

On the Trail of Early 19th-century Freedom-Seeking People Across Gulf Coast Florida: Archaeological Clues to a Robust Heritage Hidden in Plain Sight

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The Trail Toward Liberty

Not everyone leaves tracks. Some move in the hopes of not being seen, not being found. Contemporary anthropologists realize the long-term consequences for successful hiding can be historical amnesia. This was nearly the case for the early 19th century freedom-seeking people of second Spanish period in Florida (1783-1821), whose heritage is being recognized by archival and archaeological research. The location of the southern route of the Underground Railroad, what the National Park Service rightly calls the Network to Freedom, is now being remembered, revealed, and recovered across the Florida Gulf Coast. Archaeologists are highlighting the sites for the self-emancipated people of African heritage and free Blacks, a network stretching from the Apalachicola River to the Manatee River and across to The Bahamas. Imagining these routes, the connections between the havens of liberty, exposes the courage of Black Seminoles for their descendants and for all of us who want to know their inspiring heritage.

Names as labels for people, contemporary or in the past, matter. Black Seminoles, freedom-seeking people, free Blacks, Exiles, and maroons - the multiplicity of names is part of the complexities and fluidity of identity for people of African heritage emancipating themselves from enslavement and struggling against the slave regime of the United States. Their individual identities are grouped as labels by those who did not fully understand their lives. Their history is tied to the landscapes of Florida. But since much of that past has been covered over, erased, and silenced, and more recently built upon or soon lost to sea levels, archaeological excavations are required and, as importantly, an archaeological imagination needed to reveal what is now hidden in the landscape. There are many questions and, increasingly there is

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material evidence for the lifeways and hints through the swamps, hammocks, and rivers of Florida about the places where people of African heritage found liberty for brief, but significant periods of time.

This tour of the freedom-seeking people focuses on the early 19th century Florida Gulf Coast; some of the locations are hidden in plain sight. The settlements were along major rivers entering the Gulf of Mexico, places where archaeological research has recovered and even reconstructed the landscapes of freedom. In one of those heritage sites, diasporic people have returned to celebrate on the ground their ancestors found liberty. The evidence for this early 19th century history is fragmentary and in the process of being organized, analyzed, and disseminated. Traveling across the contemporary landscape, the places can be missed. But the result of noticing this robust heritage animates understandings of history beneath our feet as we travel down the Florida peninsula.

One such location is publicly accessible in Bradenton, south of Tampa-St. Petersburg and just north of Sarasota. Bradenton, a city of more than 60,000 people, spreads along the south side of the Manatee River, one of the four rivers that empty into Tampa Bay. On the western edge of Bradenton, at De Soto National Memorial - a part of the National Park Service - visitors might notice a wooden fence marking off a small area of broken-down blocks of shell as the Tabby House Ruins.



Fig. 1- Remains of the Tabby House at DeSoto National Memorial. Photograph by author 11/2020

De Soto National Memorial is on the south side of the Manatee River. The river is one of four that enters Tampa Bay, and the national park conserves a point surrounded by water and mangroves. At De Soto Point, the Tabby House Ruins (8MA07 is the archaeological designation) consists of eroding blocks of tabby, a building material made by burning oyster shells to make lime which is mixed with sand, ash, water, and broken oyster shells, known from the early Spanish colonial period in Florida, are visible but are confusing as the oyster shell mix is eroding into the sandy ground and covered with decaying leaves. The casual visitor might wonder about the ruins in a park commemorating the 16th-century Hernando de Soto expedition that marched through the greater part of today's southeastern United States. Based on the sign, few visitors will have the information to connect the place to the larger history of freedom-seeking people, although that will soon change as with plans for 2021 excavations seeking new insights into the ruins

The sign, with the heading – Tabby House Ruins – is as confounding as the jumble of tabby: “Although the origin of the tabby ruins is not known for certain, William H. Shaw is credited with its construction soon after settling here in 1843. The Shaw family lived and worked here until a Seminole Indian uprising in 1856 drove them to Key West. Recent archaeological investigations suggest earlier use as a Spanish fishing camp beginning in the late 1700s.” Shown are ceramic sherds and a glass medicine bottle noted as “...recovered during the excavation of the Tabby House.” It takes focused archaeological expertise to recognize the age of those materials.



Fig. 2- The Sign for the Tabby House Ruins. Photograph by author.

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There is a section titled “What is Tabby?” describing the material (a mixture of oyster shells, lime, and water) and the construction technique. Tabby House is descriptive of the materials but stifles the history. An identification of the person and building takes up the entire sign, and on the bottom right: “Captain Tole Fogarty stands in the doorway of a tabby house.” Only someone well acquainted with Bradenton’s history will know of Fogarty, who lived not on what is now park property but further inland and had no documented connection to these ruins. The casual visitor might quickly move on, confused. The reader of the sign has no reason to know that William Shaw, his wife, his children, and his four slaves would not all have lived in that small area marked by the eroding tabby blocks. After Shaw abandoned the point, the building became a tavern, and during the Civil War it was an outpost that, as Merab-Michal Favorite (2013:18) believes, used the nearby pre-Columbian mound as a lookout. The archaeological record suggests that was not the first use of building and mound as a place for sentinels.

What the archaeological site represents is more complex than the jumble of oyster shells from the Manatee, formerly the Oyster River: it contains elements of a history of freedom-seeking people on the early 19th century Florida Gulf Coast, a barely recognized chapter in the history of the peninsula. This history includes freedom-seeking people of African heritage, resisting slavery and fighting with the British against the United States, British soldiers and merchants, Cuban fisherfolk, Seminoles and other Native Americans, as well as American slave raiders. A tour of the Gulf Coast, spatially and temporally, can reveal the ruins as part of an impressive heritage during the early 19th century.

The precursor to the Florida Trail, from Pensacola to Big Cypress, is part of a route for freedom-seeking peoples in the early 19th century. People escaping enslavement and military attacks were searching for a haven of liberty, and they found havens at the Apalachicola River, at the Suwannee River, and ultimately at the Manatee River before events forced them into exile into the Florida interior where they would fight as Black Seminoles, or Andros Island where they and their descendants found liberty. I approach their history as an archaeologist committed to public engagement, even while knowing people in flight would not leave much in terms of archaeological

remains and few know this past. With so little in the archives on this history, archaeological research is necessary: the long 19th century war against the Seminole peoples (usually labeled as three separate wars by the American military: 1814-1818, 1835-1842, and 1855-1858) terrorized people and muffled memories through battlefield deaths and exile, to Indian Territory/ Oklahoma and elsewhere. While the courage and determination of the freedom-seeking peoples leave little archival evidence from the view of those seeking liberty, their spirit matters to descendants and others. The fragments from and the geography of the havens of freedom – at the Apalachicola River, Suwannee River, Manatee River, and Cape Florida – help us recover inspiration from people we can call Black Seminoles for their specific histories in Florida, or maroons to situate them as part of a larger movement for Black freedom across the Caribbean.



Fig. 3- Map of African Florida

Pre-History Through an Anti-Racist Post-Colonial Lens: Looking Beneath the Surface

Archaeologists traditionally employ prehistory to describe human history before writing. Maroon history is not ‘prehistory’ as archaeologists once used the term; the events occurred about two hundred years ago, distant but not ancient. But maroons, by escaping and resisting slavery, hide from the gaze of those who enter information into the archives, the resource for traditional

history. Maroon archaeology therefore is challenging, looking for evidence of people who did not want to be found. With successful excavations, maroon archaeology highlights the material evidence that confronts racism in the present and past. The simple, profound notion that no one wants to be enslaved. When uncovered, marronage exposes the courage of those who create citadels of liberty and havens of freedom.

Archaeological research is often referred to as detective work on a puzzle, a puzzle missing many if not most of its pieces (due to the extent of deposition of material culture, differential conservation of materials, and sampling by excavations). Not all those pieces are not missing simply because of time but some are destroyed and decolonizing approaches expose those uneven power relations and their historical legacies. By incorporating landscapes into the puzzle of the freedom-seeking people's lives a different perspective on the past comes forward. Landscapes are a perspective on a place, a convergence of people and environmental elements that incorporates tangible and intangible values for people. As a convergence, landscapes are a meeting place for social meaning both for those who dwell in the place and for those who study and represent history, culture, and power at a given time there. For archaeologists, landscape is a broad framework that recognizes how people engaged and challenged and were challenged by and remembered places. For archaeological research, walking a landscape offers clues for further investigations and the landscapes of Gulf Coast Florida has places where maroons created freedom.

Early 19th-century African Florida

Ever since 1693 when Charles II the Habsburg ruler of the Spanish Empire offered freedom to all runaways seeking asylum in Florida, the peninsula has been known as a haven for liberty from enslavement. That materialized in the northeast corner of La Florida as Garcia Real de Santa Teresa de Mosé, better known as Fort Mosé, a community of free Blacks that continued until 1763, when Spain transferred control over Florida to Great Britain and, officially, the Black warriors moved to Spanish Cuba though some might have gone into the Florida interior.

With the American Revolution, Spain regained Florida in 1783. Decades later, freedom-seeking peoples gathered at a British engineered fortification at Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River. Starting in 1814 hundreds of free Blacks, Native Americans, and others congregated at the fort, and many more settled up and down the Apalachicola River to farm the land. The location was recognized as a threat by the United States, specifically by Andrew Jackson who had won a military victory over the British at New Orleans just as the War of 1812 ended. In July 1816, a US naval expedition sailed up the Apalachicola River and attacked the citadel of freedom they called the ‘Negro Fort and destroyed the fortification;’ Nathaniel Millett (2013) accurately calls the community at and around the fort a marronage. The brutal events at Prospect Bluff were well-known in their era – the international implications concerned diplomats in Great Britain, Spain, and the United States. But the story has been muffled through the 20th century and today the remains of the fort are part of the Apalachicola National Forest, with Prospect Bluff commemorated not as the citadel of liberty, but rather this stronghold for maroons and Native American is listed as just one of the several forts that overlooked the river during the 19th century, a multiplicity that muffles its significance.

The decisive destruction at Prospect Bluff in 1816 led to the deaths of hundreds and the seizure of many people of African heritage and Native Americans. But the resistance to slavery was not broken. Some of the freedom-seeking people escaped: with British naval support by sea to the southern river of Tampa Bay or by land to Billy Bowlegs’ Seminole town on the Suwannee River. The maroons had allies and supporters, and the struggle for freedom continued. At Suwannee, the survivors found shelter and established hamlets south of the river. The threats of violence were not over. In April 1818, Andrew Jackson organized a military raid that destroyed the homes and fields; survivors fled to the Manatee River by land and sea, enlarging the community of Angola. Their history is their own but the heritage for these freedom-seekers harken back to ancient stories of self-emancipated people crossing the waters for liberty. Little material culture remains when people escape bondage, so the few tangible objects are tremendously meaningful.

Traveling by Land: An Accidental Find at the Little Manatee River

People fleeing oppression, falling back as a strategy in the fight against the slave regime does not leave much of a material record (*Baram 2014a, Baram 2015*). The trails for individuals and groups of people heading south down the Gulf Coast of Florida to the havens of liberty are now under roads and other development built up over the last two centuries. But archaeology focuses on recovering material traces and, as any experienced archaeologist will admit, sometimes luck is required for important finds.

One such find came in 1967 with a potential key insight into the southward movement of maroons through Gulf Coast Florida. A fisherman, visiting Tampa Bay from Indiana, found an unusual object in the banks of the Little Manatee River. Seeing a wooden tube with the six pegs led to speculation that it was a fish trap. Luckily for scholars of African Florida, the fisherman, Thomas J. Bush of Indianapolis, was curious enough about the object to record useful details that are archived with the artifact at the Florida Museum of Natural History. Lucky is the right word - the fisherman could have discarded the object, and we would never have known such an object existed. Mr. Bush wrote to the Florida Conservation Department in February 1967, describing the location where the Little Manatee River crosses State Road 301 in Parris. It turns out the object was a drum; Jane Landers (1999: 232) notes in *Black Society in Florida* the drum was made of mahogany and west African inspired. Because of the haphazard nature of the finding, we will never know the date of the deposition of the drum but, with one side burnt, the drum is intriguing as possibly left behind or buried when a maroon sought Angola some twenty kilometers away from that riverbank (*Baram 2014b*).

Traveling by Sea: Remains of a Tabby House

Archaeologists do not have to rely only on lucky finds. At the mouth of the Manatee River is one of the smallest units of the National Park system: De Soto National Memorial. A small park, yet it attracts what is considered by the National Park Service as an average number of visitors (*Whisnant and*

Whisnant 2007:1), with residents walking their dogs, local community members enjoying the pathways, and tourists attracted by heritage – cultural and ecological. There is a fascinating heritage under the feet of those who walk through the 25-acre park, some of which has been excavated and available for research.

The puzzle cliché for archaeology is exemplified at De Soto National Memorial. As part of the National Park Service, the property commemorates the 1539-1542 Hernando De Soto Expedition. Its archaeological record contains pre-Columbian remains and enigmatic historic-period material remains unrelated to De Soto but preserved by the park. The park was created by executive order, as Whisnant and Whisnant (2007:6) explain, to focus on telling the De Soto Expedition saga in Bradenton; scholars debate the exact landing location for the De Soto expedition but agree it was not on the park property. That confusion is amplified for the puzzle of the Tabby House ruin and its interpretive sign that misrepresents the remains as belonging to William Shaw, the 1843 settler of the point who might have used the structure but probably did not construct it.

The Tabby House Ruins, as they are known, sit on what was known as Shaw's Point (and continues to be the archaeological name for the complex of pre-Columbian mounds and the ruins), a small spit of land that juts out into the Manatee River as it empties into Tampa Bay. Commanding a good view of the bay's entrance and with a sheltered cove on its east side, the tabby structure was located for trade, transportation, and communication in a time and place where the waterways were the principle means of travel. The Manatee River connected Shaw's Point to the interior of Florida, wending its way inland a full 50 miles to its source near Florida's central ridge, while Tampa Bay is a strategic harbor linked to the Gulf of Mexico and the circum-Caribbean world.

The tangle of tabby blocks is difficult to read and the history that demonstrates their significance is similarly hard to convey concisely. Local history offers possibilities for the tabby house ruins; there is no Spanish-era documentation on the structure. The initial Anglo-American settlement of the Manatee River came with the Armed Occupation Act of 1842. Josiah Gates is the most famous settler by the Manatee Mineral Spring, a settlement

that became the Village of Manatee. Local folklore from the village's founding family has the site associated with a Spanish mission or a Cuban fishing rancho. In the later 1800s the site is known to have been a Second Seminole War fort, Civil War outpost, tavern, post office, quarantine station, and yellow fever cemetery. But in 1842, when the Manatee River was the Florida frontier, it was William Shaw from Key West who staked his claim to the point of land that would later bear his name. Difficult and complex as these stories are, it is clear that there is evidence to suggest that this site also may be the key to the maroon history of the region.

The Manatee River is a part of Tampa Bay and a major transit point for the Gulf of Mexico. Its location is strategically important. Cantor Brown (1990, 2005) argues for a connection between the settlement of Angola and the British filibusters (members of an unauthorized military expedition into a foreign territory to foment or support a revolution) who were operating in Florida against United States interests. The Tabby House Ruins could have been an important piece of that effort – a storehouse for the British supporters of the maroons.

Sherry Robinson Svekis in a 2005 New College of Florida honors thesis examined the historical archaeological evidence for the site and concluded the ground reveals the early 19th century maroon history for the region. That conclusion, after decades of interest, is leading the National Park Service to renewed excavations in 2021. The promise of archaeology is to reveal more of the material evidence from the site, and, hopefully in time to avoid rising sea levels erasing the site – the spit of land is facing inundation, one of the large problems for the small park as Whisnant and Whisnant (2007) in their study of the park.

For those walking through the park, archaeological research reveals the Tabby House Ruins as potentially a British trading post and location of the clandestine efforts of Edward Nicolls, Gregor McGregor, George Woodbine, Robert C. Ambrister, and Alexander Arbuthnot. These men are known to scholars of Florida's history as supporters of the anti-slavery struggle who organized and traded with people of African Heritage in early 19th century Spanish Florida. The ruins might have been at or near a landing place as those military officers facilitated the escape of survivors of the July 1816

battle of Prospect Bluff by sea to Tampa Bay. The details of the escape, like so much of this history of freedom, seemingly never entered the archival record. Some of the archaeological evidence of their lives is found by the Manatee Mineral Spring, six miles upriver from the Tabby House Ruins at De Soto National Memorial.

Life on the Banks of the Manatee River

A drum buried in the bank of the Little Manatee River and a tangle of tabby blocks by the mouth of the Manatee River and a few other clues were all an interdisciplinary research team had when a community scholar organized a research project looking for Angola, for the early 19th century maroon community on the Manatee River on the Gulf Coast of Florida. Almost nothing made by humans is ever really completely lost and small-scale archaeological excavations on the south side of the Manatee River revealed traces of Angola (*Baram 2014a*). What had been a cleared field by the Manatee Mineral Spring, a city park, preserved material evidence for the freedom-seeking peoples. As much as the surface hid those remains, history had similarly nearly covered over the historic episode of freedom. From large-scale excavations completed in January 2020, laboratory analysis is already hinting at the daily life of the early 19th century maroons. The evidence is pieced together from Prospect Bluff and the synthesis of archival sources (*Brown 1990 and 2005, Millett 2013; Weik 2012*). The effort is antiracist in recognizing the struggles of people of African heritage against state-organized oppression and large-scale exploitation. Situating the many peoples we are calling maroons in terms of their strengths and achievements, breaks through racist ideas and re-orient the history of the Florida Gulf Coast away from timeless nature and into a haven of freedom struggles, highlighting what is not visible on the contemporary surface by excavating into the ground.

The key finding from the archaeological record supports the argument by Nathaniel Millet (2013) on the identification of the maroons with the promise, made by Edward Nicholls and Alexander Cochrane, that serving with the British would provide liberty. Although Tampa Bay was part of second Spanish period Florida, the early 19th century belongings recovered near the Manatee Mineral Spring were British in origin. Thanks to decades

of efforts in Historical Archaeology, usually recognized as the archaeology of the last five hundred years in North America, the excavated material evidence is from the late 18th century through early 19th century – the period of the marronage on the Manatee River. The proposition is that the maroons used British material culture as part of their quotidian lives in Spanish La Florida, to show themselves as free British subjects.

Having escaped by land and sea to the haven by the Manatee River, the maroons of Angola lived lives focused on small groups farming the land. Recently recovered animal bones suggest dog, pig, cattle; shells include crab and clams; archival sources (*Baram 2012*) indicate maize, beans, pumpkin, and herbs. Architectural traces along with archival sources suggest wooden cabins. Clay tobacco pipes, British mass-produced pearlware fragments, and miscellaneous objects hint at dining and leisure activities. The excavations recovered materials by the Manatee Mineral Spring, an area probably used as a warning station to keep an eye out for US naval ships coming down the Manatee River.

The maroons rebuilt their lives in the area between the Braden River, the Manatee River, and Sarasota Bay. Joshua Reed Giddings (1863) describes, in biblical fashion, the Exiles, those living in Spanish La Florida, as “...quietly enjoying their freedom; each sitting under his own vine and fig-tree, without molestation or fear. Many had been born in the Seminole country, and now saw around them children and grandchildren in the enjoyment of all the necessities of life.” The enjoyment lasted until early summer 1821, broken by a raid that spread terror across the Florida Gulf Coast. From the capturers we have some of the names of the people of Angola.

The Peoples of Angola

A central goal of archaeology is to save the lives of people who have passed, and for Angola the present faces layers of silences and erasures about the freedom-seeking peoples. Scholars of the archival past (Canter Brown Jr., Nathaniel Millet, Jane Landers) have pieced together the fragments of the history and recovered the names of people who were and might have been at Angola on the Manatee River. Ethnographic research by Rosalyn Howard (2002) connects the descendants of survivors with their freedom-seeking

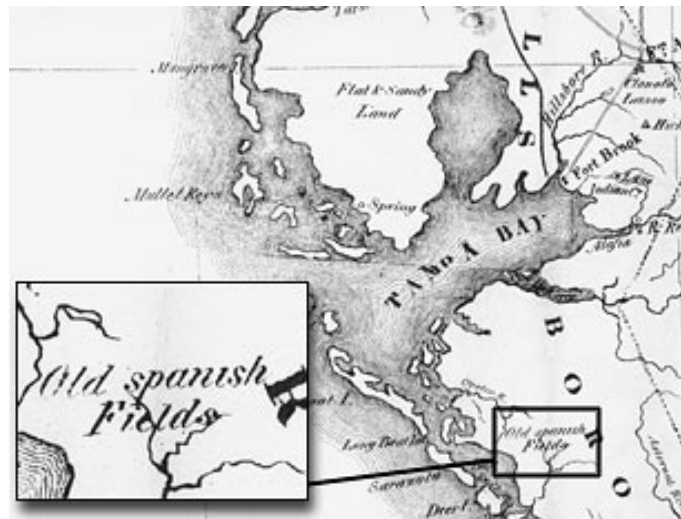


Fig. 4- Close-up of the John Lee Williams map of the Territory of Florida showing the Oyster River and Sarasota Bay. Angola's crops are marked as the Old Spanish Fields (Baram 2012)

ancestors. Archaeological materials do not identify any individuals, but the thrust of historical archaeology has been to recover voices of those whose humanity did not enter the archival record through material culture and cultural landscapes.

A crucial link comes from Rosalyn Howard's research, where she connects two names on a British list of people on Andros Island to two who escaped after capture on the Florida Gulf Coast. In the most recognizable manner, Sipa (or Scipio) Bowleg and Prince McQueen are the link between the military raid that terrorized the maroon communities of the Florida Gulf Coast in early summer 1821 and the settlement in the British Bahamas that same year. Rosalyn Howard (2002) traces the genealogy of Scipio to the present generation. Others on the list include Nancy and her two children, Jim who is listed as coming from the Estate of George Washington, and Manuel identified as a Spanish deserter. The maroon community was a cosmopolitan one, with fluid identities that belie our contemporary categories (Baram 2019). Jane Landers (2010) in representing these peoples as Atlantic Creoles and the continuities that are possible, though not established, suggests that famous Black Seminoles were part of the marronage and stayed in the peninsula when others found freedom on Andros Island. Of those who stayed in the peninsula, three became well-known to Anglo-Americans:

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Abraham (1787- c.1870), John Horse (c. 1812–1882), and Luis Fatio Pacheco (1800-1895). They and the others in Florida of African heritage are known as Black Seminoles, an identity forged during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842; for the Seminoles, a chapter in a century long battle for their homeland). The Black Seminoles, allies of the Seminole peoples, multi-lingual, and fighters for freedom, are legacies in the spirit of Angola.

Violence has erased the possibility of recovering the trail from northern Florida southward and the transformations from maroons to Black Seminoles. But travel by sea and by land hallows the ground known as the southern route of the Underground Railroad. Archaeology offers a means to remember through the traditional technique of reconstruction based on findings but with today's digital technology interaction more is possible.

Reconstructing and Remembering the Landscape of Early 19th-century Marronage

In 2016, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the destruction at Prospect Bluff a Florida Humanities Council-funded project facilitated a digital reconstruction of the landscapes for Prospect Bluff and the Manatee Mineral Spring. Traditionally archaeologists write up their analyses and interpretations of what places were like for the epoch of their research focus. Some write beautiful engaging prose while most descriptions lie flat on a page. Recognizing the significance of commemoration and not having the long timeline for an academic publication - as well as seeking a broader audience, the work for disseminating the archeological insights into the maroon communities of the Florida Gulf came alive with a virtual world.

The goal of the virtual world reconstruction of the maroon landscapes is to allow keystrokes to replicate footsteps, to immerse oneself on the early 19th century landscape and to look around the houses, fields, and plants as if one was with the maroons in their struggle for freedom.

A virtual world is a computer-based simulated environment (found online at <http://tragedyandsurvival.timesifters.org/>). For the Manatee

Mineral Spring virtual world, the landscape consists of houses based on the archaeological evidence of postmolds and analogies to an 1837 lithograph of a northern Florida Seminole town, the crops recovered by heritage and archival research (Baram 2012), and local knowledge that the Manatee Mineral Spring flowed into a pond. The programming allows the viewer to enter the landscape and walk around the riverbank, the pond, the houses, and even up the pre-Columbian mound to view the river (the maroons would have been on the lookout for US naval ships coming up the Manatee River). The goal of the interpretation is engagement to inspire a sense of what the haven of liberty was like before its destruction in 1821.

The two hundredth anniversary of the tragedy at Prospect Bluff led to continuing public presentations and community support spread information and insights like ripples on a pond. That interest led to plans for extending Bradenton's Riverwalk, a more than a mile long green space along south bank of the Manatee River, to the Manatee Mineral Spring; that expansion includes plans to revitalize the current park. Recognizing that the landscape transformation for the park would impact the archaeological record by the Manatee Mineral Spring, the City of Bradenton responded to public interest in Angola and funded January 2020 excavations. The archaeological research



Fig. 5- Digital Reconstruction of Angola at the Manatee Mineral Spring



Fig. 6- Digital Reconstruction of Angola at the Manatee Mineral Spring showing corn, pumpkin, beans

design included testing the virtual landscape as a model for the maroon community. The results are preliminary but finds are fitting the model. The early 19th century maroon landscape is under other landscapes: the mid-19th Village of Manatee and the 20th century urban filling of the area to level the ground for mid-20th century construction. Initial impressions from the excavations (a full report will be forthcoming in 2022) indicate structures, burials of dogs and a cat, small pits with sacred items, and the consumption of fish, shellfish, cows, pigs, and other mammals. The archaeology offers an avenue to the ancestors of people who have been living in freedom in the Bahamas for generations, a remembrance of struggles and survival of the peoples by the Manatee Mineral Spring two hundred years ago.

Descendants Returning to Celebrate and to Excavate

A decade ago, walking past the Tabby House Ruins or by the Manatee Mineral Spring, nothing indicated a history of freedom-seeking people. The parks seemed like ordinary preserved natural places. Florida Humanities Council funded heritage interpretation signs, placed around the Manatee Mineral Spring Park in 2013, told of the many histories from the pre-Columbian Native Americans through Spanish exploration, Angola,

and the Village of Manatee among other facets of the previous landscapes. One visitor recognized the mention of Andros Island on the sign for Angola, the birthplace of her mother. Daphney Towns organized a Back to Angola Festival in July 2018 and again in July 2019 that brought family and friends from Andros Island to walk the land where their ancestors found liberty two hundred years ago.

Connecting place to descendants makes the archaeological research especially meaningful. Rosalyn Howard (2002) provides an ethnographic perspective on the descendant community in Red Bays, Andros Island, The Bahamas and her efforts continue to animate the archaeological research into the excavations from January 2020. The materials are belongings, rather than artifacts, items used by peoples who struggled against slavery and racism and belong to their descendants who live in liberty today. An even more immediate connection came when Jason Brown, a descendant trained in archaeology came from Atlanta, Georgia, to join the January 2020 excavations. In an interview on January 21, 2020 by local television news: (<https://www.mysuncoast.com/video/2020/01/21/archaeological-site-opens-mlk-day/>) Brown says: "...very emotional feeling to know that you're walking the ground and then knowing the historical circumstances in which they [his ancestors] desired to be free. I'm only free because they desired to be free." To reach the excavation site, Jason Brown drove down I-75: a reminder that the pathways down the peninsula still offers a pathway to a heritage of freedom.

The ones who wanted to destroy the havens of freedom in Spanish La Florida labeled these people as property and organized a hostile raid succeeded in destroying Angola and the other maroon communities on Florida's Gulf Coast. They nearly succeeded in erasing the memory of Angola from history; luckily the light of freedom shines brightly as a beacon, pointing to a trail that goes down the Florida peninsula. Archaeological research unearths what had been destroyed and the spirit of freedom lived on. The descendants returned, in freedom. The Back to Angola festivals in Bradenton celebrate the food, music, and art of Red Bays, Andros Island, with the heirs of those who found liberty by the Manatee Mineral Spring two centuries earlier.

For those interested in commemorating and understanding this heritage in Florida, the Florida Trail provides sights, sounds, smells evocative of the landscapes encountered by the early 19th century maroons. Danger along the Trail is not unknown for today's travelers, but these modern challenges in the swamps, hammocks, and rivers are excellent reminders of the courage and determination that made this part of Florida a place of liberty. The sites encountered here are on the coastal zone where the erasures of maroon history are facing rising sea levels – new challenges for remembering the heritage of the freedom-seeking peoples of Florida's past landscape.

The 2019 National Park Service decision to recognize the Manatee Mineral Spring as part of the Network to Freedom marks a moment in history for freedom-seeking people and their complicit allies; the politics and moral decisions to confront enslavement and support refuges of liberty for the self-emancipated and their descendants, where seen during walks through Florida, is a source of inspiration for facing the challenges of the present and future.

Acknowledgements

Engaging the heritage, history, and archaeology of the marronage by the Manatee River has been ongoing for more than fifteen years: still much more research and dissemination of the insights ahead. Vickie Oldham and Canter Brown, Jr., ignited my commitment; Rosalyn Howard, Terry Weik, Sherry Svekis, Trudy Williams, Edward Gonzalez-Tennant, and many others supported the collective effort; Daphney Towns and Jason Brown integrated heritage into the archaeology. For this essay, Tom Hallock suggested walking the areas by the Manatee River to bring together the fragments from the contemporary landscape to understandings of the heritage beneath our feet; his suggestions will continue to inform my efforts. Casey Blanton provided editorial suggestions that improved the manuscript. All shortcomings in the presentation are my responsibility.

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