

12-1-1992

***Excavations on the Franciscan Frontier: Archaeology at the Fig Springs Missions* by Brent Richards Weisman**

Nancy Marie White
University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory>

Recommended Citation

White, Nancy Marie (1992) "*Excavations on the Franciscan Frontier: Archaeology at the Fig Springs Missions* by Brent Richards Weisman," *Tampa Bay History*. Vol. 14 : Iss. 2 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/tampabayhistory/vol14/iss2/8>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Tampa Bay History by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

Hoffman has excellent knowledge of Spanish archival material and a solid understanding of sixteenth-century Spanish paleography. The part of his book dealing with Spain is firmly based on original documentation with very little attention to secondary material. (He does not even cite the 1944 pioneer work of Verne E. Chatelain.) The French and English episodes are drawn on pivotal sources, but basically primary printed material. The same goes for the cartographic data, aided by excellent secondary sources, such as Lawrence Wroth's 1970 book on Verrazano.

There is no use of French archives. My own contention has always been that we have thoroughly neglected them. I believe that important unused French documents regarding the early North American Southeast rest in the French archives. This is basically because few historians of the so-called colonial Spanish Southeast are competent in French paleography, to which must be added (I draw on my own experience) the greater difficulty, including bureaucratic obstacles, of working in French archives, compared to those of Spain and England.

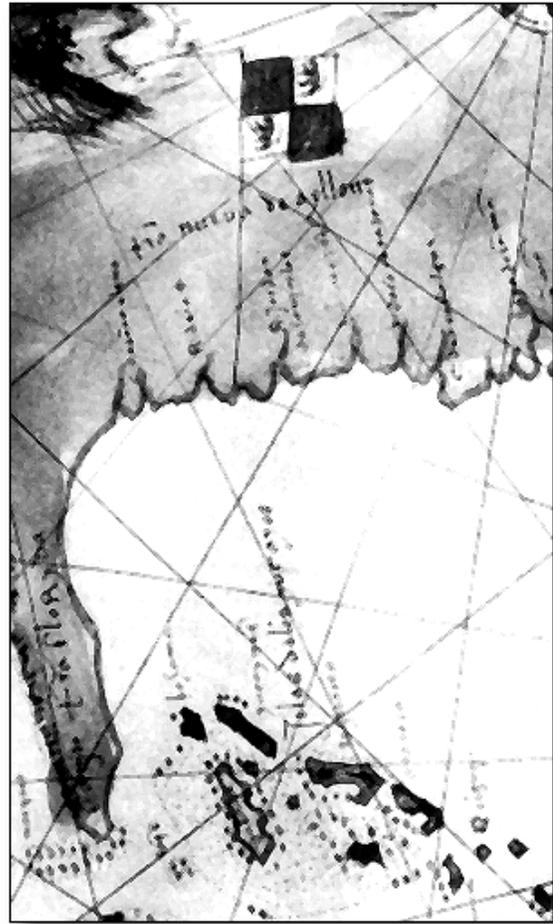
The book has twelve good maps; more would be welcomed. Notes (at the bottom of the page) and the bibliography are in traditional presentation for a research monograph. The index appears well done.

Finally, for the Florida history student Hoffman defines the term "La Florida" as all of the Spanish Southeast (including the important Chesapeake Bay). The term "Florida" is used to designate the area of what is today the state of Florida.

Charles W. Arnade

Excavations on the Franciscan Frontier: Archaeology at the Fig Springs Missions. By Brent Richards Weisman. Gainesville, Florida. 1992. University Press of Florida. Florida Museum of Natural History/Ripley P. Bullen Series. Pp. xvii. 252. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$29.95.

By now the Columbus quincentenary has inspired so many new works, scholarly and popular, concerning the interaction of Europeans and Native Americans that one might think there is little left to say. In reality, of course, we are just beginning to learn the right questions to ask and



The southeastern coast of North America, as depicted by Juan Vespucci in 1526.

Photograph from *A New Andalusia*, by Paul E. Hoffman.

realizing the scarcity of sources in which to search for answers. An advantage of archaeology is that excavation always brings out something new. The task then is to see if the information confirms previous answers or not.

Brent Weisman has produced a fascinating account of his 1988-89 excavations at the Fig Springs Mission site at Ichetucknee Springs State Park located in the Suwannee River valley northwest of Gainesville. Believed to be the early seventeenth-century Franciscan mission of San Martin de Timucua, the site produced thousands of Spanish and aboriginal artifacts, architectural details of the church, cemetery, convento (priest's residence) and aboriginal dwellings, and even plant and animal remains. All demonstrate the blending of native and Spanish cultures. Compared with better known missions at centers such as St. Augustine and Tallahassee, Fig Springs was a frontier station in Timucua province, inhabited by perhaps 100 Indians and a priest. Weisman skillfully tells the story of its discovery from 1949, when archaeologist John Goggin found Spanish pottery underwater, to the late 1980s, when the actual settlement was located up the hill from the spring in a beautiful forest setting. He carefully describes the history of Florida mission investigations and the painstaking archaeological methods of testing, excavation, dating, and artifact processing and analysis. He then explores the meaning of all the findings in relation to areas of different activities at the site, such as food preparation and building construction, as well as to the wider cultural systems of politics, society, and religion.

Wonderful details emerge to flesh out the meager historical record of this site and time period. Thousands of artifacts were recovered: typical and unusual Indian pottery, stone and cut shell artifacts, as well as a wide range of Spanish items including nails and spikes, olive jar and majolica pottery shards, glass beads, pins, tools, and other metal, and even religious items of gold such as a Catholic cult medallion and a possible rosary ornament. Evidence in the ground indicated the church was specially constructed on a raised, prepared clay floor with square hewn posts, as contrasted with the sand-floored aboriginal dwelling made with round posts. Appendices document details of pottery types and the continued native subsistence pattern based on maize horticulture and wild foods, such as deer, small game, birds, fish, turtles, acorns, nuts, and fruits, supplemented by Old World crops such as peaches, a very small amount of wheat (which was not too successful), and even watermelon.

This book will appeal to both scholars and general readers. Specialists will be delighted by the excellent scientific treatment and data tabulations with lists of measurements, including both counts and weights for ceramic shards, for example. General readers will be pleased with the rich description in clear, accessible language and the excellent presentation of so many aspects of the life of this small community, from mundane details of everyday life to the psychology of the use of space and fusing of Indian and Spanish traditions of sacred versus secular activity. Pressed to comment on the book's shortcomings, I could only mention petty items such as the lack of clarity of some artifact photos, or failure to identify all the people in photo captions, in this otherwise well edited volume.

Weisman cautions that he has uncovered only a portion of the story. Work continues at Fig Springs, including exploration of the earlier prehistoric aboriginal culture and analysis of cemetery burials. But he has brought forth vividly the wealth of information recovered so far, and he has many suggestions for future research. Intriguing mysteries remain, such as the actual

ethnic identity of the indigenous people. But this book is a major contribution toward understanding the unique and complex culture that was “the product of the frontier interaction between priest and Indian.”

Nancy Marie White

Flagler: Rockefeller Partner and Florida Baron. By Edward N. Akin. Gainesville, Florida. 1992. University Press of Florida. Pp. xiii, 305. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Paper \$16.95.

The late Edward Akin spent fifteen years compiling this fascinating picture of businessman Henry Morrison Flagler. Flagler’s birth in upstate New York, his decision to earn his livelihood at fourteen, his early success as an Ohio merchant, and his ultimate bankruptcy as a salt manufacturer are all shown to be a prelude to his amazing success as a partner in the Standard Oil Company. Although forced to start his business life over, Flagler set a new course, and his life goal of seeking wealth was in motion again.

The author first develops the various roles Flagler played during his active years as a full partner of John D. Rockefeller with their desks back-to-back during those start-up days at Standard in Cleveland. Although Flagler most likely brought some money to the arrangement, his most valuable contribution was his “business genius: a shrewdness in identifying new opportunities and then capitalizing on their potential” (27). Flagler is shown to be the skillful negotiator with the railroads and canal companies for favorable freight rates, with fellow refiners for “associations,” and with federal and state lawmakers for advantageous laws and regulations. His familiarity with contracts as a result of these negotiations made Flagler the company legalist.

The author suggests that working at the giant Standard lost its appeal for Flagler who then turned his energies to developing Florida. Flagler attempted to control all the forces necessary to convert historic St. Augustine to “the Newport of the South” (116). Advertising, transportation, electricity, water, hotels, churches, shopping arcades, baths and cottages were all built, brought or renovated toward that end. Although the new “Newport” never quite materialized, the experience and energy of the attempt prepared Flagler for later, more successful developments at Palm Beach, Miami, and finally the railroad extension to Key West.

This book portrays Henry Flagler as the builder and business man who fulfilled the American Dream of rising from humble beginnings to great wealth. We meet his family, friends, and acquaintances. We see his motives, share his failures, and successes. It is an excellent look at the business world from just before the Civil War until the beginning of World War I and an important supplement to the relatively few available readings about the man.

R. Randolph Stevens

The Historic Places of Pasco County. By James J. Horgan, Alice F. Hall and Edward J. Herrmann. Dade City, Florida. 1992. Pasco County Historical Preservation Committee. Pp. ix, 230. Illustrations. Index. Paper \$5.00.