.

Hundreds of Florida-owned banks and corporations had failed. Agriculture had fallen victim to under-consumption, overproduction, the Mediterranean fruit fly, and the cattle tick. Mullet fishermen threatened a

By Gary R. Mormino
wing critics branded Roosevelt a socialist, while the Left never forgave him for preserving private enterprise. The stakes were immense: America in the 1930s was poised on a hinge of history, precariously balanced between fascist dictatorships and social revolution.

Put simply, the New Deal ameliorated the worst of the Great Depression and offered hope to many who had lost all faith in the American way. Promising relief, recovery, and reform, the New Deal injected the federal government into family lives, the job place, even the theater.

Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) pledged to Americans a "New Deal" at the 1932 Democratic Party convention, a quarter of Floridians were unemployed. Elected by a landslide in November 1932, Roosevelt came perilously close to never fulfilling his promise. Three months later, as the president-elect began to speak to a large crowd at Miami's Bayfront Park, an Italian anarchist named Giuseppe Zangaglia fired shots, barely missing Roosevelt but killing Chicago mayor Anton Cermak.

Roosevelt's inspiration derived not from a deep-seated ideology, but rather from his confidence and consuming faith, his gift of empathy, and his willingness to experiment. A pragmatist, FDR was willing to test the limits of government; a leader, he believed that the presidency was a pulpit.

Before the New Deal, there was no social security for the aged, no guarantee of banking deposits or rights to organize a union, and no federal relief for farmers. Right-
GETTING BACK TO WORK

But no New Deal program left a greater legacy than the Works Progress Administration (WPA). It came about in 1935, when, for all of FDR’s fireside chats and daring, the New Deal had stalled. In spite of massive infusions of federal funds, unemployment remained alarmingly high. The courts checked Roosevelt’s agenda. Demagogues were on the march: Huey Long, Dr. Francis Townsend, and Father Charles Coughlin threatened Roosevelt—and threatened American democracy, itself. The election of 1936 loomed.

With the bravado of a lion and the cunning of a fox, Roosevelt outflanked his opponents. On May 6, 1935, FDR established the Works Progress Administration by executive order. In August, FDR signed the Social Security Act, unfurling the Second New Deal.

Roosevelt appointed trusted aide Harry Hopkins to head the WPA. Imbued with ample measures of idealism and cynicism, the former social worker understood that the new program promised much but threatened many.

FDR envisioned the WPA to be the centerpiece of a massive $5 billion appropriation (then the largest single appropriation in American history). The program was designed to employ as many workers as cheaply as possible—not to distribute the money as handouts. “Give a man a dole,” Hopkins said, “and you save his body but destroy his spirit.” “What I am seeking is the abolition of relief altogether,” announced the president. But critics quickly ridiculed the WPA as standing for “We Piddle Around.” Most Floridians were grateful for such “make work,” even at $55 monthly wages.

The WPA’s national legacy includes 651,000 miles of road and 78,000 bridges (notably the Overseas Highway connecting Miami and Key West). The WPA laundry list—and the agency did construct laundries!—is simply stunning: commercial airports for Pensacola, Miami, Tampa, Marianna, and Melbourne; a Boy Scout camp in Bartow; a storm shelter for Belle Glade; shuffleboard courts in Fort Lauderdale’s Stranahan Park; an armory in Lake City; a new jail for Jefferson County; an athletic field in Monticello; a football stadium for Orlando; a TB sanitarium in Woodsmere; a student union building at the University of Florida; sewing rooms for the women of Arcadia; a new Leon County High School in Tallahassee; a mattress factory in Carrabelle; a new campus for St. Petersburg Junior College; a women’s dormitory for Rollins College; a post office for Miami Beach; and a fire station for Coral Gables. Bankrupt Key West essentially became a New Deal client, with new construction, an extensive art project, and other improvements that transformed it into a tourist destination.

The New Deal also extended a hand...
five major programs: the Federal Art Project, the Federal Music Project, the Federal Theatre Project, the Federal Writers' Project, and the Historical Records Survey. These put people in the arts and humanities to work. When asked about the wisdom of hiring unemployed Shakespearian actors, Hopkins quipped, "Hell, artists have got to eat just like other people."

Florida's unemployed teachers, journalists, actors, sculptors, dancers, and artists found new callings under the WPA. Never again would so many writers and folklorists canvass the bayous and back roads in search of ex-slaves, Cuban cigar makers, Pensacola Creoles, Bahamian Conchs, Greek spongers, Minorcan descendants, Kissimmee cow hunters, and just plain folk.

The Florida Writers' Project employed about 200 people who worked feverishly to complete so much that archivists are still adding manuscripts to a mountain of papers. It was ably directed by the accomplished author Corita Doggett Corse, who deftly balanced personalities, politicians, and deadlines.

Myriad WPA publications promoted the state, but the most notable achievement was Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State (1939). Written with verve, the Guide is still carried in the glove compartments of many cars. Six decades later, many passages ring with authenticity:

Politically and socially, Florida has its own North and South, but its northern area is strictly southern and its southern area definitively northern. In summer the State is predominantly southern by birth and adoptions, and in winter it is northern by invasion....

To the visitor, Florida is at once a pageant of extravagance...
GETTING BACK TO WORK

quality...Agrarian preoccupations turn from corn, cotton, and tobacco to alligator and lion farms, reptile ranches, botanical gardens, and Indian villages.

Not every observation, however, will sound familiar to 2005 readers. Tallahassee's red-clay streets, according to WPA writers:

- Intersect many paved thoroughfares, and horse-and-mule-drawn vehicles are not uncommon sights...Parked along the high curbs are shining motors with buffed chauffeurs, and rickety farm wagons acting as carry-alls for produce, groceries, and brown-faced children. Hitching posts and watering troughs still survive.

PA writers described 1930s Destin (population 25) "as an old and well-known fishing resort." In Orlando (population 27,730), "Sidewalks are narrow; traffic signal lights bear the admonition 'Quiet.' Fruit-juice stands and used-car lots, some in landscaped settings, appear between tall, year-round hotels, theaters, and department stores." The Guide warned tourists, "Here and there are the 'pitches' of palm readers and astrologers; but to maintain the contrast, long stretches of uninhabited pine woods intervene with warning signs, 'Open Range—Beware of Cows and Hogs.'"

The guide also captured the realities of 1930s life. In La Belle, travelers encountered "primitive one-story cabins with palm-thatched roofs...Kerosene lamps light these houses, and home-cured hides are sometimes used as bed 'kivers.'"

WPA cultural projects ranged from recording Lebanese lullabies in Jacksonville to bringing the opera Aida to Apalachicola and constructing an art gallery in Key West. Art centers opened in Milton, Bradenton, Daytona Beach, and New Smyrna Beach. Pensacola, Jacksonville, and St. Petersburg sponsored Negro Art Centers. The Jacksonville Civic Orchestra, composed of 52 musicians formerly on relief rolls, played to enthusiastic crowds. In one experiment, inmates at Raiford State Prison learned to paint. Harry Sutton, a celebrated artist and supervisor of the Jacksonville Negro Art Center, offered art lessons for local youth.

Curtains closed and actors bowed at the conclusion of the 900 performances sponsored by the short-lived, but lively, Florida Theater Project. Tampa was home to the state's only Negro Theater Unit as well as the nation's only Spanish-language acting troupe. Wildly popular, Ybor City's Latin immigrants adored the performances at the palatial Centro Asturiano Theatre, but the U.S. Congress voted in 1937 that aliens could not work on WPA projects, thus robbing the troupe of its actors.

The decade of the 1930s profoundly altered the course of American and Florida history. Events changed the relationships among states, citizens, and the federal government. Popular doctrines of rugged individualism gave way to an acceptance of Washington's role in Americans' lives.

American writers and artists keenly shaped, and were shaped by, the 1930s. The popular slogans "Art for the Millions" and "People's Art" reflected new sentiments and relationships. The WPA represented what critic Lewis Mumford called "the cultural rediscovery of America." Prior to the Great Depression, terms such as culture and civilization meant European arts and letters, imported music, and theater. Historian Warren Susman insisted, "the single most persistent theme to emerge from the bulk of the literature of this period...was 'the people.'" Zora Neale Hurston may have summed it up best, "Folklore is the boiled-down juice of human living." Floridians, too, rediscovered Florida.

Gary R. Mormino holds the Frank E. Duckwall professorship in Florida Studies at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. His latest book, Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida, is reviewed in this issue of FORUM.
The narratives of former slaves like Aunt Memory Adams (right, c. 1900) were collected by the Federal Writers Project.

Giving Slaves A Voice

After 70 years, their memories of plantation life are preserved

By Gary R. Mormino

They remembered lives of uncomplicated pleasures and unmitigated hell. They recalled festivals of plenty and nightmares of pain. More than 70 years after emancipation, ex-slaves described memories of life on Florida's plantations. Their accounts, as told to black writers employed through the Federal Writers' Project, live on today as one of the WPA's legacies in Florida.

One cannot begin to comprehend the history of Florida without understanding slavery. Yet the story has not been easy to tell. While archives bulge with the diaries, account books, and memoirs of white planters, precious few documents written by slaves exist.

The WPA slave narratives, therefore, constitute the single greatest source capturing the personal experiences of the ex-slave. Compiled in 17 states between 1936 and 1938, the Slave Narrative Collection consists of 2,358 interviews, including 72 conducted with ex-slaves in Florida.

After the Depression and World War II, these documents remained in storage for decades, largely ignored.
and neglected. However, the social tumult of the 1960s motivated many young historians to chronicle the lives of Americans "from the bottom up." The study of slavery attracted a remarkably talented group of scholars, and they discovered the slave narratives.

The narrative collection does not provide an unfiltered perspective. More than two-thirds of the ex-slaves who told their stories were at least 80 years old when the interviews occurred. Nearly half had been children prior to emancipation. Moreover, the interviews were conducted during the Great Depression, a period in which elderly individuals might look back at the more prosperous plantation South with a special fondness. Thus the interviews tell one as much about the 1930s as about the 1850s.

The credibility of Florida's slave narratives is strengthened in that the interviewers were African Americans, employed by the WPA-funded Florida Negro Writers' Unit. At its peak in 1937, 10 writers were employed, among them Martin Richardson, Paul Diggs, Rachel Austin, Viola Muse, and Pearl Randolph. In most southern states, whites were sent to interview ex-slaves.

The Florida narratives covered many topics, from the crimes committed against slaves to the survival strategies used by them. The following is a sample from the narratives, in the words and dialects as transcribed by the interviewers.

On the treatment of slaves, Frank Berry, who claimed Seminole blood along with his African heritage, said, "Even in slavery we were treated better than we are now by the white people... Even the white people didn't kill Negroes then as they do now." A 96-year-old woman recalled the Creole attitudes in Pensacola as especially enlightened. "I was brought up in the Spanish way," she said. "The Spanish were very good and kind to the colored folks... Pensacola in those days was one big happy family."

But Florida's ex-slaves also recalled some terrible treatment, including the "back and gag": The slave was gagged and forced to sit for hours in the hot sun with his knees drawn up between his arms, his hands and feet bound, and the handle of a hoe threaded horizontally beneath his knees and over his arms. Another punishment was the "bell and stocks," when the slave would be placed in an iron halter with a bell attached to it. When ex-slave Alex Thompson was asked to describe his master, Judge Henry of West Florida, Thompson observed: "He gave us all we wanted to eat, but he cowhided us. He had a cowhide and used to take us in a little room to whip us. Did you ever know of a master not to cowhide a nigger? [And] his wife wuz meaner to us than he wuz."

Charlotte Martin of Sixteen, Florida, remembered her oldest brother whipped to death by Judge Wilkerson for staging an illicit church service. She also recalled the master's frequent visits to the slave quarters for sexual favors.

The Florida slave narratives suggest a series of relationships developed over time, based upon power and fear, dreams and nightmares, illusions and anxieties. "I never forget that... along as I live... If they free de people, I'll bring you back into the Union" (To Dr. Jameson) "If you don't free your slaves, I'll whip you back into the Union."
sack an’ put him on a rope over an open fire an’ smoke an’ burned him somethin’ awful.” According to Lucius Douglas of Madison County, “De overseer wuld git you if you didn’t eat nuf. You was working for him, and he meant for you to be healthy.”

Ex-slaves held cherished religious memories. An amalgam of southern traditions, Christian theology, and African customs, the black church was a refuge and shield. But they expressed resentment about the white preachers foisted upon them. “All lies!” thundered Douglas Dorsey, who remembered the white preachers telling slaves to honor their master and mistress. “We had church once or twice a month,” recollected Mary Biddis. “De white preacher, he wasn’t no good. All he preach about was to serve de white boss, not God. De white boss paid him... If dey had let de colored preachers do all de preachin’ we’d of had good services all de time.”

The slave narratives reconstruct the social world of the plantation. Willis William expressed gratitude that his mother cooked at the big house and “saw to it that her children were well fed. We were fed right from the master’s table.” Williams recalled the master providing his Leon County slaves with chickens and green vegetables.

Elderly ex-slaves fondly described the distinctive old ways of baking cornbread and making coffee. “The corn meal, after being mixed,” remembered Claude Wilson, “was wrapped in tannin leaves and placed on hot coals. The leaves would parch to a crisp, and when the bread was removed it was a beautiful brown and unburned. Sweet potatoes were also roasted on the hot coals.” Coffee was a luxury, and slaves adopted substitutes. Hot water was poured over parched kernels of corn, making a potable hot beverage.

Physicians were rare in Florida, and few ex-slaves recalled ever seeing a doctor. Instead, they generally drew upon their own resources. “I didn’t fool with all those doctors,” said Pensacola’s Thomas Moreno. “Tain’t good for nothing all those medicines. I gather Queen’s Delight, wild sage, sassafras, catnip, peppermint, and prickly pear. Prickly pear, it’s good to make the hair grow.”

Although educating slaves was a crime throughout the South, a few ex-slaves revealed they had learned to read and write. In Suwannee County, Colonel Martin’s children secretly taught Douglas Dorsey the rudiments of reading. When Mrs. Martin discovered the secret, she struck Douglas across the face, vowing to cut off his right ear. Margrett Nickerson explained how her uncle was beaten “til de blood run out of him,” because he had learned to read and write. Alex Thompson knew a slave named Lillie who had learned to write and often forged passes for friends. Squires Jackson taught himself to read and write. One day his master caught him, but Jackson cleverly turned the paper upside down, announcing, “It says, ‘Confederates done won the war.’” The master laughed and walked away.

However far the stream flows, a Yoruba proverb promised, “it never forgets its source.” African customs endured long after ancestors had been stolen from the continent. Many respondents remembered “jumpin’ de broom,” an African marriage rite. Josephine Jones, born a slave in Baker County, explained the significance of the broom in African folklore: “Brooms keep haunts away. When mean folks dies, de old debbil sometimes don’t want ‘em down dere in de bad place, an’ he make witches out of ‘em and sends ‘em back. One thing bout witches, dey gotta count everything, ‘fore dey can git ‘crosst it. You put a broom ‘crosst yer door at night, and a witch gotta count ev’ry straw in dat broom ‘fore she kin come in.” Douglas Dorsey said that in the evenings, “when the slaves left the field,” they returned to their cabins to sing and moon songs seasoned with African melodies.

Festivals punctuated the agrarian lifestyles of Southerners, both black and white. Slaves shared joyous memories of these festive traditions. Christmas, by all accounts, allowed for an extended period of rest and merriment. “Christmas time?” pondered Lucius Douglas.
"Yes, yes, de Old Man sure give somethin' extra den. He give de woman folk all new dresses made out of calico or somethin'. You see, de Old Man had a factory and made clothes for all his colored people up in Monticello."

Ex-slaves carried with them indelible memories of that precise moment when freedom was conveyed. Sarah Ross recalled that her master at first refused to acknowledge the emancipation orders, and for several months, she and her fellow slaves were confined and forbidden to mention freedom. Mary Biddis remembered a Negro on a mule telling her owner about the new order: "Mr. Jamison, master, broke down and cried." Douglas Dorsey was 14 when the driver called the plantation's 85 slaves together and told them of their freedom. Others recalled that throughout the war, they had been told to await the sounding of a loud gun to signify freedom.

For many, freedom meant mobility. Ex-slaves, eager to take advantage of their new freedom, thronged Florida's roads and trails after the war. Many sought to reconstitute broken families; others searched for new homes, jobs, economic security; still others were just curious to see a world that had been so long forbidden to them. Ambrose Douglas of Harnett County, N.C., recalled: "I was 21 when freedom finally came, and that time I didn't take no chances on 'em taking it back again. I lit out for Florida and wound up in Madison County."

Seven decades after these interviews were conducted, scholars and citizens look back at the accomplishments of the Florida slave narratives with a sense of amazement and gratitude. It is remarkable, considering the constraints and restraints of that long-ago era, that a program to document the lives of ex-slaves existed and flourished in Florida.

That was a time when a rigid color line defined and divided Floridians. Yet Florida played an important role in the conception of the slave narratives. Carita Doggett Corse, the state director of the Federal Writers' Project, became convinced of the utility of slave interviews while conducting research at New Smyrna and Fort George Island. She encouraged individuals in the Negro Writers' Unit to proceed with some preliminary interviews. In March 1937, Corse forwarded several of the Florida Slave Narratives to Washington for review.

They were well-received. John Lomax, national consultant of Folklore and Folkways, replied to her: "I need scarcely add that I have enjoyed very much reading this batch of reminiscences from ex-slaves."

Lomax, a legendary figure, proceeded to draw up a standard questionnaire, "to get the Negro thinking and talking about the days of slavery."

Henry G. Alsberg, national director of the Federal Writers' Project, brought to the program a willingness to experiment and a disposition toward innovation. He displayed particular sensitivity toward developing a program capable of capturing the African-American legacy, a collection that would include folklore, institutional studies, life histories, and slave narratives.

The Federal Writers' Project offered black writers opportunities to showcase their talents. Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Margaret Walker, Frank Yerby, and Zora Neale Hurston piled their crafts at various projects during the 1930s. Racism, of course, had not dissipated. As late as 1937, blacks constituted only 106 of the Federal Writers' Project's 4,500 employees.

Originally, the slave interviews and folklore collect-

Seven decades after these interviews were conducted, scholars and citizens look back at the accomplishments of the Florida slave narratives with a sense of amazement and gratitude.

GARY MORMINO co-directs the Florida Studies program at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg. This essay drew excerpts from his article, "Florida Slave Narratives," published in The Florida Historical Quarterly, April 1968.
Desperate Times Inspire

The Art of Hope

WPA murals depict heroic laborers, historic scenes, and happy people—visions of strength and prosperity.

By Mallory McCane O’Connor

During the dark days of the Great Depression, artists created a series of murals depicting hopeful, energetic scenes on the walls of post offices throughout Florida. Some of these murals portrayed idealized images of rural town life. Others pictured local industries such as citrus, cotton, and logging. Several showed the Spanish conquest and early colonization or reflected mythic images drawn from Florida history. A few, because of the strong Native American presence in Florida, portrayed Indians.

Now, more than a half-century later, 14 of these murals remain as the legacy of a social revolution that was America’s response to the specter of economic disaster. They can be found around the state from the Panhandle community of Milton to the North Florida towns of Madison and Perry, and from Central Florida’s Sebring and Lake Wales to South Florida’s Palm Beach and Miami. They are among the 1,116 art works created for public buildings nationwide under the funding umbrella of the Works Progress Administration.

Inspired in part by the public murals painted in Mexico in the 1920s under the sponsorship of President Alvaro Obregon, FDR’s New Deal artworks were meant to model confidence, to celebrate the achievements of the past, and to project the vision of a prosperous future. The mural project was the brainchild of Roosevelt’s friend and former classmate, George Biddle. A painter himself, Biddle had traveled in Mexico where artists were
paid a small stipend to decorate the walls of public buildings with images expressing the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. Biddle hoped to initiate something similar in the United States. He suggested to Roosevelt that the government could help support artists during the Depression while at the same time promoting the social agenda of the New Deal. In response, the Section of Painting and Sculpture (later called the Section of Fine Arts) was established under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department. The Section, as it was commonly called, dealt with art in public buildings. In contrast to the later WPA program, the Section commissions were competitive—attempting to attract professional artists with established reputations. It was this program that was primarily responsible for the murals in post offices and courthouses across the nation. Painted for a mass audience, the Section murals were intended to reflect the values and hopes of the American people and to reveal the connection between work, home, and community. They exist today as reflections of the social beliefs held between 1935 and 1943. For that reason, some of the murals have been controversial when viewed through the lens of more modern-day cultures. In 1966, for example, a civil-rights activist named Joe Waller (now known as Omali Yeshitela) was jailed after ripping down a WPA mural from the wall of St. Petersburg's City Hall. Waller said the mural depicted degrading caricatures of African Americans. The mural—painted by George Snow Hill—showed a beach
scene that included two African-American musicians. Hill, who did a number of murals in the St. Petersburg area as well as around the state, was described as being “shocked” when the City Hall mural was deemed offensive.

Another of Hill’s murals, located in the post office of the North Florida town of Madison, sparked controversy more recently. This mural depicts the interior of a cotton mill with a dozen or so husky African Americans toiling away while a white man in a hat inspects a roll of cotton. Outside the open doors, more workers pick cotton in the fields. The subject is similar to a number of labor-related murals found throughout the region: They show African Americans working alongside white laborers and being overseen by managers represented as white—probably accurately reflecting the times. The Madison controversy arose a few years ago when public works of art have an established tradition in the United States dating back to the American Revolution; but whereas earlier examples usually took the form of monuments to fallen heroes or statues of political or military leaders, the New Deal art projects were the first to focus on explorers, Indians, settlers, farmers, fishermen, teachers, and businessmen—in short, the men, women, and children who were the unsung heroes of everyday life.

Although the Section art works of Florida are unique because of the unprecedented government support that birthed them, they were still privy to the same problems faced by public art before and since—issues such as the interaction between artist and patron and between artist and public, and the sensitive and sometimes eccentric nature of the subject matter that was eventually selected for each mural was arrived at through discussions involving the artist, the Section representatives, and the townspeople.

The Art of Hope

a new African-American postmaster wanted to remove the mural because of concerns about racism. However, longtime Madison resident Willie Clare Copeland led several local citizens in opposing this move, arguing that the mural was historically significant. The mural was allowed to remain.

A conversation I had during a recent visit to view the Madison mural seemed to support views of its historical accuracy. I spotted two local citizens—a young African-American man and a middle-aged white woman—who were standing in line at the service window. Both were looking intently at the mural.

“So, what do you think?” I asked the man.

“I know that place,” he replied. “That’s the cotton gin that was down by the railway tracks. See those big wheels?” He pointed to a machine on the right side of the mural. “I remember seeing those when I was a little kid.”

The white woman chimed in. “I’ve done that.” She pointed to the workers in the field. “I used to pick cotton myself, just like that.” Both studied the mural for a moment. Then the black man nodded. “Yep, that looks just like it.”

local politics, questions of censorship, and legal issues regarding the maintenance and removal of the art.

The subject matter that was eventually selected for each mural was arrived at through discussions involving the artist, the Section representatives, and the townspeople. The artists were required to consider the distinctive activities or histories of the towns before choosing mural subjects. Even though the mural program’s regulations stipulated that artists should have historical ties to the areas where they competed for commissions, the artists who worked on the Florida murals had varied backgrounds and came from different parts of the country. Many of the artists traveled to the sites where their murals would be located before finalizing their proposals. Others carried on lengthy correspondence with local officials or did extensive research on Florida’s history and culture. Based on their work, it is clear that they all felt a strong connection with their subjects and attempted in their art to capture the culture of Florida.

Because of the state’s unique history and development, there is an apparent North/South split into two cultural and
economic regions that is reflected in the murals. The northern area was more traditionally “Southern” in culture and economy with an emphasis on agriculture. Crops such as cotton and tobacco or industries such as logging are featured in most of the murals in this region. In Jasper, two murals by New York artist Pietro Lazzari depict tobacco workers and blacksmiths along with scenes of rural life.

In Perry, George Hill focused on the local logging industry in his mural Cypress Logging, completed in 1938. A transplanted Yankee with a bachelor’s degree in art from Syracuse University, Hill was also a meticulous researcher and was said to have spent long hours gathering information from local sources in order to make his murals as accurate as possible. In Perry, Hill apparently spent hours sketching in the cypress swamps where the actual logging took place before starting on his mural.

An exception to the rural theme that predominates in the North Florida murals can be found in the eight panels painted by Hungarian-born artist Edward “Buk” Ulreich for the Tallahassee Post Office in 1939. Since this was in the state capital, it was thought that the mural should depict great moments in Florida history. Exploration, conquest, and settling are the main themes—from the five flags that have flown over Florida, shown in the first panel, to the winter playground of 1930s sunbathers and sports enthusiasts in the last. Educated at the Kansas City Art Institute and the Pennsylvania Fine Arts Academy, Ulreich had spent time as a cowhand on an Arizona ranch and was fascinated with Native Americans. His second panel, which shows a group of early Florida Indians, was extensively researched and includes a number of archaeologically significant details.

Unlike the northern half of the state, South Florida in the 1930s was a tourism destination. Images for Section murals in towns such as Fort Pierce and Palm Beach were chosen to appeal to Yankee visitors. These included scenes featuring the colorful Seminole Indians, such as Oseola Holding Informal Court with His Chiefs by Lucile Blanch, completed in 1938 for the Fort Pierce post office; and Charles Russell Hardman’s Episodes from the History of Florida, painted in 1940 for the Miami Beach Branch post office. They exemplify the somewhat sanitized versions of Florida’s history meant to appeal to appreciative tourists. Even the painting of citrus groves by Miami artist Denman Fink for the Lake Wales Post Office could be considered tourist-inspired. Many of the groves were open to visitors who came to see the trees and buy fruit to take home. The Denman mural also includes a local tourist attraction—the famed “Singing Tower.”

One of the most celebrated artists to partici-
The Art of Hope

promoted what Maybell Mann, author of Art in Florida 1564–1945, calls "a middle-class view of the world." But, she adds, "in the 1930s, when labor unions and other supporters of the political left saw the New Deal as an ally in transforming society, the positive vision of regionalism reflected in the art commissioned by the Section indicated its confidence in the possibility of change."

Whether they are in small rural towns or large urban areas, whether they are focused on history, legend, or local enterprise, the most significant legacy of Florida's New Deal murals can be found in the stories that they tell and the images that they reveal. These are images of people who were proud of their history, who had a strong sense of place and a devotion to family, who worked hard, who were resilient in the face of hardship, and who faced the future with optimism and humor. In a campaign address delivered in Cleveland on Nov. 2, 1940, FDR stated: "Always the heart and soul of our country will be the heart and soul of the common man."

The New Deal murals might not have embodied the social and cultural renaissance that Section organizer George Biddle envisioned for them, but they provide us with a timeless self-portrait of the American people caught up in the maestros of their own history.

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pate in the Section program in Florida was Charles R. Knight, who created Prehistoric Life in Florida for the Sebring Post Office in 1941. Knight's depictions of mammoths and other prehistoric creatures such as those he painted in murals for the Field Museum in Chicago and the Natural History Museum in New York, revolutionized the way these early animals were portrayed. His mural in Sebring, now housed in the Sebring Public Library, shows two saber-toothed tigers defending their cubs against a herd of approaching mastodons.

In considering the aesthetic and stylistic significance of the Section murals, it is important to keep in mind that they were government-sponsored works and that the artists were required to adhere to certain restrictions. A typical post-office commission announcement stipulated: "The subject matter should have some relation either to the post, local history, past or present, local industry or pursuits." In keeping with the prototype of the Mexican mural movement, the images tended to be monumental; the figures, simplified; the colors, rich; and the compositions, balanced. Outline and contrast are used to define forms and to dramatize subjects. Narrative overshadows aesthetics. Media included fresco, tempera, oil, and relief sculpture.

According to Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz, authors of Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal, the Section was the most conservative of the WPA art programs. It
JOHN JAMES AUDUBON:
AMERICAN ARTIST
AND NATURALIST

Chosen from the collection of the Audubon Museum, Henderson, Kentucky, the exhibit includes original Audubon letters, rare books, personal items, and sixty of the large hand-colored Double Elephant Folio engravings printed from 1826–1838 for "The Birds of America." The exhibit was organized by artextices 2000.

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Roadmaps and Folk Tales

By James A. Findlay and Margaret Bing

The crowning achievement of the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) was the American Guide Series, a collection of travel guides modeled on the well-known and popular Baedeker series of travel books. The decision to compile a guide series took into account many factors. Not only was the series a way of providing work for unemployed white-collar workers, but during a time of rising international tension the project helped promote patriotism by formally documenting the nation’s accomplishments and culture. In addition, in a country of vast distances with a rapidly developing nationwide highway system, the series promoted travel and tourism.

"In 1935 alone, 35 million vacationers took to the nation’s highways," wrote Monty Noam Penkower in The Federal Writers’ Project: A Study in Government Patronage of the Arts (1977). "The guides would serve the rapidly growing number of visitors to national parks, as well as the newly emerging youth hostel movement, the American Camping Association, and the Scouts. They would also help in the rediscovery of historic landmarks and scenic wonders."

Henry Alsberg (1881–1970) was appointed national director of the FWP on July 25, 1935. A New Yorker trained in journalism and law, Alsberg decided early in his tenure that rather than produce large and cumbersome guides to regions of the country, as was originally planned, a more useful and practical approach would be to publish titles for all 48 states and two territories.

The state guidebooks were not the only titles to be published. The FWP also produced a wide range of other works, including local guides and folklore studies. Many city and local guidebooks were written and published because they provided the FWP with “community support for the project, which might increase the sales of larger guides when they finally appeared,” Penkower wrote.

The subjects commissioned included transcontinental tours books, trail books, black studies, folklore, school bulletins, agriculture pamphlets, gazetteers of place names, local newspaper indexes, and map inventories. However, many of these works were never printed because the local sponsoring agencies lost confidence in the projects, often due to controversial passages. For example, a guide to Tampa was rejected because the text “mentioned a red-light district, the illegal ‘Little Chicago’ gambling area, and the fact that Cuban Negroes did not speak English in their homes,” according to Penkower.

Approximately 20,000 writers worked for the FWP during its lifespan, earning anywhere from $93.50 to $103.50 per month in New York and other urban states while their counterparts in rural states such as Georgia and Mississippi earned as little as $39. In Florida, Stetson Kennedy (born 1916), who went on to become a professional writer after his involvement with the FWP, earned $75 dollars per month working as a junior interviewer. Being unemployed or "on the dole" was the main criterion for employment in the FWP, and with few exceptions, anonymity was deemed essential. Not permitting individual writers to sign their pieces helped to ensure stylistic uniformity and, in an age of socialist ferment, emphasized society's accomplishments rather than those of the individual.

Administrators of the FWP decided that each state warranted its own director. Carita Doggett Corse (1892–1978), one of the few women in the project, was named head of the Florida Writers’ Project in October 1935. Her interest in recording Florida history was reflected in her master's thesis, Dr. Andrew Turnbull and the New Smyrna Colony of Florida, and later manifested itself in publications including The Key to the Golden Islands and Story of Jacksonville.

Corse was responsible for the organization of units throughout the state and for developing ideas for Florida researchers.
and writers. It was through her efforts that the Florida Negro and folklore units were formed. Early in her career she developed a profound appreciation for the colorful folk life of Florida's diverse cultures, and she worked diligently to record them before they were lost to the forces of modernization. She dispatched teams of researchers to interview and document Greek sponge divers in Tarpon Springs, Bahamian Conchs in Riviera Beach, Portuguese fishermen in Fernandina, Native Americans in the Everglades and Dania, and African Americans throughout Florida.

Traversing the state, Coree personally interviewed and selected every writer and researcher hired. She was also responsible for finding sponsors to cover the publication costs of each title, including the state guide. One of the more productive sponsors with whom she collaborated was Nathan Mayo (1876–1960) of the Florida Department of Agriculture. Together they published a wide variety of small books and pamphlets for the FWP.

The project hired unemployed residents to write chapter-by-chapter analyses of the social, economic, and artistic history of the state. The results were self-guided tours of well-known tourist attractions and intimate, down-to-earth descriptions of little-known small towns and back roads of Florida's hinterland. In its heyday the project employed up to 200 writers, although today almost all of them remain anonymous. Addressing the question of who worked on the project, Evanell Powell-Brant, a WPA book dealer and collector, stated, "There never was a master list. No local lists survive—indeed if there ever were any. Only by grapevine reports and recollections do we know who did work."

There were notable exceptions, however. Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960) was already a published author when she joined the Florida Writers' Project as a field researcher and writer. She traveled the state collecting stories for The Florida Negro, which was eventually published in 1933 using the original manuscripts. Hurston was also responsible for writing the section on her hometown of Eatonville (one of the first towns in the United States incorporated by African Americans, in 1886), and the guide quoted two long excerpts from her 1937 novel Their Eyes Were Watching God. In her day, Hurston's writing enjoyed little commercial success. As Claudia Roth Pierpont pointed out in a recent reexamination of the writer's life: "Against the tide of racial anger, she wrote about sex and talk and work and music and life's unpoisoned pleasures, suggesting that these things existed even for people of color, even in America; and she was judged superficial. By implication, merely feminine." It has only been in the last two decades that Hurston's writing has been reappraised and reevaluated. The new recognition of Hurston "has to do with her use of her native place and her cultural traditions as the main stuff of her work."

Stetson Kennedy, a native Floridian, was 20 years old when he was hired to work as a junior interviewer in the Florida Keys. Shortly thereafter, he was transferred to the Jacksonville state office where he headed the unit on folklore, oral history, and social-ethnic studies. He was one of the project's half-dozen state editors who worked at converting raw copy submitted by some 100 field workers into finished chapters for the Florida guide. Kennedy later became a founding member of the Florida Folklife Society and wrote Palmetto Country, a book on Florida folklore. He is best known for his crusading civil-rights work in his book The Klan Unmasked.

Another writer on the Florida project was Albert C. Mannay (1910–1997) of St. Augustine, who was director of the
Key West Unit and went on to write many books on St. Augustine's archaeology and architecture. His secretary in Key West was Mario Sánchez (1908-2005), internationally known for his bas-relief carved and painted murals of Florida Latin folk life in Key West and West Tampa.

The pièce de résistance of the Florida Writers' Project was its travel guide, *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State*, published in November 1939. Print reviews from the era were somewhat mixed. The Saturday Review of Literature praised the work: "Only such a set-up as a WPA Writers' Project could compile so thoroughly a treatise on an entire state as is this latest addition to the American Guide Series. The added achievement of being not only exhaustive, but largely interesting, fresh, authoritative, and at moments even entertaining, is unique for a guidebook." A less enthusiastic reviewer, writing for the Springfield Republican, considered the guidebook to be "useful for its contemporary and historical information, and its generalized comments are reasonably restrained in the main. There is some excess of color here and there, and some statements should have been checked more carefully."

The Florida guidebook was the first of 13 state guides published by Oxford University Press. It was a quirky, unusual, and informative examination of the state as it existed up to 1939. Combining a "blend of history, legend, myth, gossip, and nature lore," its purpose was to equip the traveler with a portrait of Florida that was simultaneously educational, insightful, revealing, and entertaining. The authors involved in the project strove to write a guide that wasn't "touristy" and yet conveyed "as accurately as possible the quality of life in Florida without glossing over its more sordid aspects." According to Stetson Kennedy, "they won some and we won some, so it is fairly well balanced." The finished project conveyed the essence of small-town rural Southern culture, yet at the same time promoted the trendy, sophisticated, and expensive elite coastal resort communities of Palm Beach and Miami.

The 600-page guide contained illustrations, maps, and 101 black-and-white photographs taken by several photographers, including Gleason Waite Romer, a local Miami photographer, and photographers from the Farm Security Administration (FSA). The book was bound in green cloth; a small image of an alligator appeared inside the dark blue lettering. The front of the dust jacket featured a photograph of a palm tree, an unidentified body of water, and a sailboat printed in green. On the back of the dust jacket was a small ink drawing of a Florida shack shaded by a tree dripping with moss.

The beginning section of the guide, "General Information," provided practical advice for travelers regarding railroads, bus lines, highways, passenger steamships, airlines, accommodations, recreational areas, fishing and hunting regulations, climate, equipment, information for the motorist, and a calendar of annual events. That advice included cautions to tourists, such as: "Do not enter bushes at sides of highway in rural districts; snakes and red bugs usually infest such places. Do not eat tangerine nuts; they are poisonous. Do not eat green pecans; in the immature stages the skins have a white film containing arsenic."

"Florida's Background," the 173-page history in part one of the guide, distinguished this publication from others of the time. An examination of its various sections illustrates how the traveler was outfitted with vital information on topics such as the "Contemporary Scene":

The pioneer settler...knew little of life beyond his own small clearing and saw only a few infrequent visitors, until a network of highways left him exposed to many persons in motorcars. This traffic affected his economy and aroused his instinct to profit. He set up a roadside vegetable display, then installed gasoline pumps and a barbecue stand, and finally with the addition of overnight cabins, he was in the tourist business.

Other section topics included nature, archaeology, history, transportation, agriculture, education, and sports. Folklore was also represented, as in the following example describing the lifestyle of a "Cracker," a typical rural Florida pioneer resident:

*The Cracker's wants are simple—his garden plot, pigpen, chicken coop, and the surrounding woods and near-by streams supply him and his family with nearly all the living necessities. Fish is an important item of diet, and when the cracker is satiated with it he has been heard to say: "I done et so free o' fish, my stomnick rises and falls with the tide."

Sections on arts discussed literature, music, theater, art, and architecture, offering an evaluation of Florida's cultural achievements by that time. The guidebook even included the very recent work of the Federal Art Project: Much permanent art has been produced in Florida buildings. Project work includes bas-relief designs of Florida fauna, carved in native stone on the Coral Gables Library; murals in the Orlando Chamber of Commerce; over-mantel decorations in the student union building at the University of Florida; seven murals in the Tony Jannus Administration Building at the Tampa airport; and many murals in school buildings. An outstanding piece is the memorial monument to Matecumbe Key to those who lost their lives in the 1935 hurricane, a rectangular shaft of Key limestone bears a carved panel, showing in simple lines palm trees streaming in a high wind.
The second part of the guide, “Principal Cities,” provided factual information about Daytona Beach, Jacksonville, Key West, Greater Miami, Orlando, Palm Beach, Pensacola, St. Augustine, St. Petersburg, Sarasota, Tallahassee, and Tampa.

In addition to practical information, the guide reported on oddities, introducing readers to such idiosyncratic places as the “Hen Hotel” in Miami: The “Hen Hotel,” NW 27th Ave. and NW 34th St., a huge unfinished building begun as a hotel in 1925, was named the “million-dollar hen hotel” when a hatchery was established here during the early 1930s. The floor space accommodated more than 60,000 laying hens, 20,000 fryers, and 50,000 incubator chicks. Sarasota’s unique “Tourist Park” also fit the category. In past years this park has been the site of the Tin Can Tourists of the World, an organization of trailer and house-car owners with membership of 30,000. A giant parade of “tin canners” and the showing of new model trailers, house cars, and equipment were integral parts of the convention. At the time of the Depression, much of Florida remained comparatively undiscovered. Land was inexpensive, especially in the rural areas inland from the coasts. These isolated spots were ideal settings for some of society’s marginal or disenfranchised groups to establish settlements. The guide contained a 10-page chronology beginning with the entry of 1513: April 3, Juan Ponce de Leon lands on coast in vicinity of St. Augustine site and names land Florida, claiming it for Spain. The last entry, for 1939, reported: “WPA relief rolls are cut from 1938 peak of 55,000 persons to 37,000 on September 1.” The volume concluded with an extensive bibliography, a list of consultants, and an index.
A sampling of New Deal artwork in the Florida Keys

- Monroe County Public Library - Mile Marker 82, Islamorada Branch. Originally built as a school and hurricane shelter in 1936. It contains six bas reliefs by Joan van Bremen.
- Library - Florida Keys Community College, Key West. "Portable" mural by Erik Johan Smith. Originally installed in the 32 Cafe, Duval and Petronia Streets, Key West.
- Harvey Government Center - White Street and Truman Avenue, Key West. Two bas reliefs by Joan van Bremen.
- Glynn Archer Elementary School - 1302 White Street, Key West. Contains William Hoffman mural depicting discovery of Key West by Spanish explorers, and the building of the Overseas Railroad.
- Lighthouse Museum - Whitehead Street and Truman Avenue, Key West. Artifacts and prints by Erik Smith and Stanley Wood.
- Lester Building - 530 Whitehead Street, Key West. Three watercolors by Walton Blodgett.
- Gallery on Greene - 606 Greene Street, Key West. Showcasing current, as well as early, works by artist Henry La Caprana.
- Sloppy Joe's Bar - 201 Duval Street, Key West. Reproduction of painting by Erik Smith, original in the collection of the Key West Art & Historical Society.
- Key West Aquarium - 2 Whitehead Street, Key West. Begun with Civil Works.
- Key West Art Center - 301 Front Street, Key West. One of 66 community art centers administered by the WPA throughout the U.S., where art classes were taught and gallery space provided.
- Sculpture Garden - Mallory Square, Key West. Bust of Julian Stone, administrator and creator of the Key West Art Project.

Morgan F. Townsend, of the WPA art project (left) and one of his etchings of the Keys (below).

border to Key West, using the same tour-guide format as the state guides. A glossary-cookbook section on regional delicacies, called "Special Foods from Maine to Florida," included recipes and trivia, such as the history of hush puppies.

In addition to the Florida Writers' Project titles discussed above, the Bienes Center for the Literary Arts of Broward County Library, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, houses one of the most complete collections of Federal Writers' Project literature in the United States. Furthermore, the Bienes Center's Works Progress Administration collection, which grew out of an initial gift of more than 600 Federal Writers' Project titles donated by Jean Fitzgerald in 1986, includes numerous printed books, archives, and ephemera from most of the other New Deal agencies.

The titles compiled by the Florida Writers' Project provide a comprehensive portrait of the state as it existed up to 1943. For perhaps the first time, writers, artists, and other researchers recorded for the nation's collective memory a detailed, balanced historical overview of Florida that has stood the test of time.

The New Deal gave the American people a well-documented and intimate view of the country at a time when it was attempting to lift itself out of severe economic depression and poverty. It was a unique era in United States history, and it endowed the nation with governmental traditions and social models that will be difficult for future generations to equal or surpass.


JAMES A. FINDLAY is Librarian of the Bienes Center for the Literary Arts, which is part of the Broward County Library.

MARGARET BING, who was cataloger/curator of the Bienes Center at the time this article was written, currently is head of cataloging for the Broward County Library System.
NEW TITLES

Highway A1A
Florida at the Edge
Herbert L. Hiller
"Will Floridians wake one day to find their Eden irrevocably despoiled? The drama is being played out right now, and the Day of Judgement is not far off. Herb Hiller reports with a keen eye, a sympathetic ear, encyclopedic knowledge, and obvious affection for his home state, its people, and its great but imperiled potential."—Tom Brosnahan, author of eight Lonely Planet books and travelwebsiteplanner.com
Paper $24.95

Frolicking Bears, Wet Vultures, and Other Oddities
A New York City Journalist in Nineteenth-Century Florida
Edited by Jerald T. Milanich
"Mosquito-eating alligators, bone-crushing manatees, and five-pound spiders populate this collection of fantastic newspaper articles. . . . Here are descriptions of the Sunshine State that surpass fiction in their ability to describe an exotic land."—Robert J. Malone, executive editor, History of Science Society
Cloth $34.95

RECENTLY PUBLISHED

Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams
A Social History of Modern Florida
Gary R. Mormino
"This is the first comprehensive social history of Florida in any of its epochs. A brilliant compilation of data, it will be the standard against which all future such efforts in Florida will be measured."—Michael Gannon, professor emeritus, University of Florida
Cloth $54.95

Paradise Lost?
The Environmental History of Florida
Edited by Jack E. Davis and Raymond Arsenault
"A magnificent contribution to Florida's environmental history and a fascinating analysis of "paradise lost" in the land of the pink flamingos and Disney."—Carolyn Johnston, Eckerd College
Cloth $39.95

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Whenever anyone asks me what it was like working with the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and recording Florida folk songs back in the 1930s for the Library of Congress, I tell them we were as excited as a bunch of kids on a treasure hunt.

None of us had ever gone hunting for folk songs before, but we were soon able to recognize one the moment we heard it—and to realize that it was truly a bit of cultural treasure that we were discovering and preserving for future generations to enjoy. And sure enough, here we are, more than a half-century later, able to pick and choose in a split second on our computer screens from among thousands of items it took us five years to collect.

In the 1930s, we traveled back roads the length and breadth of the Florida peninsula, toting a coffee-table-sized recording machine into turpentine camps and sawmills, into citrus groves and the Everglades, onto railroad tracks and aboard shrimp trawlers—wherever Florida folks were working, living, and singing.

“The Thing,” as we called the machine, looked like a phonograph and cut with a sapphire needle directly onto a 12-inch acetate disk. Every time we shipped off another batch of disks to the Archive of American Folk Song (now the American Folklife Center) at the Library of Congress, the newspapers would report, “Canned Florida Folk Songs Sent to Washington.”

And now all you have to do is select a can from the Website shelf, open it up, and enjoy!

The voices you hear singing, talking, laughing, joking, and telling tall tales are those of Floridians who have almost all gone to Beluthahatchee (an Afro-Seminole name for Happy Hunting Ground). As for the songs they sang and the tales they told, many are still to be heard, having been passed along as hand-me-downs from one generation to the next. Others survive in the “cans” we put them in—and now on the World Wide Web.

Happily, many of the folksongs recorded by the WPA have also been preserved in books such as A Treasury of American Folklore, as well as in Southern, Western, and other regional “Treasuries,” all edited by the man who served as national director of the WPAs folklore collecting, Dr. Benjamin Botkin.

We are all indebted to Botkin for teaching us, in his seminal treatise entitled “Bread and Song,” about the interrela-

By Stetson Kennedy
Recording Florida’s Cultural Treasures

Along Back Roads
tionship between life and culture. A bit later on, another outstanding folklorist, Zora Neale Hurston, gave us a definition that will stand for all time:
“Folklore is the boiled-down juice, or potlikker, of human living.”

Those were hard times back then, during the Great Depression of the 1930s. People sometimes referred to them as the “root-hog-or-die” days, meaning that if you didn’t keep grubbing you were a goner. Lots of folks were “hollerin’ hongry,” and longing for a little gravy on their grits. A black preacher on the Sea Islands prayed, “Hear us, Oh Lord, we’re down here gnawin’ on dry bones.” And on New Year’s Eve, Florida Latins intoned, “Go bad year, so we can see if the coming one is better.”

Although she already had two books to her credit, Hurston had taken the Pauper’s Oath with alacrity, and—like me—she had been assigned the title of Junior Interviewer.

All of us working on the WPA (except administrators) had to sign a Pauper’s Oath that we had no job, no money, no property, and no prospect of getting any of those things. I was still a student at the University of Florida when I applied and, being eminently qualified in all of the above respects, I got the job.

My job title was “Junior Interviewer,” and the pay was $37.50 every two weeks. When that first check arrived, my wife and I went window-shopping, wondering, “What in the world are we going to do with all this money?”

I had taken a fancy to folk stuff while still in my teens and had struck out on my own to collect folk lore in Key West while I was in college. Botkin was sufficiently impressed by my collection of Key West lore that he recommended I be put in charge of the Florida folklore collecting, although I was only 21 at the time.

The Florida Writers’ Project (FWP) had a staff of about 200 and most of the “field workers” were housewives. The Congressional mandate to the Writers’ Project was to write state guidebooks that collectively would “hold up a mirror to America.”

Over at our sister New Deal agency, the Farm Security Administration (FSA), when Roy Stryker’s team of “on the road” photographers asked him what they should photograph, his answer was “Everything!” No nation in history had ever tried to capture itself in word and picture, and we knew that ours was an important mission.

Not one among us had any formal training as folklorists (there wasn’t any to be had). And it was just as well—or even better. Since our interviewees were just as folksy as the interviewers, they could knock on almost any door, and the rapport was there.

I did suggest to our field workers that their first step upon entering a community should be to seek out the most respected individual—preacher, teacher, midwife, or voodoo doctor—and get his or her endorsement. Thereafter, just dropping that person’s name was enough to open doors wide.

Another helpful hint for our folk-treasure hunters was to seek and find what I dubbed “ambulatory repositories,” by which I meant some individual who had made it his or her business to collect virtually all the oral tradition floating around and about. Almost every community had one.

There was “no sucha thing” as a tape recorder, and disk-cutting equipment was expensive and hard to come by; so I constantly had to insist that the field workers “write it down, not up” in order to capture the true voices of the people in writing. Novelist Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings of Cross Creek was busy immortalizing Cracker lore; Zora Neale Hurston of Eatonville was doing the same for African Americans; and some of our staffers had visions of following in their footsteps.
Long before being “discovered” by Europeans, the Florida peninsula was inhabited by a wide variety of Native-American peoples of differing ethnicities, languages, and cultures. In colonial times, the Spanish, French, and English (not to mention polyglot pirates) put down sparse roots; but when the new-fangled “Americans” took over in 1821 they found no more than 8,000 “non-Indians,” a majority of whom were Spanish.

A century later, when the FWP launched its folklore hunt, the ethnic population consisted in the main of white “Crackers” and African-American “Negroes,” most of whose ancestors had moved from Georgia and Alabama. (At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, there were actually more blacks than whites in Florida.)

One of the first “hunts” conducted by the Florida project involved seeking and writing down the oral histories of “ex-slaves,” as we called them. There were rather many still alive, in their 70s and 80s. For the most part, they had known slavery as children or young adults.

When possible, the Florida project employed members of each ethnic group to research their own people. As a result of our black-on-black policy, the Florida ex-slave interviews are said to be superior to those obtained in other states where white interviewers were used.

Some ex-slaves, however, were not at all reticent about “telling it like it was,” regardless of the color of the caller. One such was “Mama Duck,” who lived in an abandoned “courtin’ shack” on the outskirts of Tampa. She told her white interviewer, “I done prayed and got all the malice out of my soul, and I ain’t gonna tell no lies for ‘em or on ‘em.”

When I assumed leadership of the folklore hunt in 1937, I followed this same do-it-yourself policy in assigning researchers to work with their own people. In Florida, this meant Latins, Greeks, and a few other “odd pockers,” as we called them then. So, when a Yankee Indian (Oswego, with a Ph.D. from Harvard) applied for one of those $37.50 fortnightly jobs, I sent him into the Everglades with the thought that “our Seminoles” might tell him some secrets they would not tell us Anglos. Alas, we never heard from him again.

In 1896, the Supreme Court upheld a policy of strict racial segregation in Plessy v. Ferguson; this was not overturned until Brown v. the Board of Education in 1954. Blacks and whites could not even drink out of the same water fountain in the South of the 1930s while the Jim Crow laws were in effect. It was, therefore, a rare and exciting event when one day in 1938 the director of the Florida project, Dr. Carter Goddard Corse, called the editorial staff into her office and announced:

“Zora Neale Hurston, the Florida Negro novelist, has signed onto the project and will soon be paying us a visit. Zora has been feted by New York literary circles and is given to putting on certain airs, including the smoking of cigarettes in the presence of white people. We must all make allowances for Zora.”

So Zora came, and Zora smoked, and we made “allowances.”

Although she already had two books to her credit, Hurston had taken the Pauper’s Oath with alacrity, and—like me—she had been assigned the title of “Junior Interviewer.” But her pay was only $35.50 every two weeks, because according to the WPA wage scale, it cost $4.00 per month less to live in her all-black hometown of Eatonville than it did for me to live in Jacksonville, where our headquarters was located.

Three years earlier (in 1935), Hurston had taken folk musicologist Alan Lomax, the son of pioneer folk song collector John Lomax, on a Florida recording expedition that began in Eatonville. Because this was a time of strict segregation in the American South, it would have been extremely dangerous for a black woman and a white man to be seen traveling together. To avoid complications, Hurston painted Lomax’s face and hands black. “In the field, Zora was absolutely magnificent,” Lomax recalled in a chat with me a half-century later.

Although I was nominally Hurston’s boss, I didn’t see much of her except on field trips. Like many of our rural
field workers, she worked out of her home and submitted material by mail. Sometimes weeks went by without a word from her.

"Anybody heard from Zora?" Corse would ask her editors. When no one replied, she would look at me and say, "Better write her a letter and jog her up."

I would do as directed and by return mail we would receive a thick manila envelope postmarked Eatonville—the "mark of Zora" I called it—stuffed with the most fabulous folk treasure imaginable. We took her "potlikker" and sprinkled it liberally for seasoning all through the Florida Guide.

Hurston's track record enabled her to wangle the Library of Congress recording machine as a loan to the Florida project. Our first stop with the machine was the Clara White Mission, a soup kitchen in Jacksonville's black ghetto, where the "Negro Unit" of our project was housed.

The singing of spirituals was a prerequisite to being served. The chorus of the first one we recorded was: "Lord, I'm runnin' / Tryin' to make a hundred / Ninety-nine and a half won't do!"

When I pushed the playback button after the first stanza (to make sure the recorder was recording but also as an infallible means of turning the most shy into ham actors), Eartha White, founder of the mission named for her mother, commanded: "Hold it right there. I want to offer up a little prayer."

What she prayed was: "Dear Lord, this is Eartha White talkin' to you again...I just want to thank you for giving mankind the intelligence to make such a marvelous machine, and a President like Franklin D. Roosevelt who cares about preserving the songs people sing."

It being unthinkable in those days for white and black (much less if they were also male/female) to travel together, Corse hit upon the scheme of sending Hurston ahead as an advance scout to seek and find people with folksong repertoires. I would follow with the machine and staff photographer Robert Cook. There being virtually no overnight accommodations for blacks, Hurston frequently had to sleep in her Chevy.

One such recording expedition took us to a large turpentine camp near Cross City. We gained access by telling the (heavily armed) owners we were looking for songs. We set up a nighttime recording session around a campfire. In between songs, I said to the "hands," "Don't you know they can't make you work against your will?"

"They do do it," was the answer.

"Then why don't you leave and get out of it?"

"The coldest way out is to die out. If you try to leave, they will kill you, and you will have to die, because they got peoples to bury you out in them woods."

At this point several young men jumped up and disappeared into the underbrush to serve as sentries in case one of the white woods-riders were to show up.

Sure enough, after a while one of the sentries rushed into the firefight urgently whispering, "Here come the Man! Sing somethin', quick!"

Our Florida treasure hunt lasted five years, and all during that time I urged our hunters not to overlook any of the geography, climate, flora, fauna, peoples, and occupations to be found in Florida.

Ethnically speaking, this meant documenting the predominant Cracker and African-American cultures, as well as major Latin (Cuban, Spanish, Italian), Jewish, Bahamian, Greek, and Arabic communities—and smaller pockets of Seminoles, Czechs, Slovaks, and others.

Florida occupations that strongly affected folk culture and found expression in folksong included lumbering, turpentine- ing, ranching, fishing, agriculture, citrus growing, railroading, phosphate mining, and tourism.

Besides all the peoples and places, many a "happening" made its way into the Florida song bag, including big "blows" (hurricanes), floating islands, disappearing lakes, shipwrecks, lost boys, lynchings, and so on. At the time we were recording, Florida folk were still singing ballads commemorating two big blows—the "Miami Hairykane" of 1926 and the West Palm Beach Storm of 1928. No one had gotten around to writing a ballad about the monster 1935 hurricane that wiped out the Florida Keys.

With reference to the first of the above, folks said, "Blowed so hard, blew a well up out of the ground, blewed
a crooked road straight, and scattered the days of the week so bad Sunday didn’t get around ‘til late Tuesday morning. According to the “Hairycane” ballad (which was said to have been composed by a black preacher in the Everglades):

“Ships swam down that ocean / It was most too sad to tell / Ten thousand peoples got drown-ded / And they all went to Hell but twelve!”

Two years later, a gale-force tropical storm and a full-scale hurricane hit the lower Florida East Coast at the same time. The ballad we recorded immortalized the event as follows: “The storm met the hairycane in West Palm Beach / And they sat down and had breakfast together / Then the storm said to the hairycane /What say we breeze on down to Miami and shake that thing?”

Florida has its full share of folk heroes, all cut from the same heroic cloth as Paul Bunyan, the lumberjack who got so lost up around the Great Lakes, and John Henry, “the steel-driving man who died with his hammer in his hand.”

The roster of legendary characters (many of them real) whose legacy of tall tales we recorded included:

• Big John the Conquerer, the slave who could outwit Ole Massa every time. (When Ole Massa went off to Philamayork and left Big John in charge, he moved into the Big House and told the slaves to “kill hogs ’til they could walk on them.” And then what a barbecue they had.)

• Snow James, who “...was a man of might / Fought everybody both day and night,” and who was wont to say, “I’m so bad I don’t want to be good / Wouldn’t go to Heaven even if I could.”

• Daddly Mention, the chain-gang escape artist “who could outrun the longest shotgun.”

• Ole Pete, the Tampa Bay stevedore “who stopped a runaway freight train with his bare hands.”

• Uncle Monday, who lived as a bull-gator in Eatonville’s Blue Sink, except on Mondays when he came ashore as a man to check up on the folks in town.

• Quevedo (born Francisco Gomez de Quevedo in 1580 near Madrid) who quit his job as royal secretary to King Felipe II to spend his life chasing women.

• Kerosene Charlie, the travelin’ man “who started on a trip around the world with 25 cents in his pocket, and when he got back still had 10 cents left.”

• Father Abraham, the root doctor of Lawtey, “who healed others, but could not heal himself.”

• Charlie Coker, captain of the schooner Heron, whose favorite drink was a bottle of Tabasco chased with awgydent (aguadiente, fiery water, first squeezings from rum distillation).

• Roy Tyle, Maitland’s ace mechanic, who built himself a winged automobile and looped-the-loop all over God’s heaven. A lot of angels bought one, and never flew another lick with their own wings after that. God Hissell got the original.

• Uncle Bud, that “man-in-full,” whose exploits with women are sung by Hurston, herself, in person: “Uncle Bud’s gotta gal, long and tall / Sleeps in the kitchen with her feet in the hall.”

Florida had its folk heroines too. We recorded songs singing the praises of:

• Louise, “...sweetest gal I know / Made me walk from Chicago / To the Gulf of Mexico.”

• The Johnson Gals, “...who is mighty fine gals / Great big legs and teenincey feet.”

• Evalina, long-haired babe “who runs a ho-house on the water, in Birmingham.”

• Sally, who went to Mobile, “Great God I told her not to go / Now she got to sleep on that cold icy snow.”

This has been just a sampling of the folk stuff we found on our Florida treasure hunt. Our recordings are accessible on the website of the Library of Congress—American Folklife Center: memory.loc.gov/ammem/flwpa.html.

Some of the manuscripts, from the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, can be found online. The rest are housed in other archives across the country.

Lomax always insisted that we not just take from the folk, but give back; that collections not be re-buried in archives, but used as seedbeds for the propagation of folk culture. I am delighted to know that the Library of Congress is putting so much of its folk material into that ultimate seedbed, a Web site.

In looking back, we WPA treasure hunters felt a bit conscience-stricken about hard-up informants who hoped to be paid a little something for singing their hearts out for posterity.

In looking back, we WPA treasure hunters felt a bit conscience-stricken about hard-up informants who hoped to be paid a little something for singing their hearts out for posterity. Uncle Sam had not included so much as a dime for such purposes in the treasure-hunt budget. But since we were just as hard up as our informants, there was nothing we could do but say “Thank you.” Perhaps posterity, as it visits their Web site, will add its thanks to ours.

Biddy, biddy bend / My story is end / Turn loose the rooster / And hold the hen!

This article is reprinted from the Library of Congress website—American Folklife Center: memory.loc.gov/ammem/flwpa.html.

STETSON KENNEDY, who collected folklore for the WPA Florida Writer’s Project, is the author of several books, including Palmetto Country and The Klan Unmasked.
Paradise Lost: The Environmental History of Florida
Edited by Jack E. Davis & Raymond Arsenault
420 pages. University Press of Florida $59.95

Reviewed by Bill Belleville

Florida seems to occupy the strangest territory of all the states. It has the longest chronicle of European occupation and one of the most complex histories of aboriginal use. But for most of its modern visitors and many of its residents, it may as well have been invented last week. Indeed, much of it was invented last week, with the perpetual construction of new roads, new malls, and new "walled neighborhoods." Yesterday's cypress bay head—heartbreakingly evanescent in the twilight—is today's Wal-Mart Supercenter.

It's hard to keep track of the loss, and harder still to understand what it means for us all. To function as an "environmental historian" in Florida is a lonely, trail-blazing business that searches for context where previously none existed. Paradise Lost makes a heroic attempt to remedy this.

Editors Davis and Arsenault, both trained as historians, are among a select few who have helped create this new discipline. Environmental history is real-world ecology and, thanks to the contributions by the editors and 13 other scholars, we at last have a clear picture of what this means in Florida.

The collection is divided into four parts: Paradise Explored and Interpreted; Science, Technology, and Public Policy; Despoliation; and Conservation and Environmentalism.

In Part One, Thomas Hallock considers the mythology of the Florida ideal, wherein the state historically has been "a container for stories of the fantastic." Instead of images of paradise, early reports described it as a hostile and remote place that visitors wanted to escape. Most got lost, shipwrecked, etc., and with holy intervention, somehow endured. The idea of a "Florida" was so malleable that it was easier to locate in myth than on a map.

In the second part, on science, David McCall offers the Everglades as every activist's quintessential nightmare—a dysfunctional paradigm that no one can change. McCall notes it is a recurring love story gone bad—wherein the exotica attracts, but only on the condition that its "shortcomings" be fixed. Sadly, a thoughtful 1912 report on the full impact of draining the Glades predicted it would be a disaster in all ways. Since this prediction conflicted with cheery economic plans for development, a new and biased report was commissioned. We don't have to guess at the outcome.

In the part on despoliation, Nano Riley chronicles the transformation of Lake Apopka, once our second-largest lake, from a clear sandy-bottomed oasis to a polluted sump. A state program to buy muck farms and restore the wetlands backfired when toxic chemical residue from the farming killed hundreds of white pelicans and wading birds. An ornithologist suggested the birds had been poisoned for years; worse, farm workers may have been suffering the same fate.

In the last part, conservation, we learn how environmental heroes have risen to the occasion: Marjory Stoneman Douglas for the Glades, Gov. LeRoy Collins for the degraded Boca Ciega Bay, Gov. Reubin Askew's championship of the Big Cypress against the disaster that was Golden Gate Estates, Marjorie Carr's fight against the Cross-Florida Barge Canal.

Finally, we understand that Florida is at a dangerous crossroads in its existence. Our booming population, poorly managed to favor short-term economic gain, may finally overwhelm nature's capacity to regenerate itself. Likewise for the economy that has historically depended on it. This alone should make Paradise Lost required reading for anyone running for public office in Florida.

Bill Belleville is an award-winning nature writer who lives in Sanford, Florida. He has authored four books and more than 1,000 magazine articles.

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Glenda E. Hood, Secretary of State
Florida Department of State
Office of Cultural and Historical Programs
Museum of Florida History
Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida
By Gary R. Mormino
457 PAGES. University Press of Florida.
$34.95

Reviewed by Martin Dyckman

"Florida's Full," declares a billboard promoting South Carolina's Hilton Head Island to southbound tourists on Interstate 95. Many Floridians would accept that as a painfully accurate description of their native or adopted state. Regrettably, many more Floridians do not care, let alone resent, that it has become as Gary Mormino finds it: "a state of great contrasts and broken promises, a place of First World luxury and Third World poverty," lagging behind only three other states in population but behind most by every measure of material prosperity and social contract.

It has been told many times in summary and in parts and pieces how, in a mere half-century, a backwater state of 2.7 million people exploded into one of 15.9 million. But until Mormino's account of why and how this has happened, it has not been explained nearly so comprehensively nor in such rich and vivid detail.

Mormino, the Frank E. Duckwall Professor of History and co-founder of the Florida Studies Program at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, does not approach the Florida saga from the conventional who-won-who-lost perspective of a political journalist or a political scientist. As the subtitle reflects, his fascination is with the immutable physical and human forces—World War II, air conditioning, jet travel, interstate highways, the baby boom and many others—that fueled and fulfilled the desire of millions of people for their place in the sun. Floridians, this book is about us.

Mormino says so little about the politics of our state's metamorphosis as to make by omission the stunning point that Florida's politicians have been relevant mostly in their often-willful failure to shape the future that was entrusted to them. Apart from a few visionary officeholders, notably governors LeRoy Collins, Reubin Askew, and Bob Graham, Florida's elected "leadership" has preferred to go with the flow. It has followed Walt Disney, the developer Arthur Vining Davis (of Arvida fame) and thousands upon thousands of lesser entrepreneurs. These unelected leaders allowed nothing, least of all nature, to stand in their way. Disney wanted and got the water of a cypress swamp turned from black to blue. Developers like Alfred Furen—the man behind the Pinellas Bayway—wanted water turned into land; it was not until 1967, long after the ruination of Boca Ciega Bay, that a reappportioned Legislature put a stop to that form of pernicious profiteering.

We learn more from Mormino than is commonly known about these titans. One example: Disney's father had failed in Florida citrus. Another has to do with Edward Ball, the powerful, reactionary trustee of the estate of his brother-in-law Alfred I. du Pont. Ball rebuffed Disney's inquiry into the estate's Panhandle timberlands, saying, "We don't deal with carnival people."

To this day, the devastation from five hurricanes in 2004 and 2005 exemplifies the "toothless and ineffectual" character of Florida's coastal management laws. And, as Mormino writes with passion and wrath, the taxpayers are now expected to furnish unlimited millions of dollars to protect waterfront mansions and "to refurbish beaches that are virtually closed to the public." It is but one paradox among many.

MARTIN DYCKMAN is an associate editor of the St. Petersburg Times and author of a forthcoming biography of Gov. LeRoy Collins.
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