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Florida Humanities Council.

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A FLORIDIAN?

FINDING COMMON GROUND IN OUR DIVERSE, EVER-CHANGING STATE

PLUS: CELEBRATING OLD NAPLES • HARRIET BEECHER STOWE’S FLORIDA AWAKENING
AFTER THE STORM: ONE COMMUNITY’S ARTFUL RECOVERY • MEET A JOHNNY APPLESEED OF POETRY

FALL 2019
Art is

See it. Hear it. Taste it. Share it.

Thank you to everyone who shared beautiful images of what art and culture means on Florida’s Historic Coast. To see the winning shots and more entries like these, visit @HistoricCoastCulture on Instagram.

Want to see it for yourself? Plan your trip today. HistoricCoastCulture.com
Help us tell the story of Florida together

My family’s Florida story begins in 1957. Dad got a job working in the space industry, so we moved from Minnesota to a then-small town called Largo. In July of this year, the nation celebrated the 50th anniversary of the incredible human achievement of placing a man on the moon. The hard and creative work of my dad and countless other men and women made the space mission possible. And they proved that Florida, a state where innovation is both possible and honored, can provide the elements to realize amazing dreams.

This current issue of FORUM considers who we are as Floridians, and what our state will look like in the future. In this edition, Dr. Gary Mormino provides a brilliant snapshot of the last 100 years and ponders this question:

“...a state where almost everyone comes from someplace else, how do we develop a sense of unity and cohesion, where immigrants and natives, retirees and transplants, think of Florida as something bigger than our own group or ourselves?”

The humanities provide a deeper appreciation for the state’s history and complexity and continue to uncover new wrinkles in Florida’s culture that are surprising and inspiring. Because of the work of the people of Florida, humanity gained the ability to explore other worlds. As more inspired minds call our state home, we eagerly await the new innovation that will emerge.

In the previous issue of FORUM, I wrote about the changing fiscal situation for the Florida Humanities Council. We received an incredible outpouring of phone calls, emails, and letters of Humanities Champions across our state. The Board and staff are deeply moved by your support, and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

We have made several changes to our program offerings, and we suspect more will need to be made in the coming months. At the same time, the Florida Humanities Council is looking toward future programs. We are excited to announce that a new Museum on Main Street exhibition is coming to five locations in Florida, starting in April 2020. With an emphasis on democracy and voting, this exhibit considers the challenges our system of government has faced, and the resiliency of our institutions.

As we continue to move forward, we need to move forward with you. We ask that you consider contacting your elected officials about our organization and the importance of the humanities in general. After all, mathematics and physics can give us the ability to reach the stars, but the humanities form the only force capable of giving that awesome power meaning.

Steve Seibert

We would like to acknowledge the generous support of the National Endowment for the Humanities and the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture.
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Finding my Florida, and yours

If you’ve ever wondered why it’s so hard to define what it means to be a Floridian, you might consider this:

In the time it takes to drive south down the length of Florida from Pensacola to Key West, you could head north and make it all the way to Illinois.

Or this: In our nation’s third most populous state, only some 36 percent of us who live here, were born here.

It’s no wonder that from the tip to the top, from one coast to another, our particular experiences of Florida can feel as distinct as cafe con leche does from Southern fried chicken, or as Hoppin’ John does from a hot pastrami sandwich.

That diversity is what makes our state so vibrant, resilient, and appealing. And so challenging when it comes to joining together and grappling with the issues we face as we continue to grow.

In this edition of FORUM, we take a look at who we are as Floridians — where we’ve come from in the last century; who we’ll be in the future. We tell you about a new digital portal to the past, into the lives of those drawn here by the Spanish colony. And we introduce you to a tiny crosssection of unsung Florida pioneers who left their mark on our state.

We profile the stories of three well-known Floridians whose lives illustrate distinct versions of our state’s experience:

Former Governor and U.S. Senator Bob Graham, born in a coral house on the edge of the Everglades, only left his home state for law school and service in Washington; former U.S. Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the first Latina elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, arrived in Florida at age 8, fleeing with her family from Castro’s Cuba; and former state Supreme Court Justice James E.C. Perry, a North Carolinian-turned-Floridian who has has brought his passion to work toward social justice here.

As part of our ongoing Literary Footsteps feature, we uncover the surprising Florida life of abolitionist author Harriet Beecher Stowe. Scholar Michele Navakas details Stowe’s post-Civil War winters in a live oak-entwined cottage on the banks of the St. Johns River, where the author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin continued her work for social reform. And she wrote and wrote, recording a growing appreciation for Florida’s wildness and unpredictability in letters and a book that boosted North Florida as a tourist destination.

In This Florida Life, we talk to poet laureate Peter Meinke, a native New Yorker, who tells us how a small home in a tucked-away and nature-blessed neighborhood gave himself and his family roots in Florida.

We mentioned earlier the resilience that typifies the people born in and drawn to our state. Perhaps no story here illustrates this quality as much as this one: In Insider’s Florida, Wewahitchka native and novelist Michael Lister takes us to the Panhandle’s St. Andrews as it recovers from the devastation of Hurricane Michael. Lister recounts how this community of creative citizens is turning hardship into an enduring bond — one painting, song, story, and poem at a time.

So what does it mean to be a Floridian, to be citizens of a state where so many of us also have an allegiance somewhere else? We hope this issue of FORUM provides food for thought, and we’d love for you to share your ideas with us and each other. Please write us at jlevine@flahum.org.

And in the meantime, we thank you, as always, for reading FORUM, and for valuing the humanities — and the humanity of — our Florida.

To stay up-to-date with the Florida Humanities Council and join in the conversation, sign up for our email newsletter at floridahumanities.org and like us on Facebook.
Dalia Colón, an Emmy Award-winning multimedia journalist, is a producer and co-host of WEDU Arts Plus on Tampa Bay’s PBS station and produces WUSF Public Media’s food podcast, The Zest. A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Colón was a staff reporter for Cleveland Magazine and the Tampa Bay Times. Her work has appeared in The New York Times Magazine, Los Angeles Times, NPR, and Visit Florida. She lives in Riverview with her husband, two young children, and cocker spaniel Max.

Betty Cortina-Weiss is a South Florida writer who believes salsa, the kind eaten and the kind you dance to, makes the world a better place. She specializes in food and lifestyle stories, and her work has appeared in Saveur, People, O, The Oprah Magazine, Latina and Miami INDULGE, where she was founding editor-in-chief for four years.

Ron Cunningham was a reporter at the Fort Lauderdale Sun Sentinel, higher education reporter at The Gainesville Sun, and Tallahassee bureau chief for The New York Times Florida Newspapers, before serving as editorial page editor at The Gainesville Sun until 2013. He is a University of Florida graduate and former editor-in-chief of the Independent Florida Alligator.

Bill DeYoung is the author of Skyway: The True Story of Tampa Bay’s Signature Bridge and the Man Who Brought It Down and Phil Gernhard, Record Man. Nationally recognized for his music journalism, he has been a writer and editor at various Florida and Georgia newspapers for more than three decades.

Peggy Macdonald is an adjunct professor of history at Stetson University and Indian River State College. She is the former director of the Matheson History Museum. A Gainesville native, Macdonald completed a doctorate in history at the University of Florida. She writes for Gainesville Magazine, Our Town Magazine and Senior Times, and serves on the Alachua County Historical Commission. She is the author of Marjorie Harris Carr: Defender of Florida’s Environment.

Gary Mormino is the Frank E. Duckwall professor of history emeritus at University of South Florida St. Petersburg, where he is also scholar in residence at the Florida Humanities Council.

Michele Currie Navakas grew up in Florida and is an associate professor of English at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where she teaches early American literature, culture, and environment. Her book, Liquid Landscape: Geography and Settlement at the Edge of Early America (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), won the 2019 Rembert Patrick Award and the 2019 Stetson Kennedy Award from the Florida Historical Society. She is working on a cultural history of coral in early America. Parts of her essay, “Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Florida,” are excerpted with permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press from Liquid Landscape: Geography and Settlement at the Edge of Early America.

Tom Scherberger, a communications consultant for the Florida Humanities Council, has worked as a reporter for four newspapers in the state, including for 20 years at the St. Petersburg Times (now Tampa Bay Times) as state editor, Tampa city editor, and editorial writer. He also worked as a reporter and editor for The Orlando Sentinel and The Tampa Tribune. He has extensive experience as a freelance writer and in public relations. He lives in Tampa with his wife, Janet Scherberger.

Michael Lister is a New York Times bestselling and award-winning novelist known for his mystery series set in North Florida. A native Floridian, Lister grew up near the Gulf of Mexico and Apalachicola River in Weewahitchka, where he lives. He was the youngest chaplain within the Florida Department of Corrections, serving in the Panhandle, an experience that led to his first novel, Power in the Blood. Three of his novels have been adapted for the stage and one for the screen. His stories have appeared in various collections, including Florida Heat Wave, which he edited. Lister is the winner of two Florida Book Awards.

Jacki Lyden is an award-winning former NPR host and correspondent and the author of Daughter of the Queen of Sheba, which The New York Times called a “classic memoir.” During her more than three decades with NPR, she did a number of Florida stories, from the Highwaymen painters to a series supported by the Florida Humanities Council on Seminole clothing and traditions. She now writes fulltime and is completing her second family memoir about aging called Tell Me Something Good. She began regular visits to Florida in 2007. She lives in New York, Washington, D.C., and Wisconsin.
‘Anguish in the Aftermath’

Photo and audio exhibit takes a personal look at what came after the Parkland shootings

Freelance photographer Ian Witlen knew from the moment he arrived at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School that history was unfolding before him. As it did for many people, it took time for him to process it all.

It was February 14, 2018, and a gunman had opened fire with a semi-automatic rifle, killing 17 students and staff members and injuring 17 others. Witnesses soon identified a 19-year-old expelled student as the gunman. Witlen is a graduate of Marjory Stoneman Douglas in Parkland and knew some of the teachers. This wasn’t just an assignment; it was personal. “I knew from the start that someone needed to document their lived experiences for the sake of historical preservation,” he says. “I decided early on that if I didn’t see or hear of anyone doing this, then I would do it.”

The result is “Anguish in the Aftermath: Examining a Mass Shooting,” a powerful collection of 50 portraits and audio of students, teachers, and family affected by the massacre that will be on display September 14 through November 9 at the Coral Springs Museum of Art, three miles from the high school. It is supported with funding from the Community Foundation of Broward and the Florida Humanities Council.

The project was motivated by Witlen’s desire to shift the focus from the debate over gun control the shootings sparked to the humanity of the lives forever altered. “At its core,” he says, “these are students, teachers, and families forced to live through this horror and the residuals of it that last a lifetime.”

Witlen began with a handful of subjects, making portraits at a series of makeshift studios. Word of mouth drew more people to him. A chance encounter with another Stoneman alum led him to the museum. It was a perfect fit. The exhibit is a continuation of the role the museum played immediately after the massacre. While the school was closed for two weeks, the museum opened to anyone who needed a refuge, with food, coffee, music, therapy dogs, and art projects.

Eventually Witlen set up a studio at the museum, became an artist-in-residence there and continued making portraits and recording the reactions of the subjects, who found the experience cathartic. Each photo captures the exact moment their memories are captured in the audio. The museum plans to set aside a room at the end so people can decompress, with soft lighting, music and plenty of tissues for tears. Many of the subjects, like many in the community, are still grieving. “Some of the people hadn’t talked about the event and hadn’t expressed their emotions,” says Gabrielle Grundy-Lester, the museum’s development director. “This is a way for people to release.”

The museum plans to make the exhibit available in other locations in Broward County and the state, and is creating a smaller version for venues that cannot accommodate it in full. The Florida Humanities Council is contributing an interactive kiosk where the photos and audios can be displayed at schools and other venues.

“We feel this is the perfect intersection of art and humanities,” says Julia Andrews, the museum’s executive director. The Coral Springs museum has prior experience with art therapy projects. Art for Warriors was a program about veterans with post-traumatic stress syndrome and funded by the Florida Humanities Council.
Rebecca Schwandt is hunting for mermaids.

What began as Schwandt’s thesis for a master’s degree in history at the University of Central Florida has evolved into an oral history project to preserve and present the stories of the Weeki Wachee mermaids who made the roadside attraction famous.

A $4,950 grant from the Florida Humanities Council will support Schwandt’s work, just one of an array of grants awarded so far this year to support community projects from Pensacola to Key West.

Now a Hernando County state park, Weeki Wachee opened in 1947 as a roadside attraction, presenting women who performed underwater acrobatics while wearing fishtails and other fanciful outfits.

Schwandt wants to interview former mermaids about their experiences and digitize artifacts related to the park. She plans to organize a “history harvest” to collect items of significance to be preserved.

Friends of Weeki Wachee Springs, a nonprofit group that works to preserve and sustain the park, will partner on the project with the University of Central Florida.

The Florida Humanities Council, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, provides Community Project Grants of up to $5,000 to help local communities deepen the understanding of the people, places, and ideas that shape the state. Since 1971, the Florida Humanities Council has awarded more than $8 million in support of statewide cultural resources and public programs strongly rooted in the humanities.

Here are the other community grants awarded so far this year:

**$5,000 grants**

**Polk Museum of Art (Lakeland)**
*Art & Social Justice: The Legacy of the Freedom Riders*
A panel discussion and screening of the acclaimed PBS documentary *Freedom Riders*, coinciding with the *Sun + Light* exhibition featuring Charles Edward Williams’ art examining the personal and collective impact of the Civil Rights Movement.

**Blue Planet International Explorers’ Bazaar & Writers’ Room (Palm Beach County)**
*Florida: Where I’m From*
A documentary filmmaking project in Palm Beach County exploring the lives of a group of teens, many of whom live in challenging circumstances.

**Digital Library of the Caribbean (Miami-Dade)**
*Documenting Caribbean Diasporic Communities: How to Archive Local Histories*
In partnership with the Diaspora Vibe Cultural Incubator, a one-week in-person workshop discussing community archives and the need for historic preservation work in the Caribbean diasporic communities.

**Florida Gulf Coast University Foundation (Fort Myers)**
*WGCU Celebrates 50th Anniversary of Lunar Landing*
Marking the 50th anniversary of the moon landing, a premiere
screening of “Chasing the Moon” with CBS News Director Joel Banow and a screening of PBS Kids’ “Ready Jet Go!: One Small Step” teaching kids about space exploration.

**Florida Keys Community College (Monroe County)**

**FKCC Poetics: Critical Intersections and Changing Landscapes**
In conjunction with National Poetry Month, a series of free community events led by students in the college’s poetry writing class and featuring visiting poets.

**Friends of WLRN (Miami-Dade)**
Marking the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon Landing, a week-long broadcast of space exploration programming and locally produced lectures on the cultural, political, and historical significance to Florida of the Apollo 11 moon landing.

**Gadsden Arts Center (Quincy)**

**The Southern Quilting Project**
Supporting the “Generations of Southern Quilting” exhibition of regional quilts from 1830s to today, and the Big Bend Quilt Trail, a mural trail spanning the communities in the exhibition.

**Goodwood Museum and Gardens (Tallahassee)**

**One Place, Two Worlds**
New heritage signs will expand interpretation to include those who labored at the historical plantation from 1840 to 1940, dealing with the intersection of class, race, and culture.

**Ten, Global (Ft. Lauderdale)**

**Demystifying Haitian Vodou to Improve Educational and Health Outcomes of Haitian Americans**
Three presentations with national and international Haitian-American scholars and Vodou Priestesses on what Haitian Vodou is and how it operates culturally.

**Jacksonville Public Library Foundation**

**On the Fringe: Blurred Lines of Florida 2019 Folk Music Festival and Workshops** – $3,610

A folk art exhibition in Jacksonville’s Main Library Makerspace Gallery in coordination with the 2019 Florida Folk Music Festival.

**$2,500 grants**

**Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida (Okaloosa)**

**Museum Tours for Everyone**
The Heritage Museum of Northwest Florida will provide visitors with a digital tour of nine permanent exhibits highlighting the history of Northwest Florida from the prehistoric to the modern era.

**The Crealde School of Art (Winter Park)**

**The Sage Project II: Hannibal Square Elders Tell Their Stories**
Preserving and promoting Winter Park’s historic African American community through a documentary featuring photographs and oral histories from the perspective of lifelong residents, aged 80-102.

**Silver River Museum (Ocala)**

**2019 Ocali Country Days**
The Silver River Museum, in partnership with Florida Park Service and Marion County Public Schools, hosts its annual five-day Ocali Country Days.

**Stonewall National Museum & Archives (Ft. Lauderdale)**

**Stonewall: 50 Years in the Fight for Equality**
Examining the events around the country that led up to riots at the Stonewall Inn in New York City to understand why it became the catalyst for modern gay rights movement.

**$1,500**

**Friends of Hemming Park (Jacksonville)**

**Jax Poetry Fest Community Celebration with Al Letson**
An evening of spoken word, music, food, and fun, during Jax Poetry Fest, a month-long collaboration among Friends of Hemming Park, Hope at Hand, and the Performer’s Academy.

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*The Apollo 11 Saturn V space vehicle climbs toward orbit after liftoff from Pad 39A at 9:32 a.m. EDT on July 20, 1969.*

*Man on the moon: On July 20, 1969, Astronaut Buzz Aldrin saluted the United States flag on the lunar surface. The Apollo 11 Lunar Module, on the left, and the footprints of the astronauts are visible. Photograph by Astronaut Neil A. Armstrong.*
Learning a new language — and so much more — through English for Families

Two years ago, Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico, prompting thousands of people to seek refuge in Florida, many in the greater Orlando area. In response, the Orange County Library System created English for Families, a series of English-language classes designed especially for families.

With the help of a grant from the Florida Humanities Council, the classes began in September 2018, drawing children and their parents (and grandparents) to improve their speaking and writing skills together. The grant funded the creation of the unique curriculum, which was developed by Jelitza Rivera, the library system’s ESL specialist.

“We get families with school-age children, but we also get adult families — parents and grandparents and spouses,” explains Danielle King, the library system’s chief branch officer. “It’s for any age.”

And for any nationality. Myriad countries are represented in the classes. “They’re from all over the world,” says King. “We found that really interesting because we didn’t really know what we’d get and we’re getting all sorts of people.”

One branch had students from nine nations and seven languages: Spanish, Uzbek, Russian, Burmese, Vietnamese, Arabic, and French.

The classes are kept small to encourage hands-on activities and group interactions.

“We’ve had some really great experiences and results,” King says. “They love the classes. They invest in it so they feel bad if they miss a class.”

Learning comes in many forms. In one class, the students were encouraged to describe the homes they left behind in detail. “For many students this was a reflective time, as they thought about their home countries,” wrote instructor Mayonne Granzo in a blog post. “Some talked about the mountains they saw in the background of their city, or the music they heard playing, or the taste of arepas.” An 8-year-old girl wrote: “In my city, I see broken buildings and planes. I hear bombs and I smell smoke.”

“It really demonstrated it’s not really just about learning English,” King explains. “It’s about sharing experiences they can’t really share anywhere else. Their experiences may be different but they’ve all lived through hardships. They really help each other through the process.”

“We’re just very thankful and grateful that we’ve been given the opportunity to do this program. It supports our primary purpose: We change lives.”
100 Faces of War brings powerful story to Pensacola

As a companion presentation, there will be two free performances of *The Telling Project*.

The University of West Florida Pensacola Museum of Art will offer a powerful one-two punch of emotion with the traveling exhibit *100 Faces of War* and a two-night restaging of *The Telling Project*. Both are supported by grants from the Florida Humanities Council.

*100 Faces of War*, organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service in collaboration with artist Matt Mitchell, features 100 oil portraits of Americans who went to war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Representing a cross section of home states, military branches, jobs, and backgrounds, every portrait includes a candid, first-hand account of war. The exhibition runs October 26 to January 19.

As a companion presentation, two free performances of *The Telling Project* will be on Sunday, November 10 and Monday, November 11.

*The Telling Project*, first staged in 2015, features Pensacola-area veterans sharing their stories of life and the military: how and why they served, the injuries and challenges they’ve had to overcome, and how they are transitioning back into civilian life. These performances reunite the cast from 2015.

“The new presentation will be especially poignant in our galleries surrounded by the faces and stories of 100 veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars,” says Anna Wall, curator of collections at the museum. “We are incredibly grateful that the Florida Humanities Council is supporting this exhibition and our presentation of *The Telling Project*.

The performances coincide with Veteran’s Day and Pensacola’s Foo Foo Festival, a 12-day celebration of Pensacola’s local artist and entertainers.

“There will be time for discussion after each performance and time to explore the stories in the exhibition before and after each show,” says Wall. “We hope that the exhibition and performances will allow for a support structure for our military community and be a safe space for veterans to share their experiences with both veterans and civilians. The program will effectively defeat one of the most common barriers veterans face when returning from active duty — the feeling of isolation and being alone in their transition.”

What we’re reading

Joseph Harbaugh, incoming chairman of the board of the Florida Humanities Council and dean emeritus of the Nova Southeastern University College of Law, reads nearly all his books on a Kindle, allowing him “to move among several collections as my interests shift.” Here’s a look back at his peripatetic 2019 summer reading:


*The Restless Wave: Good Times, Just Causes, Great Fights, and Other Appreciations* (2018), by John McCain and Mark Salter. Two books on mavericks whose political differences enrich our democracy.

*Seveneves* (2015) by Neal Stephenson

*The Solar War* (2019) by A.G. Riddle

*Electric Dreams* by Philip K. Dick. Three books that reflect my enduring interest in sci fi.

*Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (2016), by J.D. Vance. Helped foster better understanding of Central Appalachian culture while I was consulting at the Appalachian School of Law.


The best words in the best order

Florida Poet Laureate Peter Meinke on the craft of writing ... and the neighborhood that is his muse

By Jacki Levine

When Peter Meinke was a young boy growing up in a working class family in World War II-era Brooklyn, poetry wasn’t remotely in the picture.

“Nobody read poetry. But my mother belonged to the Book of the Month Club, so that’s where I read my first poems. I started very early,” says Meinke.

Attracted to Edgar Allen Poe and Emily Dickinson, and drawn to mysterious lines like, “Hope is the thing with feathers/That perches in the soul,” Meinke soon tried his hand writing for a limited and captive audience. “I would write like Poe about worms to scare my sisters,” he says. “I knew it was an odd thing, and for no one else. I was a closet poet”.

Since then, a love of the written word has led Meinke, 86, to a career as both an acclaimed practitioner and a teacher of poetry. He’s published several books of award-winning poetry, fiction, essays, and children’s books, and served as a literature professor and director of the writing workshop at Eckerd College for 27 years.

And after a stint as St. Petersburg’s poet laureate, he became the first Poet Laureate of Florida appointed by the governor since the Florida Legislature created the honorary, unpaid post in 2014. He completed his four-year term at the end of June.

His writing has been described by fellow poet Alica Suskin Ostriker this way: “Peter Meinke writes, it is clear, beneath a banner of wisdom.”

What does it mean to be poet laureate?

I took it to mean to be kind of a Johnny Appleseed, going around the state throwing out poems in all the cities and schools, and hoping some of them catch, and the seeds would blossom.

My basic principle was I said yes to everything. I gave several hundred readings, and tried to aim my poems to wherever I went.

After any reading of any size, I would hear from people, looking for advice on their poems.

Anything you’d change about the poet laureate experience?

In the U.S., we copied the English system of poets laureate, which goes back to Chaucer. In those days, they often gave the poet laureate a barrel of sherry. I could have used that. In place of that I’d like someone to arrange the transportation and scheduling.

What was your impression of Florida when you moved to St. Petersburg in 1966, after teaching five years at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minnesota?

I was not a fan when we moved here. I didn’t like the heat, the politics, and its flatness. They still had all the green benches with these old people sitting around, and it scared the kids. The kids would complain and I’d tell them we’d be here for three years, warm up, and then go back to civilization.

How did you learn to love Florida?

One day Jeanne found a little neighborhood called Driftwood, covered with flowers and oak trees. She told me she found a magical place. It took two years to find our house. Jeanne planted azaleas. Right across from us were the big houses, a little public beach, and a path leading to the water. The whole area is historic. And that’s what Florida means to us: Oak trees, azaleas.

How has living in Florida, and more specifically, in your neighborhood, impacted your poetry?

A great deal. It made me more interested in writing about nature. I’ve written about the ibis, the oak trees, about Lassing Park where we walk, I’ve written about houses. In fact, I have a poem called “Old Houses,” a poem in the shape of a house.

What should poetry do?

Poetry can help our lives, make them more enjoyable. But I think it should be fun; it shouldn’t be like broccoli or spinach. The more poetry we have, the better off we will be as a country.

To hear Peter Meinke read his poem, “Old Houses,” please visit floridahumanities.org/blogs
What makes someone a poet versus a dabbler?

A good poem is something that is well made. For someone to learn to be a good poet and not a dabbler, they have to read a lot of poetry. It’s an exercise in delayed gratification. You get an inspiration, and that’s exciting. And then if you want to really make it a poem, you have to work on it. It’s a long time between the original inspiration and seeing it in print.

And even if you’re not going to write a sonnet or villanelle, it’s a good idea to read a sonnet: to hear how poetry sounds. It’s like being a conductor of an orchestra; you’ve got to know what’s available in the music. You don’t have to write a sonnet, but that will give some music to your prose poetry.

Your poems have an accessible, down-to-earth quality. How would you describe your poetry?

I try to write poems that reach out and communicate. They are not abstract. Poetry is the kind of writing that is closest to music. I write for sound.

I’m interested in writing the kind of poems someone can read and understand, but want to read again.

Why would someone want to read it twice? Every poem has to have something surprising, different. Through vocabulary, punctuation, ideas, you make everything surprising. I try to make connections you would not pick up in the first reading.

If you want to write a good poem, you should try to write a great poem. The best words in the best order. That’s good advice to any poet; I try to do that as I rewrite my poems.

Sometimes I get a poem from an image: I might see a bird — an ibis, a night heron — and it makes me want to write a poem. Usually it’s a line that comes into my head, and I write it down in my notebook. I don’t know where it’s going to go.

Free verse is fun, but there’s an extra pleasure when you write a sonnet, a villenelle, or a rondo. The form should be a window, not a mirror — looking through you see what’s being said. Only when you look back at it, the form becomes clear.

Favorite poets?

Richard Wilbur, he wrote hundreds of sonnets. And William Butler Yeats — marvelous in his ideas and his forms. I also like Phillip Larkin and Gwendolyn Brooks. I believe poets are citizens. I write about politics, and she did that, too. There are wonderful stories in her poetry. And Howard Nemerov, I was the first graduate student to write about him. It was my first publication.

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propelled by the waves of optimism following WWII, Time magazine mogul Henry Booth Luce coined the term, “the American Century.” Gauging the arc of the last 100 years, few states rival Florida’s meteoric leap from the margins to the mainstream. The Florida Century is a story of improbable change with a cast of extraordinary characters.

A sense of perspective: On George Washington’s Birthday in 1819, the United States acquired Florida from Spain, a triumph of American diplomacy and fortune. A century later, Florida remained one of the least populous states east of the Mississippi, with some 950,000 inhabitants. The Great War had just ended. 1919 ushered in peace, but little prosperity and less optimism. A deadly influenza pandemic killed thousands of Floridians. The price of cotton collapsed amid an infestation of boll weevils. Massive strikes paralyzed the phosphate mines, cigar factories, and shipyards.

**A snapshot in time**

A 1919 snapshot reveals a state on the threshold of such profound change that words such as “upheaval” seem inadequate. Largely Southern born, a majority of the state’s inhabitants were Florida natives. The one constituency most likely to be native Floridians and Southerners were African Americans. Florida’s immigrant communities, while relatively small compared to the North, were significant by the contours of the South. Key West boasted a significant Cuban population, while Slovaks could be found in the agricultural hamlets of Slavia and Oviedo. A dynamic and colorful Greek community thrived in Tarpon Springs. Greek, Italian, and Slavic fishermen prowled the docks of Pensacola and Apalachicola. A small community of Syrian and Lebanese merchants settled in Jacksonville.

Ybor City, however, dwarfed all other ethnic rivals. Thousands of Cuban, Spanish, and Sicilian immigrants bolstered Tampa’s reputation as America’s premier cigar manufacturing center. Among Southern cities, only New Orleans exceeded the vitality of Ybor City’s immigrants.

If South Florida was sparsely populated, North Florida and the Panhandle were constituted with small towns amid the agricultural hinterlands. The so-called “Black Belt” or Middle Florida, the region between the Apalachicola and Suwanee rivers, still dominated the state by dint of its cotton plantations, historical legacy, and malapportioned legislature. In 1916, Middle Florida boosted Sidney Johnston Catts, the self-proclaimed “Cracker Messiah” to the governor’s mansion.

In 1919, Floridians confronted a cold reality: Demographics is destiny and wars have consequences. The South had lost hundreds of thousands of African Americans, pushed by the cruelties of Jim Crow laws and pulled by economic opportunities in the North. Blacks voted with their feet in a movement known as the Great Migration.

The Great Migration witnessed the migration to Florida of thousands of rural, black, and white Georgians, South Carolinians, and Alabamans, lured by the promise of a better life in places like Miami, Jacksonville, and Tampa.

The transition between 1919 and 1920 may be the most fraught one-year span in state history. Florida became Florida in the 1920s — an illuminating, trend-setting state. By the end of 1920, Prohibition and Women’s Suffrage became the law of the land and the Great Florida Land Boom was underway.

The pulsebeat of Florida changed. DeFuniak Springs and Bonifay, Chipley, and Marianna, belonged to the agrarian ways of Old Florida. New cities that had not even been born before 1915 captured the energy and optimism of an energized South and Central Florida: Miami Beach, Coral Gables, and Boca Raton defined a new Florida, incorporating architectural styles that matched a new Florida dream.
A profound population shift was underway, the result of myriad factors: the importance of the railroad, the rise of the automobile, and well-orchestrated dreams of developers, such as George Merrick and Addison Mizner. But mostly, Americans were flocking to Florida, having been enraptured by the tenets of the Florida dream: eternal sunshine, sandy beaches, and second chances.

1929

A beach culture and Jazz Age emerged in the 1920s. In 1919, convention dictated that women's bathing suits should be modest, ending near if not below the knees. On Miami Beach, Jane Fisher, the irrepressible wife of land developer Carl Fisher, designed a new-age swimsuit, more fitting the times. Her design was sensuous and “form-fitting.” In her autobiography, *Fabulous Hoosier*, she observed that “within a few weeks of my public pillorying, not a black cotton stocking was to be seen on the beach.”

But the giddiness and optimism of the Land Boom collapsed in 1926, followed by a national depression in 1929. The most interesting Floridian in 1929 was not the wealthiest or most powerful, and certainly not well known outside the cigar factories of Tampa. Manuel Aparicio, a Spanish immigrant, was the greatest lector of his generation. Like scores of other lectores (readers), Aparicio read — always in Spanish — newspapers, serialized novels, and political literature to thousands of Cuban, Spanish, and Italian tabaqueros (cigar rollers) inside large brick factories such as Perfecto-Garcia and Cuesta-Rey. Aparicio was such an accomplished orator that visitors would bring parasols and sit outside factories to listen to tales of *El Conde de Montecristo* and *Don Quixote*.

But the Great Depression threatened the world of cigarmakers and readers. Consumers stopped purchasing Ybor City's handmade premium cigars. Owners, searching for a scapegoat, pointed to the readers. By the end of 1931, la lectura (the reading) had been banned. Aparicio found work as an actor, and in 1936 became director of America’s only federal Spanish-speaking theater. Soon, the radio replaced the reader while machines replaced the cigar makers.

1939

Not quite two million people lived in Florida in 1939. Floridians lived in Bagdad, Sumatra, and Sinai; Havana, Oviedo, and Boca Raton; Naples, Venice, and Italia; Masaryktown and Bohemia. Founders anointed these Florida locales with fanciful names and overarching dreams. Their exotic names notwithstanding, Bagdad, Sumatra, and Italia, were best known respectively for their cypress, tobacco, and vegetable farms. Masaryktown, named for Czechoslovakia’s first president, Tomas Masaryk, was founded in Hernando County by Slavic farmers who raised chickens.

Once isolated by distance and climate, Florida was becoming an international dateline. Technology — air travel, modern highways, and radio — made Florida more accessible and popular. A modern land rush brought waves of new residents, principally from the Midwest and Northeast. Even larger numbers of “snow birds” spent their winter months attending baseball spring training and playing shuffleboard and horseshoes in places such as St. Petersburg and Fort Myers, Hollywood and Fort Pierce, Orlando, and Ocala.

A new accent was becoming commonplace in Miami and Miami Beach: Yiddish. Foreign-born and second-generation Jews were flocking to South Florida, envisioning Miami as “the golden city.” Born in Poland in 1902, the Nobel Prize-winning writer Isaac Bashevis Singer immigrated to America in 1935, spending his golden years in Miami Beach.

Floridians read about the deteriorating conditions Jews faced in Europe years before WWII. Headlines such as “Jews in Germany Are Doomed Under Hitler, Says Prominent Rabbi” and “Jewish Vets Ask Aid for Refugees” appeared in 1939.

As Americans nervously followed events in Europe, Floridians flocked to the cinema, escaping reality. From the

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Cigar makers at the Cuesta Rey cigar factory in Ybor City listen to “El Lector,” reading from a newspaper, circa 1930.
balconies and mezzanines of the Athens in DeLand, the Dixie in Apalachicola, and the Paramount in Palm Beach, patrons enjoyed Hollywood's greatest year. The year 1939 produced *Gone with the Wind*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*.

Another 1939 cinema blockbuster was RKO's film adaptation of Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame*. In the film's heart-pounding climax, Quasimodo the bell ringer rescues Esmeralda from the gallows, spiriting her to the cathedral. Atop the bell tower, the hunchback triumphantly screams, “Sanctuary! Sanctuary!”

In a dramatic turn, life imitated art, absent a happy ending. A newspaper headline explained: “Wandering Jewish Refugee Ship Puts Into Miami Harbor.” More than 900 German Jews had boarded the vessel, S.S. *St. Louis* in Hamburg, hoping to find shelter in Cuba. The Cuban government denied their request. The captain then sailed for Miami. In Miami’s Bayfront Park, pastors and rabbis pleaded with the Roosevelt administration for mercy. Washington slammed the door. The passengers and vessel returned to Germany, where many died during the Holocaust.

### 1949

The years between 1939 and 1949 turned the world upside down. Florida and America would never be the same. Exemplifying the change was the transformation of higher education in Florida. The WWII veteran was the most celebrated figure in 1949 Florida.

One such decorated veteran was Mitchell Wolfson. His family had emigrated from Lithuania. When he returned from the war, he was elected mayor of Miami Beach. As mayor, he signed a law banning anti-Semitic covenants and restrictions. Wolfson also became a fabulously successful businessman.

Florida's four-year colleges and universities and community colleges were overwhelmed by home-grown veterans and veterans from afar who had trained here during the war. Almost 8,500 men hoped to enter the all-male University of Florida in 1946, but the campus could accommodate only 6,200 students. The solution was coeducation. The Legislature transformed Florida State College for Women into Florida State University and allowed women to attend the University of Florida. In 1945, Florida's three public universities enrolled 7,000 students; by 1950, the number approached 20,000.

The impact of the GI Bill upon Florida was monumental. It ushered millions of veterans into the middle classes.

In 1949, the planets aligned for Florida. The war energized the economy; more importantly, millions of servicemen and women, their spouses and new workers had been exposed to an enchanting place that one day would be home or a vacation paradise.

Florida vaulted into the ranks of the fastest-growing states in the U.S.. A new Florida dream began to form in 1949, emitting a powerful message that nature had endowed Florida with picturesque beaches, balmy winters, and surging natural springs. Most importantly, that dream promised second chances, renewal, and fresh hopes.

No one appreciated post-war Florida more than college students. One such student was J. Earle Bowden. A native of Altha, Calhoun County, he enrolled at Florida State University in 1947. He recalled the “dormitory” at the former barracks of Dale Mabry Field (today’s Tallahassee Airport), with veterans in Army khaki, Navy dungarees, paratrooper boots, “talking about the Big War with rowdiness frustrating the dean of men.” Bowden became a journalist, historian, cartoonist, and preservationist. He served many years as the editor of the *Pensacola Journal*. He may be best known as the father of the Gulf Islands National Seashore.

### 1959

The 1950s triggered Florida’s Big Bang. The state’s population nearly doubled. Growth became creed and gospel. The decade spawned Cape Coral, Lehigh Acres, Port Charlotte, and other huge...
developments. A massive population shift was occurring as millions of Americans were leaving the Midwest and Northeast to the Sunbelt. Florida and California became the buckle of the new Sunbelt.

Few Floridians fathomed the revolution that would bring Fidel Castro to power on January 1, 1959, would alter the arc of South Florida. The first plane bringing refugees to Miami was a vanguard of the Latinization of Florida.

If there was a family that personified the optimism of 1959, it was the Mackle brothers. Frank Mackle, a British immigrant, formed the Mackle Construction Company in Jacksonville in 1908. His three sons carried on the business. They began with the construction of low-cost homes in Delray Beach and middle-class homes in Key Biscayne. The Mackles’ portfolio later included Marco Island, Port Charlotte, Port St. Lucie, Spring Hill, and St. Augustine Shores.

In 1959, a reporter from Look magazine interviewed Frank Mackle Jr. for an irresistibly titled article, “The New Florida Land Rush: $10 Down for a Dream.” Mackle encapsulated what was happening in Florida: “We’ve got millions of customers. Everything works toward helping us. We’ve got the doctors trying to get people to retire quicker. We’ve got a tremendous growth of pension funds; Social Security is getting stronger. There’s a shorter work week.”

1969

Florida gained almost two million new residents during the 1960s. Florida was becoming a Sunbelt megastate. Brevard County typified the warp-speed change.

In 1513, on his historic voyage of exploration, Ponce de León encountered a distinctive landmark along the East Coast of La Florida. He named the promontory “Cabo de las Corrientes” (tip of the currents). Navigators later renamed the landmark Cape Canaveral, because of the dense canebreaks. It remains one of the oldest place names in American history.

In 1897, a group of Harvard University graduates acquired 18,000 acres in Brevard County, including several miles of Cape Canaveral ocean frontage. Canaveral Club members visited the remote site, where they hunted and fished.

In 1949, the Cold War settled into one of the world’s most unlikely places: the lagoons, wetlands, and scrub of eastern Brevard County. The population of the county was fewer than 24,000 residents. The Joint Chiefs of Staff chose 15,000 acres of land around Cape Canaveral as the site for the Joint Long-Range Proving Ground. The site had previously been a WWII base, the Banana River Naval Air Station.

Thousands of construction workers, engineers, and technicians transformed the paradise into a bulwark of the Cold War. New words — Space Age and Rocket Age — defined the era. Each week, scores of engineers, technicians, and families moved to the Space Coast, to the fastest-growing county in the fastest-growing state in America. Resolved on a mission to put a man on the moon, the newcomers represented some of the brightest minds in the world, a cross-section of America.

On July 16, 1969, Apollo 11 blasted off from Kennedy Space Center. The world watched as the powerful boosters lifted the space capsule into the heavens. On July 20, the lunar module, The Eagle, carried two astronauts to the lunar surface of the Moon. Americans gasped hearing Neil Armstrong communicate with Mission Control in Texas, “The Eagle has landed.”

Cape Canaveral underscored an extraordinary chapter in Florida history. The U.S. was inspired by faith in progress and determined to beat the Soviet Union to the moon. Cape Canaveral played a pivotal role in that remarkable American accomplishment.

While the race to the moon summoned some of America’s best qualities, our faith in technology as the answer signals a dark side. The development of Florida resulted, in large part, because of a determination to tame nature.

1979

The 1970s represented a pivotal decade. Florida added almost three million new residents. Ordinarily, such results would have amounted to huzzahs and ballyhoo. In modern Florida, Isaiah’s prophecies were realized: the hot was made cool, the wet became dry, and crooked rivers were bent straight.

Florida’s promise to Americans was irresistible. Here, one could have it all: Prosperity amid climate control, dignity in old age, and sunsets on the beach. But a new word entered the lexicon in the go-go growth decade of the 1970s: Loss.

John D. MacDonald moved to Clearwater in the 1950s. A New Yorker, growth in Florida both dazzled and frightened the young writer and his wife, Dorothy. The MacDonalds then settled in Siesta Key, where they witnessed another march of progress.

In 1983, he returned to Clearwater and was appalled at the price of prosperity. “It had always been especially restful and refreshing to drive back home, out across the causeway and the bridge to Clearwater Beach, to look over the rail at the broad glassy bay. It was shocking to discover . . . that one could [now] go halfway to the beach and turn right! There was a bay-fill development down there, white roofs, tidy yards, boat docks, and flower beds.”

MacDonald’s gift to Florida was Travis McGee, a self-described “salvage consultant,” who recovers “lost” property for desperate clients. Condominium, written in 1977, warns Floridians that
nature bats last. The novel includes a who’s who and what’s what of Florida dystopia: the sleazy contractor, the crooked county commissioner, the once-beautiful Fiddler Key now home to Golden Sands condominium, and an ill-advised hurricane party.

In the 1970s, an environmental movement emerged. In Washington and Tallahassee, Gainesville, Tampa, and Miami, scientists, students, poets, and concerned citizens demanded change. New and old heroes emerged: Marjory Stoneman Douglas and Marjorie Harris Carr, Roger Stewart, and Nat Reed.

1989

A Florida icon died in 1989. No one had represented longer or with more passion. Claude Denson Pepper was 89, still fighting for lost causes.

An Alabama native and a graduate of Harvard Law School, Pepper came to Homosassa in the 1920s, to make his fortune in the Florida Land Boom. When the prosperity boom was pricked, he moved to Perry, and in 1928, was elected to the Florida Legislature.

Pepper settled in Tallahassee, a town brimming with ambitious, talented politicians in the 1930s and 40s. He succeeded U.S. Senator Duncan Fletcher in 1936. Pepper was a rarity in Florida and the South: A fist-pounding liberal. He idolized President Roosevelt, evident when Time magazine featured the young Senator on its May 2, 1938 cover. The caption read, “Roosevelt’s Weather Cock.”

Perhaps no Florida politician has attracted more powerful enemies than Pepper. The darling of labor unions, defense industry, and editorial boards, Pepper was blinded by his invincibility and rapidly changing times, and stumbled into the greatest race in Florida history.

In 1950, Pepper’s opponents tapped a handsome young South Florida congressman, George Smathers, to challenge a legend. Anti-communism was the era’s kryptonite, and Pepper had no antidote. Smathers scored a smashing victory.

F. Scott Fitzgerald said famously there are no second acts in life, but Pepper’s second coming was as spectacular as it was rewarding. The defeated candidate moved to Miami, practiced law, and in 1962 ran for and won a seat in the U.S. Congress. For almost three decades, Congressman Pepper was a lion, a voice for the New Frontier, Cuban refugees, and the Great Society.

When Time selected Pepper for the April 25, 1983 cover, he was no longer a young gamecock but the “spokesman for the elderly.” A classic Pepper quote adorns the cover: “They deserve much — and 1990 and 1999. Cape Coral had become the largest city south of Tampa Bay, while Port St. Lucie was the largest community between Jacksonville and Fort Lauderdale.

In 1999, two of every three Floridians came from someplace else.

A sense of perspective is needed to understand the whiplash of change. Consider that in 1950, Dade County numbered a half-million residents. The U.S. Census Bureau had no category for Hispanics. Fifty years later, Miami-Dade County had exploded to 2.25 million inhabitants, of whom half were foreign born and their children.

In the 1960s and 70s, when one discussed immigrants in South Florida, one focused upon Cubans. But in 2000, the most arresting story was the dizzying variety of immigrants, as waves of Haitians and Brazilians, Dominicans and Mexicans, Hondurans and Nicaraguans, arrived in search of the American dream. Large numbers of Jamaicans also took root in South Florida.

A single revelation of the 2000 census seemed almost impossible: Florida’s Hispanics now outnumber African Americans. One million new Hispanics had arrived during the 1990s.

Naysayers warned that when the clocks turned from 1999 to 2000, prepare for chaos. Global-gloom narratives predicted nuclear missiles firing aimlessly because of cross-wired launch codes, prison doors swinging open, and computer-flawed launch ATM machines spewing cash to strangers. But in the end, one command saved the night: “Party like it’s 1999.”

The next day, newspaper headlines read, “Biggest 2000 Loser, Y2K Furore.”

Shakespeare squeezed politics, culture, and drama along timeless plot lines: Innocents plucked from storm-tossed seas; ambitious women plotting personal and political gain; the odyssey of leaving the old world and encountering a wondrous new world; a citizenry furious at feckless leaders.

On November 21, 1999, Juan Miguel González expected to pick up his son at a schoolhouse in Cardenas, Cuba. He was told that Elián had been taken by his mother, Juan’s ex-wife. Elizabeth Brotons Rodriguez and her son had escaped from Cuba along with 12 other people in a tiny boat, and no life preservers.
Quickly, the doomed vessel was awash with salt water and the desperate passengers clung to rubber inner tubes. Some time later, two fishermen scanning the choppy waters off Fort Lauderdale thought someone had concocted a sick joke, stringing a doll to a float. They soon realized the doll was 5-year-old Elián. Tragically, Elián’s mother and 10 others drowned.

Elián was eligible for asylum in Miami because of America’s “wet foot/dry foot” doctrine. Elián’s father demanded his son’s return to Cuba. Relatives in Miami’s Little Havana embraced the young child as a symbol of American liberty. Attorney General Janet Reno, a Miami native, believed law superseded politics. She ordered Elián returned to his father.

Janet Reno died in 2016. A few days following her funeral, Janet’s sister answered the telephone at the Reno homestead in Kendall. “This is the Cuban embassy in Washington, D.C.,” the caller said, with a message for the family of Janet Reno: “The family of Elián González would like to convey their love and gratitude for sending their boy home.”

2009

Still they came. Nothing, it seemed, could derail the Florida Boom. Cassandras and Jeremias had long warned that the Sunshine State stood on the eve of destruction. A thousand new residents had been arriving every day for several years. And then came the Great Recession.

The newcomers represented a huge swath of society: surging numbers of retirees, Rustbelt transplants, and immigrants from across the globe. Navigating Florida required the skills of a linguist to distinguish Minnesota, Vermont, and Deep South accents.


Journalist Michael Grunwald wrote a blunt article about his adopted state in Time. “The question is whether it [Florida] will grow up?”

Grunwald represents a vanguard of national writers fascinated by Florida. In his best-selling study, The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise (2006), he writes, “But as the Everglades continued to wither, a few of their colleagues began to wonder if conservation really should mean development more than preservation. These heretics did not believe that God had created man in order to ‘improve’ or ‘redeem’ nature; they found God’s grace in nature itself.”

Nearly a decade after the Great Recession, Florida remains an enchanting but frustrating state. One again, we stand at a crossroads. Will we grow up? Do we have the will to manage growth, restore ecosystems, preserve our natural springs, and inspire diverse generations of residents into a common cause? Will a new dream instill pride in our state and a resolve to leave the place better for the next generation?

In 2019, any discussion of state politics or foreign policy focuses in nature itself. “Florida will grow up?”

More than 200,000 Venezuelans live in Florida now, according to a 2018 University of Miami study.

Difficult questions confront Florida in 2019. In a state where almost everyone comes from some place else, how do we develop a sense of unity and cohesion, where immigrants and natives, retirees and transplants, think of Florida as something bigger than our own group or ourselves? Is it possible to ask Floridians to believe that we are all in this together?
Bob Graham: A Life Serving, Observing, This Changing State

The Senator, Governor, and native son reflects on the 'Cincinnati Factor,' and why his beloved Florida remains the state of imagination

By Ron Cunningham

How Florida is Bob Graham? The only home he ever knew, from his birth in 1936 until he went off to get married in 1959, was a coral rock house perched on the edge of the Everglades.

His family vacationed in Defuniak Springs because "my childhood was during World War II, and it was hard to travel. So we didn’t miss many summers in the Florida Panhandle.”

He graduated from Miami High School (no joke, the Miami Herald once named him “Best All Around Boy”). And then went to the University of Florida where he met his future wife, Adele, and got himself inducted into Florida Blue Key, before leaving the state temporarily to earn a law degree at Harvard University.

How Florida is Bob Graham? When he ran for governor, his campaign theme song was “I’m a Florida cracker, I’m a Graham cracker.” And he has been known to burst into spontaneous renditions of that little ditty with very little prompting.

“I am sitting in my office in Miami Lakes, approximately five miles from the house where I was brought to from the hospital a few days after my birth,” Graham says in a recent telephone conversation. "I have lived in other places, Washington D.C., for 18 years (while serving as a Democrat in the U.S. Senate)

but I have always maintained my legal residence in Dade County.”

So, yes, it is fair to say that Bob Graham knows Florida. And having served in public office almost continuously from 1966 through 2005 (he never lost an election) Graham also knows a thing or two about trying to govern in a state in which so many "Floridians" are from somewhere else.

Which is why he often talked about the "Cincinnati Factor" during his years in politics.

Graham would begin by reading a fictional, but stereotypical Florida obituary: Mr. Smith, a Miami resident for 25 years, has passed away. The obituary would go on to mention his Florida-based fraternal organizations, business activities, civic involvements and so on.

And invariably it would end with: Mr. Smith’s body is being flown back to Cincinnati for burial.

“One of the beliefs which I still strongly hold is that many Floridians don’t appreciate the diversity of Florida ….

One of my personal campaigns is to try to encourage residents of Florida to make an effort to see as much of the state as they can if they want to appreciate the diversity, vitality, and strength that is Florida.”
meant you probably rooted for the Bengals rather than the Dolphins. It meant that you spent your early years paying taxes somewhere else, and didn’t really care to support new spending initiatives in your adopted state.

It meant that your final resting ground was likely to be a family burial plot some distance north of the Florida/Georgia border.

“In a way, Florida has been a victim of its own success,” Graham muses. “In the beginning, Florida was thought of as being little more than a swamp to be avoided at all costs.”

Still, in many ways, Graham says, Florida is a “state of the imagination.” And he believes it is no coincidence that “many of the people who made the greatest impact on Florida were recent arrivals.”

Henry Flagler came from New York at end of the 19th century and saw St. Augustine as a French Rivera. He thought the United States was yearning for a French Rivera, and by God he was going to give it to them and give them a railroad to get there.

As for the Cincinnati Factor, Graham believes even that phenomenon has begun to fade. Especially in recent decades, when waves of newcomers have been as likely to arrive from Cuba, Haiti, or Puerto Rico as Ohio, New York, and Michigan.

“Obviously the millions of people who have come to Florida in the last 15 to 20 years have a wide range of views about their decisions to come here and to stay here,” he says. “I think for most people, the longer they live here the looser the ties become to their previous residences and there is a commensurate increase in their affection for Florida.”

What it means to be a Floridian

Graham has given a lot of thought to what it means to be a Floridian in a state so dramatically shaped by in-migration from all points of the compass.

“One of the beliefs which I still strongly hold is that many Floridians don’t appreciate the diversity of Florida,” he says. “If they live in Miami, they think that’s what the rest of the state is like. One of my personal campaigns is to try to encourage residents of Florida to make an effort to see as much of the state as they can if they want to appreciate the diversity, vitality, and strength that is Florida.”

As governor, Graham signed landmark measures intended to preserve Florida’s rivers, seashores, and undeveloped lands. And in retirement he co-founded the Florida Conservation Coalition to continue to focus attention on the plight of the Everglades, Lake Okeechobee, and other Florida natural treasures – urging greater environmental stewardship in one of the fastest growing states in the nation.

“As a public official, I have tried to protect as much of natural Florida as possible,” Graham says. “There’s no such thing, really, as the original Florida. It has changed so much. But I think we are doing a better job now.

“Florida used to be thought of as a commodity,” he continues. “There were no constraints about bringing out the bulldozers and creating something new.”

But with red tide now threatening beaches and green algae infesting Florida rivers and lakes, “we have begun more and more to think about natural Florida as a treasure to be protected and preserved.”

And then there was Chicago native turned California cartoonist/entrepreneur Walt Disney. “He started thinking about the possibility of building a grand theme park to commercialize his creativity, and decided Florida was the place to do it.

“Disney’s (Orlando) property used to belong to the Bronson family. My dad was a very good friend of the Bronsons and we often went to visit them. As a born-in-Florida person I would never have conceived of something like Disney World in my backyard.”

Now in his 82nd year, Bob Graham, 38th governor of Florida and three-term U.S. Senator, mostly divides his time between Miami Lakes and Gainesville, where he and Adele have an apartment. His official papers, including his celebrated wire-bound notebooks, are archived at the University of Florida. As a candidate and during his years in public office, Graham was never without one of his small notebooks, into which he jotted down meticulous observations about the people he encountered and the events of his day.

Drawing on his papers, notebooks and other source materials, Graham intends to write a biography of his father — engineer, cattle rancher, and state senator Ernest “Cap” Graham — while also working on his own autobiography.

UF is also the home of the Bob Graham Center For Public Service, an institute founded by Graham to help develop leadership skills and promote citizenship values among young people.

Bob Graham visits the Everglades while serving as Florida governor in the early 1980s.
For 8-year-old Ileana Ros, her first plane ride brought one emotion: excitement. “My brother and I were thrilled because we were on an airplane, but my mom cried the whole flight,” Ileana Ros-Lehtinen recalls. “It was an unsettling time, to say the least.”

Unsettling, because this was no ordinary airplane ride. In 1960, the Ros family left their home in Havana, Cuba, and boarded a Pan American World Airways flight for Miami, joining an estimated 1.4 million Cubans who would flee Fidel Castro’s regime for the United States, according to the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, D.C.

“We purchased a roundtrip ticket – that’s how optimistic we were that everything was going to blow over,” Ros-Lehtinen says. “I still have the return ticket. It was $25. It has an open return date. Unfortunately, Pan Am is no longer in business, but the regime is still in business.”

So the Ros family settled into their new life in Miami. They made their home in Little Havana, spent about two years in York, Pennsylvania, as part of a government relocation program (“We got to see snow,” she says), then returned to the South Florida suburbs.

Florida, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen says, is mellow. It’s Margaritaville. It’s picking mangoes from a tree in her yard. It’s caring about climate change. It’s bumping into her friend former Florida Governor Bob Graham when she’s in town, or sitting down to a plate of vaca frita at Miami’s CasaCuba Restaurant. It’s speaking her native tongue to her adult children and grinning when her gringo husband is mistaken for a Spanish speaker.

“Many generations of refugees, no matter from where they come, we see Florida as a place of refuge, a safe haven,” Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen says.

In some ways, Florida wasn’t so different from Cuba. There were mango and avocado trees in the yard, just as there had been in Havana. Ileana and her older brother, Henry, lived comfortably enough, thanks to the American jobs their parents had secured. Their father, Enrique, worked for a laundry pickup and delivery service, and their mother, Amanda, would bring home leftover food from her job in the kitchen of a Miami Beach hotel.

“We always had clean clothes, and we always had something good to eat,” Ros-Lehtinen remembers with a laugh.

But not everything about Florida resembled her birthplace of Havana. For starters, there was the language barrier. These were the days before bilingual education, so young Ileana had to learn English as she fumbled through her days at the public Southside Elementary School.

“It was sink or swim,” she says.

At home, Spanish was still the dominant language, with her anti-Castro parents keeping tabs on the dictator via the radio. They also welcomed a steady stream of newly arrived Cuban refugees into their home.
"Being a Floridian also means that you’re accepting of other cultures and other lands, and understanding what the refugee experience is all about," whether you’ve lived through it or not, says the former congresswoman.

Their rented house “was more of a refugee center than anything else,” Ros-Lehtinen says with a laugh. “There were people coming and going.”

This, in fact, is what Florida means to her.

“For many generations of refugees, no matter from where they come, we see Florida as a place of refuge, a safe haven,” Ros-Lehtinen says. “It’s a welcoming state. It’s a place that’s adapted to changes. We’ve had mass migrations of [Latin Americans], and our community has always welcomed new people.”

Ros-Lehtinen returned Florida’s embrace, earning her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Florida International University and a doctorate in education from the University of Miami.

It turns out that little Ileana, so excited for her first airplane ride, would grow up to be Republican Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, who traveled the world representing Florida’s 27th congressional district from 1989 to 2019. She was the first Latina elected to the U.S. Congress.

“I really had to pinch myself every day that I was in Congress that I was given this opportunity,” the 67-year-old says. “We love Miami. We love every inch of it, and what a thrill to have represented this area in Congress.”

Now a senior advisor for the Washington D.C., law firm Akin Gump, she and her husband, Dexter Lehtinen, split their time between the District of Columbia and the upscale Miami suburb of Pinecrest, where she reflects on what Florida means to her now.

Florida, Ros-Lehtinen says, is mellow. It’s Margaritaville. It’s picking mangoes from a tree in her yard. It’s caring about climate change. It’s bumping into her friend former Florida Governor Bob Graham when she’s in town, or sitting down to a plate of vaca frita at Miami’s CasaCuba Restaurant. It’s speaking her native tongue to her adult children and grinning when her gringo husband is mistaken for a Spanish speaker.

Florida means all of these things because Ros-Lehtinen is all of these things. “Being a Floridian also means that you’re accepting of other cultures and other lands, and understanding what the refugee experience is all about,” whether you’ve lived through it or not, she says.

For Ros-Lehtinen, her Floridian experience is her American experience. During her time in Congress, she chaired the House Foreign Affairs Committee with a California Democratic Congressman and Holocaust survivor, the late Tom Lantos.

“We were both naturalized Americans,” Ros-Lehtinen notes, “and we always made it a point to say, ‘Wow, is this a great country or what?”’
James E.C. Perry took a circuitous route to becoming a Floridian. Born and raised in New Bern, North Carolina, Perry served in the Army as a 1st lieutenant in New Jersey and graduated from Columbia Law School in New York City. He was practicing law in Washington, D.C., when he was offered a job in Florida. He had no intention of moving, but then something happened. “I looked out the window, and it started to snow,” he recalls. He left for Florida soon after.

Perry, 75, would go on to have a distinguished legal career, capped by seven years as a Florida Supreme Court Justice. He retired in 2016 and is writing an autobiography.

When he was first approached about serving on the Supreme Court, Perry wasn’t interested. He had built a good life in Seminole County, with a comfortable home in Longwood and lake view from his office, and didn’t want to relocate to Tallahassee. But then someone told him: it’s not about you. It was about serving Florida.

“So I guess that’s when I figured I was a real Floridian,” he says, “because I really did it to make Florida a better place.”

It’s the same reason he became a lawyer: to make a difference. Perry was in the Army in 1968 when he saw TV news reports that Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated. America needed black leaders, he remembers thinking. “The Army said I was an officer and a gentleman and a leader,” he recalls. “That was a seminal moment. I decided to go to law school.”

Perry graduated in 1966 from St. Augustine’s College, a historically black private school in Raleigh, North Carolina, with a Bachelor of Arts in business administration and Accounting and earned his law degree from prestigious Columbia University. But even with those credentials, it would take persistence — and a lawsuit — to become a lawyer in what he calls “the apartheid South,” where he says white supremacy permeated all aspects of society.

Perry first considered practicing in his native North Carolina, but didn’t want to endure the required two-year wait to be admitted to the state Bar. Next he tried South Carolina, but soon discovered no blacks had been admitted to the bar in seven years. Next he tried Georgia, but didn’t pass the Bar exam. When he learned that no other black applicants passed that year, he joined with 16 others in a lawsuit. Eventually, 11 of the 17 plaintiffs were admitted, a major victory in desegregating the Georgia Bar.

But even with a license to practice law, Perry found Georgia even more racially backward than North Carolina. So he took a job in Washington, D.C., where the Bar recognized his Georgia license. Florida had no such reciprocal agreement, and when he applied to take the Florida Bar exam, he was asked if he had ever been a party to a lawsuit. He disclosed that he was one of the plaintiffs in the Georgia lawsuit and figures that helped him gain entry in Florida.

Even in the early 1970s, racism was alive and well in Florida, he says. “It wasn’t considered a deep South state,” he says, “but I knew the history.” Florida, after all, had more lynchings per capita than any state in the country. In New Bern, Perry’s uncle was president of the local NAACP and had a cross burned in his front yard over school desegregation. Perry had been trained in the tactics of non-violent resistance and participated in demonstrations and sit-ins at segregated businesses.
When he arrived in Sanford, however, he was struck by the seemingly passive black community. "I refused to live on my knees ... I had no fear," he says. "I was trying to understand why these people were so afraid to fight." But he realized that decades of racial terrorism by the Ku Klux Klan, including the assassination of NAACP President Harry T. Moore in the Seminole County town of Mims just 30 miles from Sanford, had taken a toll.

"He was the baddest black man in Florida," Perry says of Moore, "and they blew him away. And that sent a message to everyone else."

Sanford's black community was economically disadvantaged, so his work at the Seminole Economic Development Corporation, which included battling with the medical establishment to create an HMO that residents could afford, was deeply rewarding. "I had a chance to practice why I went to law school: to try to make a difference," he says.

He continued fighting for social justice as a lawyer in Orlando. "I believe I've made some difference," he says. "I've seen significant change. We have a long way to go."

He says he never compromised his principles and gained the respect of the legal and political community he fought. A lifelong Democrat, he was appointed to the Circuit Court bench by Republican Gov. Jeb Bush and to the Supreme Court by Republican Gov. Charlie Crist. "And I didn't know either one of them," he says.

And yet somehow Perry found himself accepted by the very system he challenged. "I came here to fight," he says. "I didn't come to make friends. I never sugarcoated anything. I came to kick doors down.

"I never thought I'd be let in. I won the respect of a lot of movers and shakers."

Perry is known for his work with youth in the Orlando area. He served on the Orlando YMCA, the United Way and was founder and president of the Jackie Robinson Sports Association, serving 650 at-risk girls and boys.

He told The Orlando Sentinel when he retired from the Supreme Court in 2016 that he hoped to be remembered as someone who "tried to protect the poor from the rich and the rich from the mob."

His proudest accomplishments revolve around his family. His wife of 48 years, Adrienne, is a former Stetson University education department chair and a former mayor of Longwood. His three kids are grown, two of whom are lawyers and the third a human relations executive.

He's living in the same comfortable Longwood house he's owned since 1978. Although he says he didn't always feel welcomed in Florida, he has managed to accomplish a lot and is not going anywhere.

"I'm home."
Captain Francisco Menéndez was on the verge of being lost to the mists of time before historian Jane Landers’ pioneering research placed him at the forefront of the complex history of transatlantic slavery. In 1726, Menéndez was among a group of men and women who committed the act of “theft of self” by running away from plantations in the British colony of South Carolina to live as free people in Spanish Florida. In exchange for sanctuary, runaway slaves were required to convert to Catholicism and complete four years of royal service before achieving freedom.

Menéndez led a militia of blacks who proved their loyalty in defense of the crown and then successfully petitioned the governor for their freedom. Located two miles north of St. Augustine, Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, or Fort Mose, was designed to protect the walled city against British attacks. Fort Mose was also significant because it was the first free black town in the present-day United States.

The British colonies provided no protections for enslaved families, who were treated as property under the law. At Fort Mose, freedmen and women could keep their families together. Marriages and baptisms were sanctioned by the church.

Landers has continued to chronicle the transatlantic journeys of Francisco Menéndez. Her groundbreaking work on Fort Mose with historical archaeologist Kathleen Deagan led to the creation of the Fort Mose Historic State Park. Although the settlement’s structures disappeared generations ago, the history of the United States’ oldest free black town demonstrates there were alternatives to slavery in early America, at least in Spanish Florida.

Augustus Steele was one of the first New Yorkers to follow the Florida dream. Born in Massachusetts just five years after the drafting of the U.S. Constitution, Steele lived in New York and Georgia before moving to the Florida territory in 1825, the year after Tallahassee was established as its capital. He founded a newspaper and became an acquaintance of Gov. William Pope Duval.

Steele soon relocated to the Gulf Coast near the future site of Tampa, using his Tallahassee political connections to become a deputy customs collector and postmaster at the mouth of the Hillsborough River, according to historian Murray Laurie’s 1999 book, The Matheson House of Gainesville, Florida.

In 1834, Steele persuaded Florida’s territorial legislature to carve out a section of Alachua County, which once stretched from the Georgia border to Port Charlotte, to create Hillsborough County. Gov. Duval appointed Steele as the first judge of the county he founded. In 1840 and 1842, Steele, a Democrat, was elected to represent Hillsborough County in the territorial legislature.

In 1843, Steele moved up the coast to a 168-acre island. He purchased all the buildings on Depot Key that survived the hurricane of October 1842 for $227, Laurie noted. He renamed the island Atsena Otie, Native American for “Cedar Island”—now Cedar Key. Steele’s fortunes took a turn for the worse in 1862, when the Union blockaded Cedar Key and other Florida ports shortly after the state seceded and joined the Confederacy. Steele evacuated to Gainesville and died in 1864. He is buried at Evergreen Cemetery. His portrait hangs on the wall in his daughter Augusta Florida Steele Matheson’s 1867 home in downtown Gainesville.
Business magnates such as Henry Morrison Flagler, Henry Bradley Plant and Napoleon Bonaparte Broward typically receive the lion’s share of recognition for shaping modern Florida. But there were countless lesser-known pioneers from Florida’s past who made a difference in their communities and established many groundbreaking firsts. In the next several pages, you’ll learn of the significant contributions of some of these hidden figures of Florida history.

**MAY MANN JENNINGS**

Known as the most powerful woman in Florida at a time when women lacked the right to vote, May Mann Jennings’ legacy surpasses her role as wife to Florida Gov. William Sherman Jennings. In fact, she sometimes counteracted her husband’s policies, as shown in her successful campaign to establish the first state park in Florida in the Everglades, even though her husband was a major proponent of Everglades drainage during his time in office (1901 to 1905). Royal Palm Park was dedicated in 1916 and became the nucleus of Everglades National Park in 1947.

May Mann Jennings was a powerful crusader for women’s rights. In 1915, she became president of the Florida Federation of Women’s Clubs, whose membership totaled more than 10,000 women. In that same year, the campaign for women’s suffrage was starting to gear up in Florida. Jennings convinced the Federation to endorse suffrage, even though it was still viewed as controversial.

Jennings helped establish the first State Board of Forestry and was active in too many state boards and commissions to list here, at a time when “women were either politically disenfranchised or were viewed with skepticism and ridiculed by their male counterparts,” observed Linda Vance, in her 1980 University of Florida doctoral dissertation. As the country prepares to celebrate the centennial anniversary in 2020 of the passage of the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote, May Mann Jennings is a finalist to be added to the Florida Women’s Hall of Fame.

**MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE**

Mary McLeod Bethune also made it her mission to educate African Americans. The 15th of 17 children born to previously enslaved parents, Mary was the first of the McLeod children to be born in freedom. Bethune’s belief that education was the key to opportunity for African Americans was shaped when, as a child, a white girl snatched a children's book out of her hands, telling her only white people could learn to read. Education was a luxury Bethune’s family could not afford — their children’s labor was needed in the cotton fields. By the age of 9, Bethune could pick 250 pounds of cotton a day. When a Presbyterian mission school for black children opened near the family home in rural Mayesville, South Carolina, Bethune begged for the chance to go to school to learn to read.

Bethune later attended Scotia Seminary in Concord, North Carolina — the first institute of higher education for black women, established in 1867 — and Moody Bible College in Chicago. Her dream to serve as a missionary in Africa was thwarted when the Presbyterian Missionary Board told her that black missionaries were not permitted to serve there. So Bethune directed her energies toward educating girls in Florida.

In 1904, Bethune opened the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls in Daytona Beach. In 1923, the school became coeducational and merged with Jacksonville’s Cookman Institute. In 1931, the school changed its name to Bethune-Cookman College. Today, Bethune-Cookman University continues to fulfill Bethune’s dream of sending black college graduates into the world. In 2020, a statue of Mary McLeod Bethune will replace Confederate General Edmund Kirby Smith’s statue in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda.
A nother pioneer in the establishment of Freedmen’s Bureau schools in Florida was Dr. Esther Hill Hawks, an 1857 graduate of the New England Female Medical College. At the start of the Civil War, Dr. Hawks — an abolitionist — offered her services to the Union Army. But because she was a woman, she was not welcome as a physician. Instead, Dr. Hawks became a teacher for the National Freedman’s Relief Association and joined her husband, Dr. John Milton Hawks, in Beaufort, South Carolina, at Hospital No. 10, a military hospital for the Union Army’s first official black troops. Dr. Hawks chronicled her experiences providing medical and educational services to freedmen in South Carolina and Florida in a series of letters collected in the 1984 book, *A Woman Doctor’s Civil War*, edited by Gerald Schwartz.

For three weeks, while her husband was on a secret mission to Florida, Dr. Hawks unofficially commanded the hospital as its chief physician. In her diary, Dr. Hawks suggested that she would not have been allowed to run the hospital if her patients had been white men. She also provided medical services at the battlefront. After the Battle of Olustee, Florida’s only major Civil War battle, Dr. Hawks treated wounded black soldiers from the 54th Massachusetts Infantry.

At war’s end, the Drs. Hawks joined other Union army officers and established a freedmen’s colony in Volusia County at Port Orange. Esther founded what may have been the first interracial school in Florida and the nation. Located in Union-occupied Jacksonville, the school served black and white students, but faced resistance from parents. Due to declining attendance in Jacksonville, Esther opened a Freedmen’s Bureau school in Port Orange, where she offered her services as a doctor and teacher without pay. Sadly, by 1869 most of the freedmen’s families had left the colony, and the school Esther established was torched in resistance to integrated learning. Before her death in 1906, Esther was elected an honorary member of the New Hampshire Association of Military Surgeons.

In 1886, President Grover Cleveland dedicated the Statue of Liberty at Bedloe’s Island. That same year, Tampa’s Ybor City emerged as a new industrial center and safe space for Spanish, Cuban, and Sicilian immigrants. Ignacio Haya, a Spanish cigar manufacturer from New York, and his friend Vicente Martínez Ybor determined that Tampa would be an ideal location for the cigar industry due to its proximity to reliable transportation and its notorious humidity, which “supplied a natural humidor suitable to tobacco leaf,” Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta wrote in their 1998 book, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985*.

Martínez Ybor and Haya’s planned community included 111 acres of land in a grid pattern, with Havana-inspired brick factories and courtyards; Spanish style wrought iron railings and balconies; and Southern shotgun houses. Martínez Ybor recruited Cubans and Spaniards to start work in his new three-story brick cigar factory, where workers would soon produce premium hand-rolled, pure Havana cigars. By May 1886, Martínez Ybor had recruited almost 220 cigar workers. However, it was a Haya employee who produced Ybor City’s first cigar, Mormino and Pozzetta observed. Cuban workers at Martínez Ybor’s factory were already on strike because he had hired a Spanish bookkeeper.

“In 1900 Tampa cigarmakers earned $2 million in wages, making them the highest paid per capita and the most concentrated work force in the state,” Mormino and Pozzetta noted. “Even more dramatic was the increase in total product: In 1886 Ybor City operatives produced one million cigars, which climbed to 20 million in 1900 and peaked at 410 million in 1919.”

A century later, visitors can discover the history of Ybor City at the Ybor City Museum State Park.
In 1845, Florida entered the Union as a slave state. Cotton was one of its biggest cash crops. On the eve of the Civil War, approximately half of Florida’s population was enslaved, including Johnson Chestnut, who arrived in Alachua County in 1854 with Thomas Evans Haile and Esther “Serena” Chesnut Haile. The Hailes relocated from Camden, South Carolina, to establish a cotton plantation on the outskirts of Gainesville.

Although no known picture remains of Johnson Chestnut, visitors to the Historic Haile Homestead at Kanapaha Plantation can view examples of his work throughout the plantation house, built by enslaved laborers between 1854 and 1856. A beautifully constructed dresser Chestnut made is on view in the nursery, where enslaved women likely cared for the youngest of the Hailes’ 15 children.

Serena Haile inherited Johnson Chestnut from her father, John Chesnut. Johnson Chestnut’s actual surname is not known. A deed on file with Alachua County Clerk of the Court lists Chestnut and other enslaved people who were distributed to Haile according to the terms of her father’s will. They are mentioned by their first names only. After emancipation, part of the process of moving from slavery to freedom involved choosing a name. To this day, descendants of the slave-owning Chesnuts have one “t” in their name, while the descendants of the freedman Johnson Chestnut have two.

After emancipation, Chestnut settled in Gainesville, where the majority of city residents were African American after the Civil War. He was elected to the City Commission and served from 1868 to 1869. He also joined the board of trustees of the Gainesville Freedmen’s Bureau school, Union Academy. Chestnut started a political dynasty in Gainesville, where generations of Chestnuts have served as community leaders. Today, Charles Chestnut IV serves on the Alachua County Board of County Commissioners, where he’s working with local organizations on the lengthy process of truth and reconciliation as the community examines the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow-era lynching in Alachua County.
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The sponge industry was once centered in the Mediterranean. In the 1880s, John Cheyney transformed Tarpon Springs into a supplier of sponges for the U.S. market, building sponge processing warehouses and christening the first sponge fishing boat. In 1896, John Cocoris revolutionized the Florida sponge industry by making it more efficient. While working for Cheyney, Tarpon Springs’ largest sponge distributor, Cocoris and his brothers — George, Constantine, and Elias — introduced deep-sea sponge diving methods used in the Aegean Sea. In 1905, Cocoris brought a crew of Greek divers and equipment to Tarpon Springs to increase sponge yields by diving for them instead of using long poles to hook them. When the first diver surfaced after surveying the area, he reported that there were enough sponges in Tarpon Springs to supply the whole world, according to Tina Bucuvalas’ 2016 book, *Greeks in Tarpon Springs*.

By the end of 1905, 500 more Greek divers had arrived in Tarpon Springs. Soon after, the number of sponge boats increased to 100, with up to 1,500 Greek sponge divers employed in the area. The center of Florida’s sponge industry shifted from Key West to Tarpon Springs, and the combined output of both cities made sponges the state’s most lucrative sea product in the early 20th century, Bucuvalas writes.

Besides transforming Tarpon Springs’ economy, the culture changed as well. Cocoris’ wife, Anna was the first Greek woman to make her home in Tarpon Springs and their daughter, Stamatina was the first Greek child born there. By 1913, about half of Tarpon Springs’ residents were Greek. By 1940, Tarpon Springs’ population was 3,402, including approximately 2,500 Greeks. Tarpon Springs had become the world’s largest sponge production center, Bucuvalas observed. Today, no U.S. city has a larger percentage of residents with Greek heritage than Tarpon Springs.

Hubbard L. Hart’s business got off to a profitable start during the Civil War. Starting in 1860, the steamboat entrepreneur offered tourists the chance to take in the natural beauty of Florida’s unspoiled subtropical paradise along the Ocklawaha River on the way to Silver Springs.

It wasn’t all smooth sailing for the Hart Line. In her 1873 book, *Palmetto-Leaves*, Harriet Beecher Stowe recounts declining to board one of the Hart Line’s Ocklawaha steamers because it looked like a “gigantic coffin.” Hart had purchased some of his early, uncomfortable steamboats with Confederate money during the Civil War.

The narrow, winding, canopied Ocklawaha River posed unique challenges for steamboat designers. Stowe called the Ocklawaha River’s course “as crooked as Apollo’s ram’s horn.” In order to make the Ocklawaha passable by steamboat, Hart cleared hundreds of trees from the river’s banks and bottom. As his tours became more popular, Hart increased the quality and comfort of his specialized steamers, which were so unusual that a scale model was displayed at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair, according to C. Bradford Mitchell’s 1947 history of Ocklawaha River steamboating, published in the defunct maritime history journal *The American Neptune*.

Hart enhanced his success through inventive marketing. Passengers who purchased a daytime steamboat tour, for instance, were bombarded with promotions touting nighttime river trips. As seen in the postcard image of the Hart Line’s grand Hiawatha steamboat, the Ocklawaha was illuminated by flame, enabling passengers to admire (and shoot at) wildlife at night. Another postcard shows the Hiawatha on the Ocklawaha in the daytime, with wildlife added in through a primitive form of Photoshop. A flag with a heart design was positioned at the bow for branding. Ultimately, the railroad made steamboat travel superfluous, and the Hart Line steamboats became a Florida memory.
Born in Indiantown in 1923 to a Seminole mother and a French father, Betty Mae Tiger Jumper narrowly escaped death as a young child. Viewed as “half-breeds,” Jumper and her brother, Howard, relocated with their family to a federal reservation after several Seminoles threatened the children’s lives. “The Seminoles believed that the half-breeds were evil ‘Ho-la wa-gus!’ (bad spirits) who could endanger the tribe and bring on bad spells,” Jumper recounted in *A Seminole Legend*, an autobiography published in 2001 in collaboration with historian Patsy West.

Jumper attended a Quaker-run Cherokee boarding school in North Carolina to learn English and receive a better education than was available on the reservation. After graduation, she enrolled in the Kiowa Teaching Hospital in Oklahoma with the goal of becoming a public health nurse and improving the quality of health care available on the Seminole reservation.

In 1946, Betty Mae Tiger married Moses Jumper, a friend and classmate from the Cherokee boarding school. He was the second Seminole to enlist in the U.S. Navy and was on the USS Lexington when Japanese dive-bombers sank it in the Coral Sea. After the war, Moses took to the bottle to cope with his memories of the attack, limiting his ability to provide for his growing family. At the time, many young Seminole men earned money wrestling alligators. On a good day, a wrestler could make $100 in tips from tourists. Women made Seminole dolls to sell to tourists. Since Moses Jumper was unable to wrestle, his wife took her turn in the alligator pit to support the family.

Wrestling alligators was not the only way Jumper challenged gender norms. In 1967, at age 44 she became the first and only female Florida Seminole tribal chair and the first female tribal chair of any American Indian tribe in the nation.
La Florida: The Digital Archive of the Americas brings the residents of colonial Florida into three-dimensional focus

By Bill DeYoung

Doña Catalina Barbón was a noblewoman in the Spanish territory known as La Florida in the 16th century. In 1576, following the death of her soldier husband during a skirmish with natives, she left Santa Elena, the capital city, for the relative safety of Mexico.

Barbón, in the early months of her third pregnancy, was accompanied on the arduous journey by two small children, one of whom died soon after their arrival in Mexico City. Destitute and desperate, she petitioned the high court for financial support. In a brief to the King of Spain, the judges recommended compensation for the young widow …

And that’s where the paper trail ends. We’ll never know what became of Doña Catalina Barbón, but thanks to La Florida, an interactive digital website conceived and designed as a technological portal into the 16th century, a three-dimensional portrait of Florida’s colonial history – and the diversity of its population – has begun to emerge.

J. Michael Francis, Hough Family Chair of Florida Studies at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg, is the engine that makes La Florida run. The history professor and his hand-picked team have spent more than a decade ferreting out, digitizing, studying, and cross-referencing more than 100,000 pages of original Florida documents from archives in Spain, Italy, England, and Mexico.

La Florida: The Interactive Digital Archive of the Americas turns years of complex historical research into an easily navigable, 21st century version of a family tree. The La Florida team members are well-trained in paleography, the difficult art of reading ancient writing.

The early European arrivals, they want the world to know, weren’t just armored, native-slaughtering soldiers and explorers greedy for gold. The existing historical record is both inaccurate and incomplete.

Everyone can agree, however, that St. Augustine is the oldest continuously occupied European city in the continental United States.

J. Michael Francis being interviewed by a reporter from Spanish television. “Our primary goal,” he says, “has always been to share Florida’s fascinating history, to try to capture the moments of tragedy and triumph in ways that capture the public’s imagination the same way they capture ours as we read through centuries-old documents.”
“When Pedro Menéndez de Avilés founded St. Augustine in September 1565, he brought with him a diverse population of men and women,” Francis explains. “They included tailors and blacksmiths, soldiers and carpenters, silversmiths and biscuit bakers, priests, an apothecary, a trumpeter, and even a master beer brewer. These are the individuals most texts label as conquistadors.”

This catch-all terminology did not sit well with Francis, who’d been obsessed with the history of Spain in the Americas since his teenage days in Alberta, Canada. Textbooks consistently refer to the conquistadors who arrived in Florida in waves, beginning in 1513 with Juan Ponce de León’s first expedition.

And so La Florida, he explains, “began with a simple question: Who were they? In other words, what do we know of the people identified as conquistadors? Where were they from? What were their backgrounds? How old were they? Were they married or single? In other words, we wanted to build a profile of the ‘typical conquistador,’ if in fact there was one.”

Under the heading “Florida Stories” are video biographies of Barbón, of mapmaker Miguel Mora and free black woman Luisa de Abrego, who married a Spanish soldier named Miguel Rodríguez in a public ceremony – the oldest documented Christian marriage in the continental U.S.

The site’s searchable and comprehensive population database Above: The vaults at Casa Ducal; thousands of documents, chronicling the earliest centuries of Spain’s settlements in La Florida, are stored here in a climate-controlled environment. Below: The view from the “sala” (specialized room) at Casa Ducal, where Francis and his research team consult the ancient documents.
includes biographical information about more than 3,500 individuals. “To date,” Francis explains, “we have identified a wide range of non-Spaniards who participated in these early expeditions, including Portuguese, Flemish, Germans, Italians, and Greeks.”

The site is continually upgraded with freshly discovered information. “From its inception,” Francis says, “we never considered La Florida as a replacement for textbooks, monographs, or scholarly articles.

“However, not all historical data translates well into written text. There are distinct advantages to working on a digital platform, which allows us to present all kinds of historical information that would not translate well into print.”

Francis discovered that an Irish priest, called Ricardo Arturo by the Spanish, arrived in St. Augustine in 1597 and led the city in a St. Patrick’s Day celebration and parade – the first such event in the New World.

Since Boston and New York, respectively, had always claimed to be the first American cities to go green, Francis’ discovery was a game-changer. One for Florida!

“Our primary goal has always been to share Florida’s fascinating history,” he says, “to try to capture the moments of tragedy and triumph in ways that capture the public’s imagination the same way they capture ours as we read through centuries-old documents.”

Rachel Sanderson, the project’s associate director, explains that the process isn’t quite Indiana Jones-style archaeology. She, Francis, and their team aren’t hidden away in

This map of the far-reaching Spanish province of “La Florida,” published in 1584, was created by Spanish royal cartographer Geronimo Chiaves. It is thought to be based on the recollections of members of the Hernando De Soto expedition, 1539-1543.

Screenshot from La Florida: This is the introduction to the story of Luisa de Abrego, a free black woman who married a Spanish soldier in a public ceremony in St. Augustine; the interracial union is the oldest documented Christian marriage in the continental U.S.
air-starved basement, turning page after page of musty, dusty documents on a historical treasure hunt.

“Though I’m sure there was a time in history when that is exactly what you would see, the Ministero de Cultura in Spain and other archive directors in Europe and throughout the Americas have done a magnificent job of working towards preserving and caring for these valuable records,” Sanderson says.

Housed in an imposing fortress known as Casa Ducal, in the Spanish town of Cuellar, Segovia, the Archives of the Ducal House of Alburquerque include documents from the 12th century — when construction began — through 1994. The country’s most valuable historical documents are often kept in castillos, Rachel Sanderson explained. “These fortified stone structures work naturally to moderate temperature and humidity, as well as protecting the documents from natural disasters and human causes of deterioration,” she says. “Documents are often held in vaults, limiting direct access to qualified staff only, and protected by gas fire suppression systems.” History students from around the world, including the La Florida team, work closely with the Fundación Archivo Histórico de la Casa Ducal de Alburquerque.

Several of the Spanish archives, Sanderson adds, are digitizing their collections for easy access via the internet. However, “accessibility alone does not translate into student or public engagement. The inability to read the records remains the most common obstacle, and Spanish paleography requires advanced language training, a skill relatively few possess.”

“This is where laflorida.org can help users of all ages.”

While a faculty member at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Francis taught history and paleography to eager students. His boyish enthusiasm for the history of colonial Florida was, and is, contagious.

In 2006, Francis created a two-semester program to teach students how to navigate and translate old Spanish documents with real-world experience: Three students from the program accompanied him to Seville, Spain, the following summer to conduct archival research at the Archivo General de Indias, searching the crumbling manuscripts for any references to colonial Florida.

“We often joke that we are building a site that can never really be ‘finished,’” Francis says. “The story never really ends. There is always new material to be found, new ways of looking at the past, and new strategies and methodologies to convey that information.”

In 2012, St. Augustine’s Bishop Felipe J. Estévez granted Francis’ team permission to digitize the city’s entire collection of colonial ecclesiastical records, consisting of 13 boxes of unbound individual folios, each crinkled page shrink-wrapped in protective plastic, with a mixture of baptism, marriage, confirmation and death records, organized roughly in chronological order.

Fifteen bound books from the 18th and 19th centuries complete the collection of colonial documents. Until 1735, Francis reports, St. Augustine’s parish priests recorded all races in the same books.

The entire collection of high-resolution digital images is currently available on the La Florida site. “We’re now implementing the next phase of the parish records project,” he adds, “which involves transcribing and translating the entire collection of baptism, marriage, death, and confirmation records, which date back to 1594.”

Sanderson explains that the eventual, extensive cross-referencing of these records on La Florida, “will contribute significantly to genealogical research and a better understanding of the diversity of early Florida.”

Since the beginning, says Francis, their focus on the goal of giving new life to the past has never wavered. “We wanted to build a searchable database of everyone we encounter in the documents, including Native Americans, free and enslaved Africans, and Europeans from regions outside of Spain. Over the next year, our database will expand to include more than 10,000 individuals.”
What It Means to be a FLORIDIAN
FLORIDANS OF THE FUTURE

Who will Florida be when it grows up?

This land of “swamps and quagmires” had a population of just 87,445 souls shortly after statehood in 1845, which has now swelled to 21 million.

Well, we can be confident that there will be a lot more of us in years to come. This fast-growing state reliably gains 300,000 to 350,000 people a year.

With historical trends and future projections taken into account, Florida’s population is projected to increase to more than 23 million in 2025, 24.3 million in 2030 and 26.4 million in 2040. This, according to the University of Florida’s Bureau of Economic and Business Research.

And the Florida Chamber of Commerce’s Florida 2030 Project estimates that 93 percent of that growth will come from out of state — from around the nation, around the Americas, and around the world.

That we will import far more Floridians than we will home-grow is one consequence of the state’s long-time aging trend. Within a decade, the University of Florida predicts, there will be more deaths than births in Florida. Demographers call that trend “natural decrease.”

Stefan Rayer, demographic researcher with the University of Florida, says “there are already many counties in Florida that have reached natural decrease, and that number goes up each year. We expect Florida as a whole to fall into that category some time around 2028 or ’29.”

“What’s happening in Florida is independent of mortality rates going up; they are actually coming down. What you have is an aging population, with Baby Boomers moving into retirement ages,” says Rayer.

So we expect that by 2030 there will not only be a lot more of us, but one in four will be of retirement age, 65 or older. And fewer than half of us will be in our prime employment years of 25 to 64.

This aging demographic trend could have a profound impact on Florida’s future economy and its ability to provide essential public services.

“Florida is now the third most populous state and by 2030, 26 million Floridians will call Florida home.”
—The Florida 2030 Project, Florida Chamber of Commerce

“IT is a land of swamps, of quagmires, of frogs and alligators and mosquitoes! No man would immigrate into Florida no, not from hell itself!
—U.S. Rep. John Randolph of Virginia, speaking in 1821 against the U.S. acquiring Florida from Spain

Who will we be? Aging and increasingly diverse, our state’s rapidly growing population will be fueled by new residents, not home-grown births.

By Ron Cunningham
"As more and more baby boomers move through the pipeline, they will demand greater services to meet their needs, but there will be proportionately fewer people of working age in Florida to address their needs and to contribute to the economy in general ... because the working age population is projected to grow more slowly than the senior population," write Lynne Holt and David Colburn in their paper "Senior Citizens — Their Place in Florida’s Past, Present, and Future."

Holt is a policy analyst emerita with the University of Florida’s Bob Graham Center for Public Service and Colburn is a former UF history professor, provost, senior vice president, and director of the Graham Center.

They conclude: “In short, the picture for Florida at 2020 and beyond carries no surprises: more retirees, fewer working-age people relative to seniors to support the state’s tax base, fiscal pressures for seniors who will live longer and, as they age, require more medical and support services, and more stress on families and unpaid caregivers to assume or contribute significantly to caregiving responsibilities. In general, those with less education and retirement savings will be the most adversely affected.”

To which David Denslow Jr., UF research economist adds: “Over the latest two or three decades, younger college grads have been moving to cities that already have a lot of college grads. By and large that does not mean Florida.

“As the boomers age, and continue to move to Florida, the largest share of Florida’s workforce will be in the service sector, producing local services, not goods for export...Florida will remain a state with mostly low-wage jobs.”

A minority majority state

What else? By 2030, fewer than half of us will be non-Hispanic whites, long the dominant ethnic group here, making Florida a "minority majority" state.

So where will the new Floridians be coming from?

Pretty much where they’ve been coming from all along.

“They’re coming mostly from New York, which has been the leading origin state for a long time, and that is unlikely to change just because it has a large population,” says Rayer.

Several other states in the North and Midwest – New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Illinois, Massachusetts — are “all among the leading states for migrants.”

An exception to the North/Midwest trend is Georgia. “Just because it’s next door, Georgia is number two after New York,” says Rayer. “But Georgia is also a primary destination for Floridians, so the balance tends to be negative.”

Meanwhile, foreign-born immigrants to Florida will be largely arriving from Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean, South America, and Canada.

“We expect a significant number of Brazilians,” Rayer says. “Also the number of Puerto Ricans moving to Florida has been picking up.” Conversely, “Florida is not a primary destination for Mexicans, as opposed to the southwestern U.S. or California.”

And the fastest growing foreign population in Florida in recent years — although still relatively small in actual numbers — are immigrants from India, China, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia. Between 2005 and 2015, Floridians Asian-Indian population grew from just over 80,000 to more than 600,000, according to Rayer’s research.

So where will all these new Floridians be living? According to the Chamber’s research, 72 percent of the state’s population growth will be concentrated in just nine Florida counties: Miami-Dade,
Orange, Hillsborough, Broward, Palm Beach, Lee, Duval, Polk, and Osceola. Small wonder that the U.S. Census Bureau recently listed two Central Florida communities as among the 10 fastest growing metro areas in the nation.

One is The Villages, the retirement community that sprawls across three counties south of Ocala. The other, Lakeland/Winter Haven, is centered in largely suburban Polk County, strategically positioned to connect the spreading Orlando and Tampa Bay metro areas.

“It is only a matter of time before the area between Tampa and Orlando becomes, in essence, a conurbation,” Garrett Kenny, a central Florida developer, recently wrote in *Forbes*.

### As our state grows, so do the challenges

Regardless of where we come from and where we will live, the ramifications of Florida’s growth patterns will make significant demands on Florida communities and on public policy makers at all levels of government in the coming years.

Outlining some of the challenges, University of Florida economist Stan Smith wrote in his 2015 report “The Baby Boom and the Aging of Florida’s Population”:

“The large increases in Florida’s older population will have a substantial impact on demands for healthcare, housing, transportation, and many other types of goods and services.

“Will supplies keep pace with shifting demands? Will Baby Boomers save enough to support themselves during retirement? Will families be able to care for aging parents and grandparents? Will state and local governments adopt policies that meet the needs of an aging population? Will federal programs like Social Security and Medicare provide adequate funding?

“The future quality of life for many Floridians will depend on the answers to these questions,” Smith concludes.

His concerns are echoed in other respects by the Florida Chamber’s Florida 2030 Project:

“To secure Florida’s future, we must consider the water and energy needs for nearly 5 million more residents, be ready for the hard and soft infrastructure needs like broader telecommunications, improved roadways and railways, air, space and sea ports, ensure Floridians can connect to job opportunities, education, healthcare options, each other and the world, as well as support continued economic growth while preserving Florida’s essential environment and community assets.”

To a large degree, no matter where these new Floridians come from and where they settle, the question of who we will be when Florida grows up largely depends on the willingness and ability of decision-makers to rise to these challenges.
“For three hundred years has Florida been open to settlement,” wrote American poet William Cullen Bryant in 1873 to the New York Evening Post. How, then, is much of the state “still for the most part a wilderness?” On a trip to Florida after the Civil War, Bryant saw swamps, sandy plains, pine trees, and scrub palmettoes; he saw very few conventionally neat dwellings, sturdy fences, green lawns, or fertile fields. Echoing the sentiments of many Northerners who visited post-Civil War Florida — the poorest, least populated, and arguably most undeveloped state in the South during that time — Bryant declared most of the peninsula the “despair of the cultivator.”

Yet he found reason for hope just south of Jacksonville. For at Mandarin, a tiny village on the east bank of the St. Johns River, “Mrs. Stowe has her winter mansion, in the shadow of some enormous live oaks,” surrounded by an orange grove.

We don’t typically associate the author Harriet Beecher Stowe with Florida. Born in Litchfield, Connecticut, in 1811 to Roxana and Lyman Beecher, a prominent Presbyterian minister, Harriet Beecher married theologian Calvin Stowe, with whom she had seven children. The future author spent significant time in Hartford and then in Cincinnati, where she witnessed the nation’s increasing racial unrest in the form of race riots, abolitionist meetings, African Americans escaping from slavery, bounty hunters seeking fugitive slaves, and other events that inspired her first novel, the abolitionist work and international bestseller, Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852).
Written as she raised children at home in Maine, where the family had relocated for Calvin’s teaching position at Bowdoin College, Stowe’s novel caused a groundswell of anti-slavery sentiment so powerful that some credit her book with precipitating the Civil War.

Yet after the War, and during nearly every winter from 1868 to 1884, Stowe and her husband — accompanied by servants and an assortment of family members — traveled south from the family home in Hartford, by railroad and steamboat, to live in a renovated cottage at Mandarin.

Incorporated in 1841 and named after the orange variety, Mandarin would just begin to flourish by the time Stowe left Florida for good in the mid-1880s, when it boasted about 1,200 residents, a riverfront boardwalk, and several large estates and steamboat landings.

So what drew Stowe to Florida during the 1860s, and particularly to Mandarin, in the first place?

Her son, Frederick, was a Civil War veteran seeking a fresh start. To help him, Stowe leased a former cotton plantation called Laurel Grove, located on the west bank of the St. Johns River at present-day Orange Park. Stowe, her husband, and their son — accompanied by her nephew and his family — first visited Florida in 1867 and attempted to restore Laurel Grove to a fully functioning farm, assisted by recently freed African Americans hired as housekeepers, cooks, planters, and laborers.

Stowe chronicles the experience in a short story called “Our Florida Plantation” (1879), published in the Atlantic Monthly. There she recounts Laurel Grove’s brief success . . . followed by total failure due to a cotton worm infestation.

The Stowe family abandoned Laurel Grove after just a few months. Yet there was one bright spot in that difficult winter of 1867: When rowing east across the St. Johns River to send and collect the mail at Mandarin, Stowe saw the cottage she would purchase as her winter home.
A champion of social reform

In Mandarin, Stowe found a warm place to write in peace, and a chance to expand her commitment to social reform by assisting African Americans who had been recently freed from slavery. She quickly began the complex process of planning and securing funding from the Freedmen’s Bureau for the construction of a combined schoolhouse and church. The school, built in 1869, served both black and white children until it was destroyed by fire, at which point Stowe and her neighbors continued instruction in their homes until the Mandarin Schoolhouse was built in 1872.

To serve the community’s spiritual needs, Stowe’s husband, Calvin, offered Episcopal church services open to all denominations (with separate services for black and white members), while Stowe assisted him and led Bible study groups for women. By 1883 the congregation had grown enough to merit a separate building, and funds were raised for the Church of Our Saviour, which endures to this day.

Stowe entertained visiting family members, including her siblings Catharine, Charles, and Henry, her youngest son, Charley, and her daughters, Hattie and Eliza. She fished and boated on the St. John’s River and Julington Creek, and visited St. Augustine and other tourist destinations by railroad. She observed agricultural experiments on orange trees, cabbages, cucumbers, and other crops growing on the small farm at her Florida cottage.

The Florida writings

And, of course, she wrote — sometimes from a desk in her yard where she could see the St. Johns River.

Stowe was a prolific writer in Florida. She published a number of letters about the state in the Christian Union, a New York newspaper owned by her brother Henry Ward Beecher, in which she promoted Florida settlement, tourism, climate, scenery, agriculture, and employment opportunities for black and white residents.

Some of these letters appeared in her book, Palmetto-Leaves (1873), and the success of her Florida campaign is evident in the many letters she received from Northerners seeking additional information about Florida opportunities. Her writings are often credited with the significant increase in Florida tourism during the mid-1870s, when Jacksonville and the St. Johns River became popular destinations.

Stowe’s Florida writings are wide and varied, but across all of them one thing is clear: The place to which she returned for nearly 20 winters ultimately transformed her. She grew to love and embrace the energy and vitality of the same natural features that other Northerners, such as poet William Cullen Bryant, deemed “wilderness” or evidence of the state’s resistance to civilized life. She delighted in swamps, orange trees, and the tangled roots of the scrub palmetto — a plant many settlers lamented, but Stowe chose as the inspiration for the title and cover image of her published collection of Florida letters.

Her delight in Florida’s resistance to conventional order is apparent in a letter to friend and fellow writer George Eliot in which Stowe describes her discovery and early renovation of the Mandarin cottage.

“The history of the cottage is this,” she writes. “I found a hut built close to a great live-oak twenty-five feet in girth, and with overarching boughs eighty feet up in the air, spreading like a firmament, and all swaying with mossy festoons. We began to live here, and gradually we improved the hut by lath, plaster, and paper. Then we threw out a side veranda all round, for in these regions the veranda is the living-room.”

Stowe describes how the family had to build their veranda around the massive trunk of the oak tree, and how they added on gables and chambers, just “as a tree throws out new branches,” so that the cottage “seems as if it were half tree, or something that had grown out of the tree.”

The tree architecture of Stowe’s Florida home was a local attraction. In many of the photos and artistic renderings of the cottage — including Stowe’s own oil painting of it — the live oak pushing through the roof takes center stage, as if to declare the inhabitants’ intention to adapt to the local landscape by disregarding any effort at symmetry, order, or intentional design. Stowe’s winter home appeared “peculiar and original,” she wrote to her friend. And yet, Stowe concludes, “we settle into it with real enjoyment.”

After the War, and during nearly every winter from 1868 to 1884, Stowe and her husband — accompanied by servants and an assortment of family members — traveled south from the family home in Hartford, by railroad and steamboat, to live in a renovated cottage at Mandarin.
At home in Mandarin, Stowe found beauty and vitality in Florida’s opposition to familiar forms of cultivation. Writing to her son Charles, she reported that her garden is more like a “jungle,” and that the lawn is “littered with fallen oranges” and covered with “rampant” roots. Elsewhere, she writes of the “raptures and frenzies of growth,” and the “green labyrinths made by the tangling vines,” of the swamp fronting her home. On the whole the place is “shockingly untidy,” she declared — and yet, it is also “so beautiful that I am quite willing to forgive its disorder.”

An appreciation for nature’s resistance to order is similarly evident in a number of oil paintings that Stowe made while wintering at Mandarin, such as “Yellow Jessamine” and “Orange Fruit & Blossoms,” which portrays oranges so lively that they appear to push against the painting’s frame.

This appreciation pervades Stowe’s descriptions of life in Palmetto-Leaves, where she explains the difference between Florida and New England: In New England nature is a “smart, decisive house-mother” that sharply freezes and thaws at predictable “times and seasons;” Florida nature is more like a grandmother who “does everything when she happens to feel like it,” alternating unpredictably between warmth and sudden cold snaps. But this atmospheric fickleness makes for a much more interesting life, a “tumble-down, wild, picnicky” existence filled with unexpected energy.

Palmetto-Leaves is ultimately a settlers’ guide, practical and whimsical. The book offers instructions for buying good land, building a home, hiring local laborers, and establishing schools for the recently emancipated. It also recommends impromptu picnics, twilight steamboat rides, and rambles through “magical” palmetto groves.

An important message is that, while Florida may appear to resist settlement or progress, appearances can deceive. The same characteristics that sometimes make Florida seem averse to growth could actually be signs of its capacity for energetic development.

This message is most fully exhibited by Florida’s orange trees and scrub palmettoes. In a letter about the frost of 1835, Stowe tells of a Mandarin grove that appeared to die that year. However, the trees soon “sprang up again” and vigorously bore fruit, thereby offering “lessons in perseverance” for people “struggling to found a colony here.”

The same hidden resilience flows through the scrub palmetto. True, she reflects, this lowly shrub, native to the Florida peninsula, will never attain the “grace” or “perfect shape” of that other species, the tall Sabal palm. Yet it possesses a hardiness that “these regions” require: “catching into the earth by strong rootlets, and then rising up here and there,” the scrub palmettoes “burst forth into a graceful crest of waving green” leaves. Scrub palmetto leaves make an ideal cover image for Stowe’s settlers’ guide to Florida. Embossed in gold against red, the leaves attest that flourishing in Florida requires continual adaptation to its unique landscape.

Stowe lived until 1896, but stopped visiting Florida after 1884 due to Calvin’s failing health. Today, a historical marker commemorates the site where her winter home once stood, while the Mandarin Museum features a permanent exhibit on Stowe in Florida. The 1872 Mandarin Schoolhouse still exists, maintained by the Mandarin Community Club. The Church of Our Saviour — destroyed by Hurricane Dora in 1964, then rebuilt on the site of the original church of 1883 — continues to serve the community. And Stowe’s letters, stories, and paintings of Florida remain as a testament to the vital possibilities of a place that has never been conventional.
There was no fast food, and definitely no frozen chicken nuggets. Instead, Delius Shirley grew up with a decidedly sophisticated palate: “At school in New York City, I used to trade the foie gras sandwiches my mom made for me. Everything she put in my lunchbox was exotic and bizarre, and I’d trade it for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.” Shirley’s mother was, unsurprisingly, a chef — and not just any. She was Norma Shirley, who at the time was one of the city’s most highly regarded caterers, but who would eventually return to her native Jamaica to open a series of critically acclaimed namesake eateries, where she famously paired island ingredients with classic French technique. She was dubbed “the Jamaican Julia Child” by Vogue magazine and remained, for the rest of her life, determined to teach her son to appreciate the haute cuisine to which she was dedicated, passing on to him the flavors of her heritage.

Many years later, when an all-grown-up Shirley was traveling, he met Cindy Hutson, a New Jersey girl who had transplanted to Miami. She worked hosting fishing trips and teaching customers how to cook their catch, with a side-hustle distributing gourmet Jamaican coffee to U.S. restaurants. There was an instant connection between them and, for Shirley, a profound realization soon after: “She had the same innate talent my mother had: You could give them each bacon, lettuce and tomato and, where I would just be able to make a sandwich, they would come up with something totally new and delicious,” he said. “And you wouldn’t even realize there’s bacon, lettuce or tomato in there because they’ve done something so creative and different. It’s a gift!”

Delius Shirley and Cindy Hutson are culinary and life partners, working together at their various venues, including Ortanique in Coral Gables.
It’s precisely that gift — and the memory of Norma, who passed away in 2005 — in which Shirley and Hutson have rooted their Miami-based restaurant empire, which continues to honor and elevate Caribbean flavors, ingredients and traditions. Their creations are also delicious tips of the hat to South Florida’s history, which is inextricably intertwined with that of the Caribbean’s, from where settlers and immigrants have long hailed. Such cultural influences have made Miami — where more than 60 percent of residents are foreign-born — one of the country’s most diverse metropolitan areas.

Today, Shirley and Hutson run four restaurants ( Ortanique in Coral Gables, Zest in downtown Miami, Ortanique Camana Bay in Grand Cayman; and Restaurant at The Dunmore in the Bahamas) and it’s a collaboration in every sense. He runs operations and the front of the house while she reins over the kitchens — and they’re life partners as well.

From the start, it was hard not to take notice of the duo. Their initial venture, called Norma’s on the Beach, opened in 1994, the first U.S. mainland outpost of Norma’s, and a pioneer of the then fledgling South Beach dining scene. Like his mother’s restaurant, Shirley and Hutson’s version centered on Jamaican classics with modern European twists: spicy jerk tuna, rich oxtail and pork dishes refined and elegantly plated. The restaurant shuttered after five years, but paved the way for Ortanique in Coral Gables, where the couple decided to tap into something more global. They reinvented the menu, turning it into an all-out feast of Caribbean flavor—bold, spicy, seasonally-driven ingredients that, throughout history, have been transported to the islands from India, Africa, Asia, and Europe. “At first, every writer who came to try the food didn’t know what to call it. They kept calling it Jamaican, but it was so much more than that,” Hutson recalls. “So I finally called it, Cuisine of the Sun. Cultural, ethnic foods from around the world that all found their way to here and now.”
**JERK CHICKEN PENNE PASTA**

Serves 10

- 4 pounds chicken, sliced into bite-sized strips and marinated (marinade recipe below)
- 3 tablespoons salted butter
- 1½ cups shiitake mushrooms, thinly sliced
- ½ cup sun-dried tomatoes
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon Better Than Bouillon Chicken Base
- 1 bunch scallions, chopped
- ¼ cup fresh basil, thinly sliced
- 2 pounds penne pasta, cooked according to box directions
- Salt and pepper to taste

*For the marinade*

- ½ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup store-bought teriyaki sauce
- 2 tablespoons prepared Caribbean jerk paste or powder
- 2 cloves fresh garlic, minced
- ½ cup yellow onion, minced

1. Start by marinating chicken. In a large stainless steel bowl, whisk together all the marinade ingredients. Place the chicken in the marinade, cover and refrigerate for at least an hour. Remove chicken from the marinade, pouring off the excess liquid, when ready to begin cooking.

2. In a large skillet over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the chicken and cook until just half-way done. Add the mushrooms, sun-dried tomatoes, heavy cream and chicken base, sautéing for an additional three minutes on med-high heat, until the cream has thickened. Stir in the scallions and basil, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Toss with the cooked pasta and serve.

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**CARIBBEAN PUMPKIN BISQUE**

Serves 10

- ¼ cup salted butter
- 4 cups yellow onion, sliced
- 2 large carrots, chopped
- 4 cloves fresh garlic, chopped
- 6 to 8 sprigs fresh thyme, leaves stripped off stems
- 1 scotch bonnet pepper (optional)
- 2 pounds Caribbean pumpkin (known as calabaza) seeded, peeled, and diced into ½-inch pieces (look for ones with bright orange flesh)
- 8 cups chicken stock
- 1 can unsweetened coconut milk
- Salt and pepper to taste

1. In a large stock pot over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the onions, carrots and garlic. Cook until the vegetables caramelize being careful not to burn.

2. Add the thyme and scotch bonnet pepper, being careful not burst pepper. Stir for an additional 2 to 3 minutes. Add the pumpkin and chicken stock. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and allow to simmer, uncovered, for 30 minutes.

3. Remove from heat and let the soup cool for another 30 minutes. Remove the whole scotch bonnet pepper, and set aside. Working in batches, puree the soup in a blender until smooth, streaming in the coconut milk as it blends. Season with salt and pepper to taste. If you prefer a spicy soup, remove seeds from the reserved scotch bonnet pepper, chop and add to soup.

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Jerk Chicken Penne Pasta

Caribbean Pumpkin Bisque
WEST INDIAN CURRIED CRAB CAKE

Serves 4

3 eggs
½ cup mayonnaise
1 tablespoon whole-grain mustard
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
2 tablespoons Madras curry powder (substitute Javin or other high-quality curry powder)
2 scallions, chopped, green parts only
½ cup red bell pepper, diced in 1/4 inch pieces
½ cup yellow bell pepper, diced in 1/4 inch pieces
¼ cup red onion, diced in 1/4 inch pieces
¼ cup parsley, minced
1 pound jumbo lump crabmeat
1 cup panko breadcrumbs
Salt and pepper, to taste
4 tablespoons salted or herb butter

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. In a large bowl, using a whisk, beat eggs, mayonnaise, mustard, Worcestershire and curry powder. Set aside and let curry bloom for 15 minutes. Add scallions, peppers, onion and parsley and toss. Add the crab and panko breadcrumbs, combining gently, being careful not break up the lumps of crab. (I suggest wearing kitchen gloves and using your hands!)
3. Also using your hands, form the mixture into eight 3-ounce patties. Be careful not overwork, but do make sure each patty is firmly compressed so it stays together while cooking.
4. In a hot skillet, melt butter until bubbling. Sear the patties four at a time until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Flip them over and sear on other side until equally golden brown.

Place the patties on an ovenproof sheet pan and finish cooking in the oven for an additional 8 minutes. Remove from oven and serve the patties immediately, topped with Papaya Mango Salsa (recipe below).

PAPAYA MANGO SALSA

Makes about 4 cups

2 cups firm, ripe papaya, finely diced
2 cups firm, ripe mangoes, finely diced
½ cup sugar (you might adjust this, depending on the sweetness of the mango)
Juice of 2 to 3 limes
½ cup scallions, finely chopped, green part only
½ teaspoon Scotch bonnet hot sauce
½ bunch cilantro, chopped

In a non-reactive stainless-steel bowl, combine all ingredients. Taste for sweetness and hot-sauce balance.
IN THE SPIRIT OF
OLD NAPL

A beloved house and artists’ haven celebrates its 100th anniversary — and a legacy worth saving

The lush exterior of the home.
It is 1918, and Norman Prentice Sloan Sr. alights from the steamer docking at the Naples Pier, traveling down from Fort Myers and Punta Gorda. Clouds of plume birds thrill the passengers — the southwest Florida Gulf coast is a paradise. For Sloan, a Philadelphia cotton broker and silver mine owner, stretching before him is an idyll and an opportunity: Empty land stretched between the beach and the Old Naples Hotel.

Sloan becomes Naples’ first private real estate investor, buying up acreage all the way to Naples Bay. He sells to the Du Ponts, who ship cypress out of Everglades City, and to other pioneers. Tourists come, such as the writers Daphne Du Maurier and Mary Roberts Rinehart, and build cottages, Rinehart on Pine Island and Du Maurier in Old Naples.

(She calls it “Manderlay,” after her fictional estate in Rebecca. It’s one of the most famous first lines in English literature. Last night I dreamed I went to Manderlay again.)

But first, in the year he arrives, Sloan builds for his family a handsome three-story house of impenetrable Dade County pine, kitty-corner to the Naples Hotel, then the center of the quiet Gulfside village. Everything is warm, resonant, board-and-batten carpentry. The house has a peaked roof with steep gables, which glint in the sun. His carpenter creates matching galleries on the upper and lower floors fronting the street, accessible to each other only by an outside staircase.

Perhaps that’s because this is really a children’s house for clambering around. Sloan and his wife have seven children, who live in the house while they, the servants, and guests inhabit several cottages on the property. Today, one is painted coral red, the other canary yellow. The big house is now white, trimmed in turquoise, and all have shutters and casement windows.

Sloan calls his family compound “Tecopa,” after a leader of a Southern Nevada branch of the Palute Indians, for whom he’s already named his silver mine, a name that means “wild cat.”

The entire compound is sheltered by an astonishing banyan tree — the largest in Naples today.

Sloan planted it in the early 20th century, as if it were a sentinel to guard his children. Even now, tourists stop, stare, and photograph the magnificence of it.

The neighboring Naples Hotel was built in 1888 with a cupola from which you could see the “oceanview” at 12th Avenue South and Gordon Drive. The
hotel was torn down for a parking lot in 1965. The parking lot is still there.

But so is Sloan’s banyan tree. And Sloan’s house and cottages have evolved into an artists’ oasis, surrounded by, but not succumbing to, the urban commercialism flowing around it.

At least, not yet.

New purpose for an old house

The gulf breezes are the same, but now it’s 100 years later, December 2018. The artist Paul Arsenault, 66, and his wife, Eileen, 67, who runs the nearby Arsenault Gallery, have lived in what was once the Sloan house for nearly four decades. The Arsenaults call it “The Banyan Arts Social and Pleasure Club,” named by Eileen in a nod to her Louisiana roots, and have turned it into a haven for artists and conservationists.

To mark its survival, they hold a centenary celebration. Guests move through the shelter of the unpainted pine walls, untouched since Sloan’s day. A jazz pianist plays standards on a teal-colored piano in the living room. There are Amend pianist plays standards on a teal-colored piano in the living room. There are

the world over, but especially here. His vision of Florida is as many wish it still to be, yet without sentimentality. He is an acclaimed contemporary impressionist, painting like Monet in his Giverny garden. Arsenault paints the house and the banyan tree, too, as he stands beneath it.

“And with the banyan tree, we have a lightning rod into the soul of the neighborhood,” he concludes.

A lightning rod it would prove to be, galvanizing and changing their lives. Paul and Eileen and a neighbor bought the house and the banyan tree, too, as he stands beneath it.

Arsenault, an adventurer, storyteller, and archivist, was born in Montreal to a line of ship captains from New Brunswick and raised in Massachusetts. He came to Florida as a deckhand on a research vessel from Woods Hole, the R. V. Gosnold. It was 1973, and he landed on the citrus docks of Fort Pierce. Almost immediately he was introduced to A.E. “Beanie” Backus, the dean of Florida landscape painting, and that influence lasted. Arsenault is listed as a member of Florida’s “Indian River School,” which Backus founded. He met Eileen in Naples and moved into the Yellow Cottage in 1983, a year after she moved into the house.

In 1985 for $350,000, every dime they could scrape together.

Arsenault, an adventurer, storyteller, and archivist, was born in Montreal to a line of ship captains from New Brunswick and raised in Massachusetts. He came to Florida as a deckhand on a research vessel from Woods Hole, the R. V. Gosnold. It was 1973, and he landed on the citrus docks of Fort Pierce. Almost immediately he was introduced to A.E. “Beanie” Backus, the dean of Florida landscape painting, and that influence lasted. Arsenault is listed as a member of Florida’s “Indian River School,” which Backus founded. He met Eileen in Naples and moved into the Yellow Cottage in 1983, a year after she moved into the house.

In 1982, Eileen was a 31-year-old newcomer in Naples, working for an antique map dealer. She pulled up to the compound on a bicycle. By then it was a rooming house and the owner, Willard ‘Bill’ Trout, interviewed prospective tenants on the porch.

I didn’t need to go inside,” she remembers. “I thought, who wouldn’t live there! Under THAT tree!”

Artists have long gravitated to the spot. There was the renowned painter Emile Gruppe and his artist son, Robert Gruppe, who lived in the Yellow Cottage in 1953. There was a short stay by the poet Robert Frost, and another by James Jones, the author of From Here to Eternity. Last year, noted wildlife painter John Ruthven visited, with whom Eileen and Paul walked down to the Naples pier for a supermoon eclipse. Ruthven, 93, was a good friend of the late astronaut Neil Armstrong, who’d told him, “when you look up at the moon after I’m gone, I’ll be giving you a ‘thumbs up.’”

The historian David McCullough painted the house — a painting that hangs in the McCullough living room. And so has Richard Segalman, a New York artist and close friend of the Arsenaults.

Segalman lived in the rooming house in the ’60s, once paying Mr. Trout a summer’s rent with the painting now on the Arsenault walls. He comes to Naples every spring for a show at the Harmon-Meek gallery, sometimes staying in his old room. And he still paints models, including Eileen, under the banyan tree and in the garden or at the beach.

“When I came here in 1959 from New York, the only beach I knew was Coney Island,” Segalman says. “I went down to the pier and I saw that color water and the sky, and the sand, and I’ve never forgotten it. I love the light and the beauty.”

A running theme at the party, though, is the changing face of Old Naples' largest and oldest banyan, it is popular with passersby, and featured frequently in Arsenault’s work.
Naples, and indeed, Old Florida. So much development — and there are no preservation codes in Old Naples. Private property owners can, and do, tear down architectural gems — and many bemoan what has been and could still be lost. “It’s a constant worry,” says Cathy Wilson, the great-granddaughter of N.P. Sloan Sr.

She’s putting her own “Sloan house” her great-grandfather built, called “Fisherman’s Lodge,” on the market. On Broad Street around the corner from the Arsenaults, it was moved there by mules and logs. She’s trying to find a buyer who will preserve it. Joann Smallwood, formerly on the Naples Historical Society board, says that Paul Arsenault once painted more than a dozen houses a client of hers was trying to relocate and preserve. Another artist, Dale Beatty, from St. Petersburg, praises Arsenault’s instinctive relationship with the ever-more fragile past.

“Paul’s never deviated from his interest in preserving the history of Old Naples, and the fact that it’s disappearing,” says Beatty. “He’s the one person I can see who is preserving it in his paintings. No matter what he’s painting, it’s always going in that direction. Above everybody else around here, he’s the focal point of preserving this community that really isn’t here anymore.”

A new development, the Old Naples Hotel, is going up near where the old hotel once stood, on the site of a shuttered shopping complex opposite the Arsenaults’ compound. The couple say they were disappointed with the scale, 109 rooms and three stories high. The city planning board approved it 4-3.

The Naples Historical Society, a nonprofit managing many initiatives, including Palm Cottage, a historic house museum two houses over from Paul and Eileen, also supported it. “We felt the modifications the Old Naples Hotel group made were the best we were going to get, and we pushed for them,” says CEO Elaine Reed.

She points to 63 remaining historical structures in Old Naples, but admits that nothing more than persuasion or desire preserves them, though there is a process for historic preservation, which the Naples Historical Society can help with.

“Old Naples,” a 500-acre district, is on the National Historic Register.

She guides homeowners to Florida’s suggested preservation codes, and enthuses over how the Arsenaults have preserved their compound. “Paul is a visionary,” she says, “and the house exudes the past.”

For the Arsenaults, and many of the guests at the centennial party, the way forward depends on the kind of vision that has inspired those living in Sloan’s house all along.

Eileen is president of the Audubon Society of Western Everglades, and national and international conservationists have been on her porch, launching plans and projects just as Sloan once did. Nathaniel Reed, the father of Florida conservation, Mark Plotkin, founder of the Amazon Conservation Team, and the brothers Philip and Michael Nash, who made the award-winning Climate Refugees film have dined there. Also a guest: Louis Psihoyos, Oscar-winning filmmaker of The Cove. There have been fundraisers for the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Hope for Haiti, Audubon, and others.

A Vietnamese antique gong rings out. A healer, David Clark, blesses Paul and Eileen with sacred oils, and notes the Calusa made this area their home centuries ago. (Arsenault painted the Calusa mural at the Marco Island History Museum.)

“This is a place of spiritual power and beauty which has been a focus of human attention since before the time of the Calusa,” Clark intones. “That it is today an artistic sanctuary is no accident.”

“We’re not leaving,” adds Paul Arsenault, “because the network we’ve generated, with good people doing good things, would be squandered. We’ve had a lifetime of opportunity to do important things that demand attention. We want to make the most of it.”

“I look around this garden and at this house and think how the spirit of the property has guided us not only to today, but to the years beyond,” says Eileen.

After a century, there’s a symbiotic spirit at work: The banyan tree limns the spirit of the Banyan Arts house, and the spirit of the banyan is invoked to bring the right traveler to the door, and the right future for all those who love living with the past in Old Naples.
Rising above the storm

Historic St. Andrews’ close-knit arts community comes together in the wake of Hurricane Michael

By Michael Lister

A lively Sunday afternoon crowd gathers beneath the bright sun and clear sky on the deck at the Little Village, an eclectic collection of arts, crafts, and food shops.

We are here for an open mic event, many of us with instruments in our hands, while in the distance the ragged edges of tarps flap on homes that have long since been blue-roofed.

“Blue-roofed.” We weren’t aware of this term before October 2018. It means to cover your shingleless roof with a tarp, usually blue, until months or years later when it can be repaired — months or years, because nearly every house and business in the area is also in need of repair.

It’s fitting that we meet at the Little Village, for it takes a village to recover from a catastrophic disaster. It’s also fitting that we’re in St. Andrews — the patron saint of, among other things, singers.

This small community, located on the southwest side of Panama City along the shores of St. Andrews Bay, is rich with history: from the Native Americans who used the sacred grounds here for middens and burial mounds, through the arrival of the Spanish, to the first European settlement and its importance to shipping and trade. Later, it was a strategic supplier of salt to Confederate troops during the Civil War, and significant in World War II, as Panama City became a center for training soldiers and shipbuilding.
Hurricane Michael is now part of that history.

Just a few months before this Sunday get together, we endured one of the most powerful and destructive hurricanes to ever hit the United States — and we’ll never take warm showers, or showers — warm or otherwise — for granted again.

Hurricane Michael, upgraded this year to a Category 5 storm once all the data became available, made landfall near Mexico Beach and Tyndall Air Force Base on October 10, 2018, with winds of 160 miles per hour, decimating a vast swath of the Florida Panhandle from Panama City to Apalachicola. Michael is only the fourth Category 5 hurricane to make recorded landfall in the United States and the first since 1992.

There’s now a fault line in our existence, dividing everything into the before and after of Michael.

The superstorm, which felt apocalyptic, left behind a post-apocalyptic landscape of rubble and debris and felled tens of thousands of acres of North Florida slash pines. Michael is estimated to have inflicted more than 25 billion dollars’ worth of damage, but I can tell you as someone who lived through it, that doesn’t even begin to count the true and real costs involved.

In the beginning

This area was inhabited by the Chatot and Yucci tribes when the Spanish first arrived in the 1500s. Tragically, the Chatot later became extinct as a tribe, but the Yucci survived by dispersing to the north and west. By the time many of the first European settlers had moved into the area, they and other tribes had joined a new Native American tribal group that became known as the Seminoles.

The first year-round European settlement near St. Andrews Bay included retired Georgia Governor John Clark and his wife, Nancy, who lived in the area from around 1827 until their deaths in 1832. At this time, St. Andrews was home to only a few families, many of whom made a living fishing, making salt, and from the first early forms of tourism.

By the middle of the 19th century the summer population of St. Andrews was well more than 1,000 people, and John and Nancy Clark’s home had been converted into a hotel called The Tavern. By the time of the first official survey in 1855, the fledgling community was referred to as “St. Andrews City” located on St. Andrews Bay.

Getting back up again

Like nearly 70,000 of their neighbors in Bay and Gulf counties, the smiling people now gathered at the Little Village went for several weeks after Michael hit without electricity, running water, and cell service, isolated from the outside world, trapped in a post-storm prison with inadequate supplies for basic survival.

On this Sunday, some five months after the devastating storm, we are happy to be here. It can be seen in the hugs, the smiles, the laughter, the tender tears, the enjoyment of the music, and the enthusiastic applause when each song is completed.

But we are gathered for far more than food and music. We’re here for something sacred and communal and creative.

Of the many things to recommend this part of the Panhandle in general and St. Andrews in particular, the thriving arts community is chief among them — and it is through art that we are recovering, healing, and rebuilding.

In the great bout of life, it’s not how many times you get knocked down, but how many times you get back up. Hurricane Michael seemingly rose out of nowhere and intensified far faster and more extremely than anyone predicted — and we went down. And now we’re getting back up. Sure, we’re a bit dazed and our legs aren’t fully beneath us yet, but they will be.

In For Whom the Bell Tolls, Ernest Hemingway wrote, “The world is a fine place and worth fighting for.” We believe that about our world — the world of ancient oaks, pine forest flats, hardwood hammocks, the Gulf of Mexico, St. Andrews Bay, and some of the world’s most beautiful beaches. A world where Old Florida is still alive and thriving. The bell tolled for us, but we’re still here, climbing back to our feet, readying ourselves for the next round.

To take the walking tour of St. Andrews, download the Florida Humanities Council’s free Florida Stories app available from the Google Play Store or iStore.
Out of the rubble comes art

Besides singers and fishermen, Saint Andrews is also the patron saint of women wanting to become mothers. And all of us here, especially the artists, are working toward and waiting for a new world to be born — or rather, reborn, out of the debris and rubble of the storm.

As artists, we respond to the events in our lives, including or especially the devastating life-and-death ones, by creating art. We process, we explore, we interpret, we empathize, we find meaning. Area photographers have captured Michael, and its aftermath has filled the canvases of area painters. Songwriters are writing songs. Musicians are playing with more emotion and empathy. As a novelist who grew up in the neighboring town of Wewahitchka with more than 30 mystery thrillers set in this region, I have recently written two novels set against the backdrop of Hurricane Michael, And the Sea Became Blood, and its sequel, The Blood-Dimmed Tide.

Jason Hedden, an actor and director and college professor friend of mine, turned to a new-to-him art form in response to that which demanded a response: writing Michael-inspired poetry — enough to fill a book, After Words: In the Wake of Hurricane Michael.

The music, photography, painting, poetry, and prose captures some of the pain, chaos, isolation, and desperation we were feeling — and some of the hope, too.

Art doesn’t just allow artists to process what they are experiencing. It’s also a way for others to vicariously explore and experience these fundamental human emotions and the events that birthed them, providing a much-needed catharsis.

Just down the way from the Little Village, in the center of St. Andrews, is the arts center Floriopolis, a gallery, classroom, and events space. Even through the disruption and destruction of the storm, it continued to fulfill its mission to use the arts to create a positive impact on St. Andrews.

After Michael, fellow artists from the nearby arts and architecture-rich communities to the west along 30A, rescued several works of art from Floriopolis that would have otherwise been destroyed. They also held a Floriopolis fundraiser called “Rising Tides.” Elmore’s Landing in Santa Rosa Beach and Gypsy Beach in St. Andrews also kept art safe and for sale, and St. Andrews Coffee House and Amavida opened up their walls as well, while the St. Andrews Civic Club provided meeting space.

It takes a village. “We’re tired, but inspired,” Floriopolis director Heather Parker says. “Full of visions of the past and possibilities for the future, struck with bouts of creative energy, and whims of despair, we muddle through, one step, one creative act, at a time.”

There’s something about being brought low, about being broken, that produces some of the most poignant and profound creative work. It’s the sweet song of thorn birds, the delicate wine of crushed grapes, the quilt of well-worn and discarded garments.

It’s going to take a long while for us to recover from the catastrophic blow we were dealt by Hurricane Michael, but that’s OK. We’re not going anywhere and we’ll do what it takes, though it takes the patience of a saint.

What to see when you visit

St. Andrews is worth visiting for many reasons. There’s the rich history captured on the historical walking tour, part of the Florida Humanities Council’s Florida Stories free walking tour app. The tour includes the Panama City Publishing Co. Museum, the open-air Market at St. Andrews, which takes place every Saturday, Oaks by the Bay, a five-acre waterfront park, and the National Historic Landmark Vessel, and the Governor Stone, the oldest known surviving Gulf Coast schooner, which is now a moving maritime museum.

There’s the great food found at places like the Shrimp Boat, Uncle Earnies, Hunt’s Oyster Bar, and Finn’s Island Grub. There’s the shopping at places like the Little Village, Floriopolis, and the Bot Boutique.

And there’s the art — art, like the community itself, that has now been transformed by the fierce force of a Category 5 hurricane.
What is the best advice you've given your poetry students?

Hang in there; don't get discouraged; be patient. Don't wait for inspiration. Be disciplined. Write every day. I did it when I was tired, when I didn't feel well, when I had four young children. I never had a writing group, but I think that would be a good thing. Take the teachers' words seriously when they are talking about your poems.

Which poets and books of poetry do you recommend to someone wanting to develop an appreciation of poetry?

Outside of reading poetry, I think they should read The Shape of Poetry, my book on writing. It gives you specific examples, lots of examples, and the idea that a poem is looking for its shape. Find the right shape for the poem you're working on. I compare it to a potter making a pot — he follows the clay — or carving a piece of wood. You're working the clay or wood and doing what it would let you do.

And to parents who would like their children to develop an appreciation for poetry or literature?

We didn't push our children to be artists or poets. We let the kids do what they wanted to do. We did expose them to lots of books, poetry reading, theater. They basically all became scientists. But they are theater-loving, book-loving kids, movie-loving kids. Jeanne did a lot of reading to them; they read A Child's Garden Verse. Give them some poetry books.

Your wife of 61 years, Jeanne Clark Meinke, is an illustrator whose works have appeared in publications, including The New Yorker, Gourmet, Bon Appetit, as well as your books. What is it like working together?

Jeanne and I have worked together for so many years. Our very first book was the Legend of Larry the Lizard, a children's book of limericks. We still work together on a poetry column for Creative Loafing. We work together in separate rooms. I don't look at her drawings, and she's not looking at my writing. At the end of the week, we come up with our 700-word essay, The Poet's Notebook. Every other Thursday, we pick up our Creative Loafing with our 700-word essay, looking at my writing. At the end of the week, we come up with our 700-word essay, The Poet's Notebook. Every other Thursday, we pick up our Creative Loafing with our 700-word essay, looking at my writing.

What would you say to someone wanting to go into poetry as a life's work?

I would say follow that dream, but you need a backup to know how you're going to live. Make sure you get a job that won't detract from your writing. That's why people end up in teaching. You can write in the summers.

Many poets have worked in advertising. Wallace Stevens worked in insurance. He didn't tell anyone he worked with that he was a poet, and when he won the Pulitzer Prize, the people in his office said, "What, our Wally?"

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The Secret Code by Peter Meinke

Bach was rising from another room
like a secret code in a mathematician's castle
when you came toward me in a summer dress
light slatted through the oaken banister
like a secret code in a mathematician's castle
floating down the stairway in the afternoon
light slatted through the oaken banister
an idea of harmony made manifest
floating down the stairway in the afternoon
striping your slender body like a strobe
an idea of harmony made manifest

The music wound you in a golden braid
striping your slender body like a strobe
and Bach and April and undying youth
would cling across the downward years
conspiring until I knew the dream
of Bach and April and undying youth

while Bach was rising from another room
—by Peter Meinke, from SCARS, 1996
first published in The Georgia Review, 1995

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Peter Meinke

Family: Jeanne Clark Meinke, wife of 61 years, four adult children
Hometown: Brooklyn, later in childhood, New Jersey
Current home: St. Petersburg since 1966
Education: Bachelor of Arts, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York, 1955; Master of Arts, University of Michigan, 1961; doctorate in English literature, University of Minnesota, 1965.
U.S. Army, 1955–57
Assistant professor: Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1961–66
Professor of Literature and director of writing workshop, Eckerd College, 1966–1993
Publications:
Fiction: The Piano Tuner, winner of the 1986 Flannery O’Connor Award, The Expert Witness
Children's books: most recently, The Elf Poem
Books of essays, including To Start With, Feel Fortunate, winner of 2017 William Meredith Award
Seven chapbooks of poetry, including Campocorto, winner of the Sow’s Ear Award

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Education:
Bachelor of Arts, Hamilton College, Clinton, New York, 1955; Master of Arts, University of Michigan, 1961; doctorate in English literature, University of Minnesota, 1965.

Hometown:
Brooklyn, later in childhood, New Jersey

Jeanne Clark Meinke, wife of 61 years, four adult children

Peter Meinke continued from Page 13
In the pink

By Patty Previc Graham

This photo was taken on one of my trips to St. Augustine while visiting a friend in Palatka. We happened upon all these birds, including this wood stork surrounded by roseate spoonbills, gathering by the bridge outside of St. Augustine heading toward A1A. I was so excited to see them – I’m always searching for birds to photograph. Photography has been my passion ever since growing up in Gainesville. I still return to visit my father and we try to hit the outdoors every time. One of the things I love most is experiencing nature and being able to photograph its beauty.

Patty Previc Graham is a retired registered nurse from Gainesville who lives in Macon, Georgia. Since her retirement, she’s been traveling frequently in search of nature to photograph. She is also a runner of marathons and half marathons. She has three grown children and one granddaughter.

Do you have a photo for State of Wonder? Please email Jacki Levine at jlevine@flahum.org
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