

SILVER SPRINGS: THE FLORIDA INTERIOR IN THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION

By

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A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2011

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To Mom and Dad
Now you can finally tell everyone that your son is a doctor.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my entire committee for their thoughtful comments, critiques, and overall consideration. The chair, Dr. Jack E. Davis, has earned my unending gratitude both for his patience and for putting me—and keeping me—on track toward a final product of which I can be proud.

Many members of the faculty of the Department of History were very supportive throughout my time at the University of Florida. Also, this would have been a far less rewarding experience were it not for many of my colleagues and classmates in the graduate program. I also am indebted to the outstanding administrative staff of the Department of History for their tireless efforts in keeping me enrolled and on track. I thank all involved for the opportunity and for the ongoing support.

The Ray and Mitchum families, the Cheatoms, Jim Buckner, David Cook, and Tim Hollis all graciously gave of their time and hospitality to help me with this work, as did the DeBary family at the Marion County Museum of History and Scott Mitchell at the Silver River Museum and Environmental Center. David Breslauer has my gratitude for providing a copy of his book. Dalton Delan provided unparalleled assistance in proofreading this work, and he did so voluntarily.

Countless unknown or overlooked staff members at various libraries provided invaluable assistance, not only at the University of Florida's campus facilities and collections, but also at the State Library and Archives of Florida in Tallahassee, and also at countless other institutions around the country thanks to the Interlibrary Loan system. Further, the many unsung people and parties who have helped scan and archive materials at various institutions for electronic retrieval made this project infinitely easier and can not be thanked enough. Likewise, numerous people who I have never

met in person have my undying gratitude for all manner of technical support related to this project. Technology has been as much an enemy at times as it has been an ally in this work.

I would also like to thank John Soety for his ongoing inspiration and encouragement that one day I “really should learn some history.” The entire Bergren clan deserves special thanks, as does the “Jean George Experience,” for showing me aspects of Florida so bizarre that Carl Hiassen would shake his head in disbelief. Countless other friends and acquaintances have also kept me on track and on my toes in pursuit of this project, often simply by asking if I ever planned on finishing this dissertation. Finally, the lovely and talented Lauren Sonis has remained inexplicably supportive and tolerant throughout.

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August 2011

Chair: Jack E. Davis

Major: History

This dissertation examines how the interior and coastal parts of Florida have redefined each other and, in doing so, reshaped how they have been perceived and encountered in the American tourist experience. By examining the history of Silver Springs and the surrounding areas from the Spanish period to the present, the work explores the concept of interior space in the American imagination. While Florida is best known for its resort communities and beaches, at one time the coast, other than a handful of seaports, was of secondary importance economically and culturally either to Florida or to its visitors and immigrants. Silver Springs, for example, was the state's first significant tourist attraction as well as the largest representative of the state's unsurpassed collection of freshwater springs. Long before beaches and resorts and theme parks defined Florida, nature did. The changing ways in which Americans have viewed nature has had an enormous impact on how they have interpreted their surroundings. In the case of Florida, those changing perceptions have led to interpretations of the Florida interior as both wasteland and fountain, wilderness and garden. Throughout, the Florida interior has remained a critical lens through which

Americans have viewed Florida, and through which Florida has reimagined and reinvented itself.

In the nineteenth century, Florida was known through literary and artistic depictions and in travelers' journals for its interior nature—springs, wetlands, hardwood hammocks, its fertile soils, and the wildlife that inhabited these places. Interior Florida was a principal subject of art and literature (visited by the most important writers and artists of the late nineteenth century), and a subject of much discussion among policymakers and business entrepreneurs. Similar to the American West, it was a territory that had been tamed and its native peoples dispossessed of their lands. Still, it also entered the American imagination as more than mere frontier. Its history is the long story of the American relationship with the natural environment, the quest for individual prosperity, the emergence of a mass consumption culture, and the transition to a post-World War II society increasingly defined by speed, technology, and artificiality. At the center of all this has been Silver Springs—unique ecosystem, natural resource (as defined by humans), riverside tourist attraction, roadside tourist attraction, movie and television set, modern theme park, and nostalgic natural place.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The first time I kayaked from the mouth of the Silver River to its springhead, Silver Springs, I was amazed at the beauty and tranquility of the experience. Other than the dull hum of the occasional power boater idling by and the decidedly out of place occasional chattering of rhesus monkeys along the shore (both twentieth-century additions to the local environment), the river was completely serene. Left alone to gaze down into the crystal clear water at long-nose gar and bluegill and to admire the great blue heron and wood storks stalking along the shore, I imagined myself in the Florida of the eighteenth century, a latter-day William Bartram alone in an undiscovered country.

As I approached the springhead, however, I was surprised and annoyed by the growing sound of country music. Who, I wondered, could be blaring a radio that loudly without suffering the wrath of the authorities or fellow boaters? When I emerged into the springhead, I was amazed at the incongruous scene I had come upon.

Amidst a now carnival-like atmosphere of rides and attractions, I had, for all intents and purposes, paddled into an Oak Ridge Boys concert. Having approached Silver Springs from the river, I had not been aware that the springhead was the site of a 57-acre theme park of exhibits, rides, and even a concert venue. I had passed within two miles of this place dozens of times, traveling between Tallahassee and DeLand, but State Road 326, two miles east of the attraction looped around Ocala and connected with Interstate 75 to the north, bypassing the attraction altogether. I had seen signs along the road for Silver Springs, but I had assumed that it was an incorporated area (it is not) and, having lived near Silver Spring, Maryland, (where there is not even a spring to be found) I paid them no mind. I had never heard of the Silver Springs attraction

before I moved to Florida, nor had I heard any mention of it during my then-seven years as a resident here. For all I knew it was, like Alexander Springs, Juniper Springs, and a host of other spring-fed rivers I had visited, a pleasant and relatively quiet place to spend some time on the water. Yet here it was in all its glory. Electric-powered glass-bottom boats humming over the waters of the great clear springhead basin as passengers gaped and gawked. But for many of those in the park itself, the beauty of the springs themselves appeared to be of secondary importance to the concert and the myriad other attractions on shore.

Over time, as I delved deeper into the history of Silver Springs (a system of sixteen springs in all, in fact), I discovered a complex and compelling tale of the confluence (and divergence) of Florida's natural features with tourism and development interests. The story of Silver Springs is not just that of a singular tourist attraction, once a household name across a good part of the United States long before the modern corporate theme-park era of Florida but, now, largely forgotten. Instead, it is an insight into the quintessential story of Florida itself—the bizarre and schizophrenic merger of nature and culture, the superimposition of artifice upon the natural, and the commodification of the scenic. Moreover, I had often heard that there are two Floridas, north and south, with the southern end being considered urban and more “northern” than the north part. What I discovered instead was that there are indeed two Floridas, but the delineation is between coastal and interior. In 1855, Walt Whitman rejoiced in the interior lands and waters that gave America its hope, promise, and its very character. As much as the oceans that bounded the young nation, he saw in the interior a certain meaning to be deciphered by the American pioneer and settler. “When the

long Atlantic Coast stretches longer and the Pacific coast stretches longer he easily stretches with them north or south. He spans between them also from east to west and reflects what is between them.”¹ We see then from Whitman that while the boundaries may define in some ways the physical limits of the nation, that which is bounded—the interior—also defines its potential. The same was—and in many ways still is—true of Florida.

Still, the notion of a north-south dichotomy in Florida persists, as it does in a national context, overshadowing the more telling contrast between coast and interior. With the exceptions of Gainesville, a college town, and Orlando, a relatively recent anomaly, even the cities of interior of Florida are more “southern,” if the term can even be defined. (The continuing existence of a place called Yeehaw Junction—known briefly once as Jackass Junction—seventy-five miles south of Orlando should be enough to raise doubts about a more “northern” south Florida.) Moving away from the strip malls and condominiums of coastal Florida, one will find amid the pine forests and wetlands a world of farms and ranches, barbecues and wild game feasts, wrap-around porches and town squares, pick-up trucks and hunting dogs—everything that screams southern to this particular Yankee transplant. It was a world I did not know existed and I doubt I am an exception. Today, the interior of Florida is for many, an unknown entity that they do not even know that they do not know. Millions upon millions of people go to Florida’s beaches; few of them sit with their backs to the water. This work seeks to explore and reassess the interior’s role and importance in the evolution of perceptions and portrayals of Florida as a distinct place. It argues that the experience of European

¹ Walt Whitman, “Leaves of Grass (Preface),” in *Walt Whitman: Selected Poems, 1855-1892*, Gary Schmidgall, ed., (New York, 1999), 4.

settlers and subsequent visitors and immigrants in Florida has either been indelibly colored by their perception of the Florida interior or, at times, their lack of awareness about the interior. Its intention is to restore the place and the role of the spring-laden natural environment of the interior to its rightful importance in understanding the more complex development of Florida's identity.

Since the earliest days of its "discovery" by other Americans, Florida has been shaped by competing notions about what it represents, imagined ideas about Florida that, in part, became reality. These self-fulfilling prophecies were largely dictated by economic interests that sought to sell representations of Florida to the rest of the nation. For starters, there was the natural wonder of Florida, largely epitomized in this work by the springs, pine forests, and hardwood hammocks of the northern interior areas of the state—areas that were, unlike much of the state, more than sparsely inhabited and visited before the introduction of major railroads into Florida. From just before the Civil War until shortly after the turn of the century, river travel, first by sail and then by steamboat, largely dictated where travelers could and did go. Indeed, as related by travel writers in the nineteenth century, Silver Springs was included in the pantheon of great American natural wonders, along with such sites as the Grand Canyon. The interior of Florida, a natural and still-wild place laden with springs and blessed with fertile soils, was Florida in the American imagination for much of the nineteenth century.

Over time, a decidedly un-natural dimension came to largely define Florida in the American imagination, a *built* Florida of rails and roads and hotels and resorts and, eventually, of mega-theme parks and Disney. As these transitions occurred, and the frontier of Florida gave way to the pioneers of development and tourism, many of the

original natural attractions of Florida were pushed into the background. Visitors to Florida came to bypass the traditional destinations of northern Florida to visit the grand resorts and beaches. The very idea of Florida in the American consciousness likewise shifted and Florida went from a place of wild and natural beauty to a controlled environment where nature was simply another part of the vacation package, if even that. But still, those old-guard attractions and destinations did not go gently into the good night. Rather, the communities of the interior and their boosters at times embraced and at others rejected these changing ideas of what Florida is and what it should be. The idea and image of Florida as a place consequently changed quite frequently.

Automobiles and roads paved the way for a new post-World War I Florida where an influx of residents and tourists, freed from the routes and timetables of the railroads, could again explore and discover Florida for themselves. Promoters of Silver Springs, like those of many other “roadside attractions,” as they came to be known, increasingly “enhanced” the natural attractions with man-made ones. Especially after World War II, when Florida’s true growth really began, the notion of Florida as either a spring, a garden, or a jungle became popular tropes for designing and naming attractions. The history of Silver Springs, which used all three and more, is emblematic not only of the Florida interior’s struggle to compete economically with the state’s ever-changing identity, but also its attempts to shape and fit into that very identity.

The early development of Florida’s interior was the result of a wide range of factors, from its natural environment and resources to the peculiar shape of the state itself. Farmers settled in the northern peninsula and pushed agriculture into the fertile heart of the interior. But for the most part, development of the interior of Florida has had

surprisingly little to do with its natural assets or geographic features. Other than Palatka and Sanford, virtually none of the interior rivers gave rise to cities, and those two had yet to reach a total of 50,000 residents combined as of the 2000 census. Central Place Theory suggests that an urban area should have developed surrounded by the agricultural hinterlands, but the development of Florida instead followed much different lines. With the coast no more than fifty or so miles from anywhere within the peninsula, the interior became dotted with smaller communities and a few small cities while the coastal periphery became more densely settled—Central Place Theory in reverse. Ocala and Silver Springs, just a few miles from the Ocklawaha River, offered a seemingly ideal location to move goods from the central interior to Palatka and then along the St. Johns River to markets beyond, yet the windy, narrow, and heavily wooded Ocklawaha River was for much of the early American period neglected and left an impassable barrier. The presence of the Seminole Indians in Florida and the Second Seminole War both hindered and then directed how Florida developed. First, the reservation created for the Seminoles proscribed settlement by Americans. Then, the outbreak of the war forced many pioneer settlers to retreat to safer locations. Eventually, the forts and roads built by the U.S. Army to prosecute the war came to dictate where people lived and how they travelled.

Different images of Florida have been marketed to the rest of the nation since the eve of its becoming a U.S. territory. At first, it was the natural attributes that writers argued over, some extolling and some dismissing the land's potential. Post-Civil War writers lauded the interior and celebrated the exotic journey up the Ocklawaha River to Silver Springs. By the turn of the twentieth century, though, they were writing almost

exclusively about the hotels and resorts of the coasts. During the boom and bust 1920s, boosters in south and coastal Florida were selling wild visions of instant riches. Interior communities, not wanting to miss out on the speculative binge, went on all-out campaigns through their chambers of commerce and newspapers to market their area as the next best place to visit or move. After World War II, the increasingly mass media was touting Florida as a beachside playground. State government got involved in advertising itself, trying to find balance between promoting tourism, agriculture, and industry, but the latter two had only a narrow audience. With growing affluence and opportunities for leisure, most Americans were not interested in Florida's agricultural or industrial output, but rather what a vacation in the Sunshine State would hold in store for them. 1960s beach movies and glossy magazine photos glamorized the beaches as places of youth and fun, even as the state was graying from the influx of more and more retirees. By the 1970s, Florida's iconic "When You Need it Bad" jingle and television advertisement sold Florida to frozen northerners as the place for "sunshine and sea breeze, soft sands and palm trees."

"Great Man" theory has little place left for it in today's academia but, in the case of Florida, the impacts of a handful of powerful and creative individuals largely dictated where and how people experienced Florida well before Walt Disney set up shop in Orlando. When Henry Plant and Henry Flagler built their railroads in Florida, they did not extend to cities but rather created them.² A mere slight to Flagler's ego deterred him from investing in Palatka and reinforced his desire to focus on the Atlantic Coast of

² Along the East Coast, Flagler's line gave rise to cities such as Miami and Palm Beach, while Plant's line entrenched Tampa, which already existed, as the pre-eminent port city along the peninsula's Gulf Coast, supplanting Cedar Key.

Florida. When the affluent boosters of the 1920s such as George Merrick and Carl Fisher used ballyhoo and gimmickry to promote southern and coastal development, promoters of interior Florida responded with some of the most creative and effective promotion campaigns ever seen. Instead of literary descriptions, photographs, advertising copy and other marketing devices came to define Silver Springs in national promotional campaigns. For nearly forty years, from 1924 to 1962, the legendarily innovative and relentless promotional efforts of Walter Carlyle (Carl) Ray and William M. “Shorty” Davidson made Silver Springs a household word. Ironically, it was only after the two sold it to media empire ABC-Paramount that Silver Springs began to fade from the national consciousness.

For several decades in the middle of the twentieth century, the budding road system and the “automobile age” benefitted places like Silver Springs, at a nexus in the web of roads tying together the state and linking it to the rest of the nation. Then the Interstate Highway System came, and with it, an age of speed and efficiency, in which travelers increasingly avoided even the most minor detours or delays, seeking the familiar rather than the exotic on their way to the coast or, after 1971, Walt Disney World and Orlando. Between the Florida border and a traveler’s ultimate destination, the placement of an interstate highway or a state highway bypass a few miles in one direction or another could mean life or death to businesses and communities. As Florida grew and diversified economically in the latter half of the twentieth century, interior communities and their chambers of commerce, once seemingly wedded to their tourism businesses and attractions, now largely divorced them for other means of economic growth or sustainability.

Silver Springs, among the larger and best known of the interior attractions, has outlasted many of its fellow attractions, surviving even the arrival of Walt Disney World, which along with the interstates and air travel, created a new interior destination that could be reached at the exclusion of any other en route destinations and attractions. Disney, as much the result of a changing Florida as it was the creation of a new one in Americans' minds, essentially stole the show from other attractions. With its seemingly unlimited resources, Disney could outdo any other attraction's artificial components, so the only card left for those attractions to play was their "natural" settings. Even that was no obstacle for Disney, which made its bread and butter by conjuring and constructing illusion and fantasy. While Silver Springs could offer crystal clear waters, for example, Disney could create them, by dredging swamps and draining the tea-colored tannic water. Over time, as other attractions grew up around Disney, many people came to think of Florida as either the beach or Orlando. The natural interior was either lost or forgotten. In his 1990 book, *Out of Place: Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape*, Michael Hough recalls setting out on U.S. 441 through Central Florida in an effort to locate the natural ecosystems he had just learned about at the Museum of Natural History in Gainesville. Leaving the open farmland and horse pastures of north central Florida, he entered a "continuous strip development" that completely obscured the natural elements he had come in search of. It was development that "denies the tourist the opportunity to experience the very environment he or she has come to see. But then, in Central Florida, the tourist is looking for Epcot Center and Disney World, not for nature." Even so, the tourist will still find the facsimile of nature at those parks in "vastly

enlarged plastic extension.”³ For the visitor to the Florida interior then, the natural has become obscured from sight and mind by artifice.

The growth and corporatization of the latter half of the twentieth century did not go unmet with resistance. An emerging environmental consciousness manifested itself in efforts to protect natural areas and, increasingly, to take them out of private hands. Spring areas in particular in the Florida interior were seen as treasures worth saving and seventeen of them are now state parks. Not among them is Silver Springs, although it and much of the land around it are state property and there is a neighboring state park. Although the state has, since the 1980s, owned a growing amount of land around and including the springhead attraction, it still allows private entities to lease the springhead and continue to try to transform the scenery of Silver Springs into profit. The result has been a delicate balancing act in which the state has sought to preserve what is left of the natural while still catering to the remaining—and resurgent—economic viability of the natural as commodity. The springs are to be protected but, for the Oak Ridge Boys and others, the show can go on. Silver Springs can be, according to its un-ironic slogan, “Nature’s Theme Park.”

This dissertation will seek to trace the history of Silver Springs through several distinct periods of transition in Florida. It seeks to ascertain how, why, and to what extent tourism and development interests there attempted to negotiate the changing physical and economic landscape of Florida and its geography of tourism and settlement. There are two overarching theses to this work. First is that Florida as a place has been constructed in the American imagination by its promoters and boosters

³ Michael Hough, *Out of Place: Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape*, (New Haven, Conn., 1990), 106-7.

as much as it has physically by developers.⁴ Second, the construction of Florida, figuratively and literally, has revolved around a dichotomy of interior and coast from which several imagined Floridas have emerged. Silver Springs, the neighboring city of Ocala, and Marion County in general are treated as the specific geographic focus of the paper, but also as representative of interior Florida as opposed to the coast. The area had all the assets necessary to potentially thrive—a river, central location, a natural attraction, agricultural and mineral resources, and a steadily growing population—but for people other than Florida residents, the horsey set, and crossword puzzle aficionados, the name Ocala today largely draws a blank. Its place in the national consciousness has diminished over time. As with the rest of the non-Orlando interior, it is part of a forgotten Florida. The focus of this dissertation, it should be emphasized, focuses largely on peninsular Florida. It does not, for the most part, address the Florida panhandle or the Florida Keys, as neither lend themselves readily to the distinction of coastal versus interior. Moreover, the Florida peninsula is in many ways as much a distinct perceived and imagined region as it is a physical one.

This dissertation will also focus on the technological and economic forces that drove visitation and immigration trends since 1821. It will consider the broader conceptions about the very nature of Florida, both physical and metaphorical, that drove those trends. It asserts that a wide array of nature-oriented attractions in northern

⁴ The relationship between memory and imagination has long been an object of philosophical inquiry. (David Hume explored the subject in Book 1, Part 1 of his 1739 work, *Treatise of Human Nature*.) In this paper, the idea of imagination is one that requires similar mnemonic tools as memory, i.e. that to either remember or imagine a place, one must have both a physical idea of it as well as frame of reference or context—a larger narrative—in which to place it. This work explores in part how both the physical image of Florida and the narrative around it were increasingly constructed by writers, promoters, and others throughout Florida's history.

Florida, which largely defined Florida as a tourist destination in the late nineteenth century, were suddenly and rapidly supplanted by development along the coasts. A transportation revolution coupled with development speculation propelled the closing of continental America's last frontier and reoriented tourism and settlement trends away from the fertile agricultural lands of the inland peninsula toward the beaches.

At the turn of the twentieth century, railroad magnates created vacation resort cities like Miami virtually overnight. With monopolies on the new transportation systems, they could steer travelers to the resorts, and visitors and newcomers to Florida largely forgot northern Florida. Silver Springs, like other once-popular attractions, all but disappeared from the public consciousness. The emergence of the automobile and a growing network of roads allowed travelers to once again explore Florida on their own terms. It was again a place of exploration, but one where nature alone was no longer enough. It had to be packaged and sold to an expanding middle class that had specific ideas about what Florida should be, ideas both created and reinforced through the attractions and the marketing of Florida. Now, reptile exhibits, bikini-clad bathing beauties, and carnival-like attractions became the marketing devices for what had once stood on their own as travel destinations.

This renaissance would fade, however, when the arrival of the Interstate Highway System, corporatization and homogenization of hospitality businesses, and affordable air travel again encouraged visitors to circumvent or leapfrog the venerable old attractions of the northern interior. Then, in the latter stages of the twentieth century, as much of Florida became swollen with immigrants and nature was subsumed by construction and development, the state government, spurred by popular sentiment,

began to attempt to protect and restore the natural attributes that had defined northern Florida a century earlier. Again pushed to the margins of relevance, the custodians and proprietors of the natural attractions began to return to their roots. Hand in hand with such concerns as the Cross-Florida Barge Canal and the rape of the Everglades a movement began to purchase and protect lands around many of Florida's springs and repackage these places again as "natural" Florida.

This paper also frequently utilizes notions of both wilderness and frontier. In the case of the former, it refers to an idea of wilderness as much as it untamed and savage nature. Wilderness is not just an untamed environment; it is also, as Roderick Frazier Nash describes it, "the opposite of paradise."⁵ For the development of Florida, for which the tropes of "paradise" and "Eden" are seemingly ubiquitous, the idea of wilderness is as important as the fact of it. The term "frontier" is a highly loaded one in American history. Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" has become a whipping post for historians, particularly environmental historians and scholars of the American West. At the same time, Florida in many ways defies the Turnerian narrative. First and foremost, Florida is geographically distinct from the rest of the nation, if in no other way than it is a peninsula, an appendage to an essentially contiguous and congruent nation of states. Its north-south axis defies the classic narrative of westward expansion. Florida also is chronologically out of synch with the American narrative. Although Florida was "discovered" and inhabited by Europeans a good century before anywhere else in North America, it remained largely unexplored and sparsely populated until after the Civil War. Indeed, at the closing of Turner's frontier in 1890, Americans were just beginning to

⁵ Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Rev. ed., (New Haven, Conn., 1973), xii.

migrate to Florida in appreciable numbers. While the transcontinental railroad was all but completed in 1869, Daytona marked Florida's southern railroad terminus a full twenty years later, on the eve of the closing of the frontier. Because of its distinct and largely unwelcoming geographical condition, much of Florida had escaped large-scale settlement for more than 300 years of European inhabitation of North America.

Finally, while Florida's natural beauty is undeniable (in the eyes, at least, of this beholder), it often did not quite fit with the standard tropes of American exceptionalism in the nineteenth century. Whereas recent scholars of tourism have illuminated the American celebration of natural "cathedrals" like Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon in the nineteenth century, Florida's landscape often invited a much more subdued reaction. Places like Silver Springs were not panoramic, sublime, and awe-inspiring as much as they were placid and intriguing. While the springs did invoke some of the lyricism of poetry, it was just as likely to evince the restrained prose of scientific reflection. As Michael Grunwald would later write of Florida's grandest natural landscape, the Everglades, the springs were "less ooh or aah than hmm."⁶

Despite all these factors, the idea of Florida as a frontier remains important. Florida was, for the earliest European settlers, a vanguard of civilization pushing against and into wilderness, but subsequent generations of visitors and tourists also often experienced it as terra incognita. Florida was a place not only of recreation and relaxation, but also of exploration and discovery. This paper does not argue in favor of or against Turner's notion that the frontier was the defining crucible in which American character was forged before 1890, but rather that that is how it was perceived by

⁶ Michael Grunwald, *The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise*, (New York, 2006), 13.

visitors. Turner's thesis does not need not to be true for travelers into the interior to imagine themselves as latter-day pioneers, just as the Judeo-Christian belief in creation need not be true to experience the idea of a garden, nor the mythology of the Fountain of Youth be true to experience the springs through that lens. Indeed, the latter images were often reinforced by the proprietors of many Florida attractions, helping to reflect and reinforce what they believed people wanted from their Florida experience.

Meanwhile, the magic of imagining the interior of Florida as a wild and untamed place lent an added sense of meaning to mid-century automobile travelers. By the 1960s, promoters were pouring money into "Old West" theme parks such as Fort Dodge, Six Gun Territory, and Pioneer City in the heart of Florida. At the same time, though, the proliferation of corporate interests along the emerging interstate system was creating a Florida that travelers could experience as familiar and comfortable and reducing its identity to the two distinct features they might encounter at their destinations, the beach or Orlando.

Structurally, this dissertation will address distinct periods in the history of Silver Springs and Florida in general. It begins with a look at Florida's physical environment, particularly the topography and geology of the interior. Before examining Florida as an imagined and experienced place, it will establish it as a distinct and unique physical place. To recognize or imagine a place, as with a person, one must have a physical descriptor as well as a contextual setting in which to place them or it. As the majority of this work deals with the history (the context), the physical nature of the Florida interior will be addressed first. And while the interior may not have lent itself to the idea of American exceptionalism, it is indeed exceptional. With the highest concentration of

freshwater artesian springs in the world there is simply no other place quite like it on Earth. At the same time, the physical environment of Florida figured prominently in how it was interpreted by visitors and related to other Americans for much of its recorded history.

Chapter 3 discusses most of Florida's true frontier phase, how it was interpreted and experienced by Europeans from the sixteenth century until Americans ultimately invaded the area for the Second Seminole War in 1835. For much of this time, it was viewed alternately as either a forbidding wilderness or a desert. In both cases, it was the antithesis of paradise. The Spanish, custodians of the region for much of that time, did little to establish a viable colony and the British efforts during their brief tenure also were largely unsuccessful. It was only when the Americans, on the continent to stay and looking to expand the agricultural south, turned their eyes to Florida that it was finally seen as desirable. Even so, most descriptions were couched in soil fecundity and crop potential, not as a paradise. Critically, it was not until English-speaking people began to encounter the interior of Florida—and relate their observations—that the idea of Florida as a garden began to evolve in the American imagination.

Chapter 4 addresses the impact of the Seminole War and the period between that war and the end of the Civil War. It was in this period that springs and spring travel became a fad in America. Nevertheless, the home of the largest number of freshwater artesian springs in the world hardly enjoyed the fruits of this phenomenon. The culprit was an obvious one. Florida lacked infrastructure and much of the northern interior, no longer a true frontier, remained inaccessible to all but the most intrepid of travelers.

Chapter 5 examines the first golden age for Silver Springs and tourism in the interior. With the clearing of the Ocklawaha River by entrepreneur Hubbard L. Hart, steamboat travel along the St. Johns River now could link through Palatka to Silver Springs on Hart's specially designed paddle-wheel steamboats. For travelers of means, the Silver Springs experience was the culmination of the exotic voyage up the wild river, through the cypress strands past all manner of wildlife. Literary figures such as Sidney Lanier and Constance Fenimore Cooper provided lyrical accounts that piqued the imaginations of readers in the *Saturday Evening Post* and other national publications.

Chapter 6 examines the redirection of attention to the coasts of Florida. The arrival of Flagler and Plant's railroads, accompanied by the construction of grand hotels, turned Florida into a built environment of luxury and leisure. The Florida interior was largely forgotten as the railroads dictated destinations and development patterns. It was in this time that the idea of the beach as a destination took hold in Florida as the "vigorous flowering of American beach culture" that began in northern areas in the 1860s and 1870s⁷ finally extended down Florida's sandy coasts. The interior languished, and visitation at Silver Springs, which had reached as much as 50,000 annually in the 1880s, dropped to a fraction of that amount.

Chapter 7 looks at the boom and bust 1920s and the Depression-Era 1930s. During this time, Florida was redefined by creative marketing and "ballyhoo" promoters in the south Florida coastal areas, but the advent of the automobile allowed travelers to define their own paths into and through Florida and the communities of the interior responded with their own public relations campaign as each sought to brand itself as a

⁷ Lena Lencek and Gideon Bosker, *The Beach: The History of Paradise on Earth*, (New York, 1998), 157.

tourist destination. Chambers of commerce and local newspapers churned out seemingly endless amounts of self-promotional materials. It was also during this time that Silver Springs was leased by W.C. Ray and W.M. Davidson, who would by the 1930s turn Silver Springs into a household word. Even in the depths of the Depression, Silver Springs continued to grow, becoming the largest tourist attraction in Florida.

Chapter 8 looks at the post-war golden age of roadside attractions in Florida as the state began its incredible growth spurt. During the late 1940s and 1950s, Americans rediscovered Florida en masse in an age of growing affluence when more Americans began taking vacations and looking toward retirement in warmer climes. Air conditioning and pesticides also helped make Florida's environment tolerable and even comfortable year-round, helping to spur mass post-war migration to the state by some of the millions of servicemen who had been stationed there during the war and others who heard of its charms via those servicemen or through the media. Silver Springs rode the crest of this wave through the period, and its annual attendance soon eclipsed the one million mark.

Chapter 9 examines the beginning of the end for Silver Springs and the Florida interior as major attractions. The rise of corporate franchises and the transition from state roads to interstate highways in the 1960s were critical components in the demise of many attractions, while the growth of the state as a whole led many interior communities, bypassed by the new roads, to look to other economic avenues than tourism. Corporatization and homogenization led many visitors to seek the familiar en route to their destinations, and Florida no longer was a place of exploration or discovery for many. With the arrival of Walt Disney World in 1971 and the growth of Orlando, it came to stand for the Florida interior in the American mind. There was either the beach

or Orlando. The rest of the interior was largely out of sight and out of mind for travelers. There were, of course, the Everglades, but they remained an excursion, not a destination. Few people traveled to Florida to stay in the Everglades.

Chapter 10 will examine the period from the late 1970s to present-day, and the efforts of Florida's state government and private entities to acquire and protect lands in the northern interior. Critically, it will examine a recent proposal for Marion County to purchase the lease for the attraction and turn Silver Springs into a regional eco-tourism destination and the possibility of using such a park to help create a new identity for interior Florida. The end result of this examination of this work, it is hoped, will be to reestablish the historical significance of the Florida interior in defining Florida's larger place in the American imagination. A brief summary conclusion will follow in chapter 11.

CHAPTER 2 WET AND WILD: THE FLORIDA LANDSCAPE

Florida is the place where land meets water. Since well before the dawn of people, with each cycle of glaciation, much of the peninsula has risen from and fallen back beneath the sea, enlarged at times to several times its present size, and reduced at others to a group of small islands. Today, Florida juts boldly out from the mainland into the sea like “a great pointed paw,”⁸ as Marjory Stoneman Douglas described it, then arcs back and disappears gracefully and gently along its keys. Its 1,180 miles of coastline, not including the keys, are lapped by the surf of the Caribbean Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Gulf of Mexico.⁹ The shoreline itself, left to nature’s devices is more than just a “beach.” In the southern peninsula, mangrove swamps once abounded, creating almost impenetrable thickets with their root systems alone. Along much of the east coast and the panhandle, sand dunes rise and fall with the natural process of accretion and erosion. Intermixed with these are tidal marshes and mud flats, teeming with often invisible life as they are washed by the tides.

Florida never rises too far from the sea and, with a mean elevation of only one hundred feet and a high point of just 345 feet, it is dotted and lined by more than 7,700 lakes, more than 1,700 lazy rivers and streams, and countless ponds, swamps, and brooks.¹⁰ The southern portion of the peninsula is home to Lake Okeechobee, the second largest freshwater lake entirely within U.S. borders. Even Florida’s climate

⁸ Marjory Stoneman Douglas, *The Everglades: River of Grass*, 50th anniversary ed., (Sarasota, Fla., 1997), 6.

⁹ Ronald L. Myers and John J. Ewel, *Ecosystems of Florida*, (Orlando, Fla., 1990), 429.

¹⁰ Edward A. Fernald, Donald J. Patton, and James R. Anderson, *Water Resources Atlas of Florida*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1984), 15-16.

suggests the last wading steps into a world of liquid, with a rainy season that contributes the majority of the fifty-three inches of annual rainfall while relative humidity averages a minimum of 60% and maximum of 80 or more percent year round.¹¹ Dr. William Simmons, traversing Florida in 1821 and 1822, encountered Florida in all its wet wonder and, to him, it nearly defied description. It was, he wrote, “a land of lakes and innumerable sheets of water. Some new term in geography must be invented to describe this extraordinary land of many waters which has, I believe, less of a terraqueous character than any other region of country, perhaps in the known world.”¹²

And then there are wetlands. Once reviled as swamps to be drained, or, later, “reclaimed,” wetlands have had a peculiar role in the imagined history of America. Christopher Meindl’s aptly titled essay about Florida wetlands, “Water, Water Everywhere,” defines them as “transition zones between deepwater environments that are always submerged, and upland environments that are almost never flooded.”¹³ In other words, wetlands are the shifting thresholds between land and water, sometimes dry, sometimes submerged. As late as 1850, Florida contained an estimated 20.3 million acres of wetland, about one-half of all the wetlands in the eastern seaboard states and 10% of all the wetlands in the continental United States. More than half of the peninsula was wetland, “the highest density of swamps and marshes anywhere.”¹⁴ It was, according to historian Ann Vileisis, “wetland through and through.” The entire

¹¹ Ibid., 19, 23, 57.

¹² William H. Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1973), 36-37.

¹³ Christopher F. Meindl, “Water, Water Everywhere,” in *Paradise Lost?: The Environmental History of Florida*, Jack E. Davis and Raymond Arsenault, eds., (Gainesville, Fla., 2005), 114.

¹⁴ Ann Vileisis, *Discovering the Unknown Landscape: A History of America's Wetlands*, (Washington, D.C., 1997), 17.

southern part of the state, dominated by the Everglades, was categorized as wetland. Reviled by developers and speculators from Florida's earliest days as an American territory, those wetlands have been assaulted and largely tamed. By 1973, two years after the federal Clean Water Act was passed, Florida's wetlands had declined by 60% to 8.3 million acres, a loss of about 12 million acres. That figure continued to drop into the 1980s before the value of Florida's wetlands was acknowledged in the state's Florida's 1984 Warren S. Henderson Wetlands Protection Act. A great deal of this disappearance took place to the south of Lake Okeechobee, in the enigmatic Everglades, the sheet flow "river of grass" described by Douglas.¹⁵ Still, the presence of wetlands throughout the state helped define Florida in the minds of many well into the twentieth century.

Vileisis's history of American wetlands, *Discovering the Unknown Landscape*, tracks changing perceptions about nature as demonstrated through attitudes toward wetlands. As early as 1678, she notes, swamps were portrayed in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* as dismal and sinful places. The "Slough of Dispond," for example, was a place in which "the descent whither the scum and filth that attends conviction for sin doth continually run," where "the sinner is awakened about his lost condition [and] there ariseth in his soul many fears, and doubts, and discouraging apprehensions, which all of them get together, and settle in this place; And this is the reason of the badness of this ground."¹⁶

¹⁵ Thomas E. Dahl, *Wetlands Losses in the United States, 1780's to 1980's*, (Washington, D.C., 1990); Fernald, Patton, and Anderson, *Water Resources Atlas of Florida*, 95; Meindl, "Water, Water Everywhere," 128-31. Note: There are some discrepancies in the figures used by the different authors, likely due to the elusive and changing definition of "wetland."

¹⁶ Vileisis, *Discovering the Unknown Landscape*, 35, 358 n28.

Florida, in many regards, suffered from similar perceptions even as mid-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Americans began to tout it as Edenic. In a way, rather than being unable to see the forest for the trees, many early visitors could not see the water for the swamps. (Ironically, prior to the American period in Florida history, the area's reputation was one of either a wilderness or a desert). From virtually the moment Florida became part of the United States, Americans looked at Florida's natural waters as obstacles to be drained and reengineered. "The desire to make 'improvements' in nature's arrangements was overwhelming."¹⁷ Even some early naturalists had difficulty appreciating Florida's peculiar environment: As Andre Michaux recorded, "I employed the preceding day and this one in visiting the surrounding woods and the swamps where I was, but there were no interesting plants in this disagreeable place because caimans and serpents were abundant and mosquitoes tormented us."¹⁸ It is hard to imagine that the naturalist could find no interesting plants, as Florida is still home today to more than 4,000 native species of trees, shrubs, and flowering plants.¹⁹

Indeed, it would not be until the late nineteenth century when the Romantic painters of the Hudson River School finally "discovered" Florida that water would become celebrated in artistic depictions of Florida. Earlier naturalist artists like John James Audubon and Mark Catesby never got beyond the keys or coastline while more intrepid ones like Thomas Say and Titian Peale aborted their effort to "follow the track of

¹⁷ Nelson Manfred Blake, *Land into Water/Water into Land: A History of Water Management in Florida*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1980), 5.

¹⁸ Walter Kingsley Taylor and Eliane M. Norman, *Andre Michaux in Florida: An Eighteenth-Century Botanical Journey*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2002), 75.

¹⁹ Eleanor Noss Whitney, D. Bruce Means, and Anne Rudloe, *Priceless Florida: Natural Ecosystems and Native Species*, 1st ed., (Sarasota, Fla., 2004), 15.

Bartram” without getting much past present-day Jacksonville for fear of “dangerous Indians.”²⁰ Their legacy to Florida largely took the form of still life art and the documentation of birds and fauna. In the middle part of the nineteenth century, depictions of the Seminole Wars or portraits of the Seminoles themselves then “became prevalent,” spurred by artists like Charles Bird King and George Catlin.²¹

When the first of the Hudson River romanticists, Thomas Moran, came to Florida, even he struggled to find the sublime of nature in Florida’s landscapes, although some of his etchings for Edward King and Julia Dodge or his oil “Fort George Island” arguably did achieve just that. But where Moran failed—or gave up, believing that he had—Martin Johnson Heade was able to find in Florida’s marshes and wetlands “the peculiar beauties of this landscape.”²² Indeed, Heade was ahead of his time in rejecting the idea of swamps as dismal places and “instead found in them a refuge for the contemplation of the spiritually profound.” It was in the seemingly “monotonous” landscapes of wetlands that he found “the perfect vehicle for conveying the transcendental, awe-inspiring state experienced when contemplating infinity.”²³ Water and land, in combination or often even convergence, have since dominated much of the popular visual art depicting Florida, from the works of the Highwaymen to the photography of Clyde Butcher, not to mention the vast majority of advertising and tourism art that has

²⁰ Charlotte M. Porter, “Following Bartram’s ‘Track’: Titian Ramsay Peale’s Florida Journey,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 61, (April 1983): 432.

²¹ Maybelle Mann, *Art in Florida: 1564-1945*, 1st ed., (Sarasota, Fla., 1999), 29.

²² Roberta Smith Favis and Martin Johnson Heade, *Martin Johnson Heade in Florida*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2003), 8-9.

²³ Vileisis, *Discovering the Unknown Landscape*, 97.

been commissioned and created over the years. Much of this, however, has focused on the coasts and beaches.

But while many of Florida's attributes help define it as a place where land and water intersect, only two aspects of Florida can be considered unique among the states. Florida certainly has no monopoly on coastline, nor do its rivers and lakes surpass in size or quantity those of many other states. Its greatest lake is not a Great Lake or even, in size, the Great Salt Lake. Its annual rainfall is the same as that of Alabama and Mississippi. Its humidity can be extreme, but not very different from parts of Texas. Wetlands still comprise a large and defining element in Florida's environment, but not much more so than Louisiana, whose famed bayous and swamps arguably make them an even more defining feature for that state.

The first of Florida's truly unique features, the Everglades, were a misunderstood adversary for much of the time they were known to Americans. Now drained and re-engineered, they are but a shadow of their former self, a patient on life support. The Everglades are a fascinating place with a rich history, and they provide a compelling and cautionary tale about man's war on nature, but they are both remote and, despite their size and name, singular. The Everglades were not and generally are not a place people want to live, except where the land was "reclaimed," nor were they even a place people wanted to visit until much later in Florida's history. Visitation to Everglades National Park grew steadily from its establishment in 1947 to a high of more than 1.5 million in 1972, then dipped as low as 550,000 in 1984 before steadying out in the mid-1980s, since when annual visitation has hovered between about 750,000 and 1.25 million. Still, more than a third of visitors surveyed in 2002 were from Florida and nearly

three-quarters of all visitors indicated that their visit was merely a day trip. The Everglades were not a destination so much as a side trip. The combined population of Monroe, Hendry, and Collier counties, meanwhile, has grown to more than 430,000, but the vast majority live in the Florida Keys, on the west coast, or along Lake Okeechobee, respectively.²⁴

What makes Florida truly unique, though, where land and water intersect in the most visible, ubiquitous, profound, and (in as close to a literal sense as can still be applied to Florida) natural manner, is in its abundance of springs. Florida is home to more limestone artesian springs than anyplace else in America—"the singular blessing of the Florida landscape," wrote naturalist Archie Carr—and its largest are the largest in the known world.²⁵ Often well inland from the expansive panoramas of the coastline, they dot the Florida interior with crystal clear water emanating at near constant flows. The springs of Florida offer a window into another world; one does not look into springs so much as one may try to look through them. "Behold, for instance, a vast circular expanse before you, the waters of which are completely diaphanous or transparent as the ether," eighteenth-century naturalist William Bartram wrote of Salt Springs. "But behold yet something far more admirable, see whole armies [of fish] descending into the

²⁴ "State and County QuickFacts," *U.S. Census Bureau*, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/12000.html>, accessed February 6, 2011; "Everglades National Park Visitation," *National Park Service*, <http://www.nps.gov/ever/parkmgmt/everglades-national-park-visitation.htm>, accessed February 4, 2011; Margaret Littlejohn, *Everglades National Park Visitor Study* (Washington, D.C., 2002).

²⁵ Archie Fairly Carr and Marjorie Harris Carr, *A Naturalist in Florida: A Celebration of Eden*, (New Haven, Conn., 1994), 63.

abyss, into the mouth of the bubbling fountain, they disappear! Are they gone forever?
Is it real?”²⁶

Here is where land and water truly intersect and, at one time at least, the springs and their runs teemed with life. Seeing this hydrologic and biologic eruption teased the imagination and forced many early observers to wonder what was beyond, what was beneath the surface. Some, like Bartram, saw the possibility of underground worlds, connected by

subterranean rivers, which wander in darkness beneath the surface of the earth, by innumerable doublings, windings and secret labyrinths; no doubt in some places forming vast reservoirs and subterranean lakes, inhabited by multitudes of fish and aquatic animals and possibly . . . meeting irresistible obstructions in their course, they suddenly break through these perforated fluted rocks, in high, perpendicular jets.²⁷

In the unknown of the springs, a universe of new possibilities seemed to exist and many wondered what manner of creature might inhabit this underground world. As late as 1944, naturalist Thomas Barbour wrote that it was “not unreasonable to suppose that these great Florida springs should produce samples of fauna which as probably been lurking in the bowels of the earth since Cretaceous times, perhaps a hundred million years ago.”²⁸ But while these ideas may conjure scenes from Jules Verne novels, they are not without some kernels of truth.

For millennia, as rain has fallen onto the southeastern portion of what would become the United States, most of it has returned to the atmosphere through evaporation, usually in a mere matter of days through evaporation and transpiration

²⁶ William Bartram and Francis Harper, *The Travels of William Bartram: Naturalist Edition*, (Athens, Ga., 1998), 105.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 142-43.

²⁸ Thomas Barbour, *That Vanishing Eden, a Naturalist's Florida*, (Boston, 1944), 122.

from vegetation. However, some of that rain was absorbed into the soil and then seeped down further into a substratum of limestone known as the Floridan Aquifer, a combination of limestone and dolomite ranging from 600 to more than 3,000 feet thick and lying beneath an area of about 82,000 to 100,000 square-miles, including all of Florida and parts of Alabama, Georgia, and even South Carolina.²⁹ All told, the aquifer may contain more than 2.2 quadrillion gallons of water and, while that which emanates from many springs has only in the ground itself for a matter of decades at most, it likely passed through rock and sediments as old as 38 million years.³⁰

The Floridan Aquifer is, for lack of a better metaphor, a giant sponge saturated with water. Because Florida has been repeatedly beneath the sea, the limestone of the Aquifer consists of a great deal of shells and fossils, making it especially vulnerable to erosion by carbon and carbonic acids. Over time, rainwater that picked up carbon in the atmosphere or soil helped erode innumerable caverns and channels into the Aquifer.³¹ Under the surface, this porosity allows the Aquifer to hold an incredible amount of water, often under immense pressure from hydrological forces. At the surface, meanwhile, the limestone is sometimes visible in what is called karst topography, a terrain “characterized by sinkholes, springs, caves, disappearing streams and underground drainage channels.”³²

²⁹ Fernald, Patton, and Anderson, *Water Resources Atlas of Florida*, 36.

³⁰ Thomas M. Scott, *Springs of Florida*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 2004), 13; James A. Miller, "Ground Water Atlas of the United States: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina," (1990).

³¹ Jack C. Rosenau and George E. Ferguson, *Springs of Florida*, Rev. ed., (Tallahassee, Fla., 1977), 18.

³² Ed Lane, *Florida's Geological History and Geological Resources*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1994), 47-50.

So while the springs are the most noticeable manifestation, they are products of the same topography and geology that account for many of the other interesting features, wet and dry, that characterize the landscape of much of interior north and central Florida. Simmons and other early American explorers who endeavored to explore the interior encountered an abundance of clear ponds, some of them surprisingly round and many of which are, in fact, ancient sinkholes filled with water from rain or from the Aquifer.³³ In an age before agricultural and residential run-off of dissolved nutrients, they may have appeared as clear as spring runs. Observed Simmons: “The waters of all of them are remarkably clear; hence they are termed in the country ‘clear water ponds.’”³⁴ Untold numbers of these may still exist, it should be added, yet those which have not been polluted remain largely unseen from roadsides, hidden behind woods or development.

Sinkholes themselves are essentially either stagnant or dry cousins of the springs. Sometimes, as the limestone is eroded, the land above will gradually subside into it, leaving a depression or large hole. Other times, however, the underlying limestone is eaten away while the surface remains intact creating an underground cavern. When the weight of the roof is too great or the water table is particularly low and the cavern hollowed, it can collapse. This may be a “generally abrupt and sometimes catastrophic occurrence,” as residents of Winter Park learned in 1981 when one swallowed up an

³³ Barry F. Beck, *Sinkholes in Florida: An Introduction*, (Orlando, Fla., 1986), iv.

³⁴ Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 40.

import car lot, public pool, and part of a residential neighborhood and was referred to as "Florida's Mount St. Helens."³⁵

While sinkholes can remain dry or become pond-like, they can also become springs. The essential difference between sinkholes like those mentioned above and those that form springs is artesian pressure. Where adequate water pressure to support the surface stratum is absent, a sink is created that may or may not fill with water. Where the water pressure in the Aquifer is great enough or the sink falls below the water level of the aquifer, water bursts through and springs are formed. In general, most Florida springs occur where the limestone aquifer intersects with the surface.³⁶

As noted above, erosion has turned the Floridan Aquifer into one great porous slab (the saturated sponge). Over the millennia, as sea levels and water tables rose and fell, springs ran at different rates and sometimes, when the water table was low enough and the land exposed high enough, stopped running altogether. Or, when sea levels were high enough, seawater replaced the fresh and saline water of the Aquifer altogether and the springs ran salty. In general, though, much if not all of the Aquifer has remained saturated one way or another. Today, freshwater dominates the upper level of the Aquifer from which surface water is mainly derived, although withdrawals for development and agriculture have caused saltwater intrusion in some coastal areas.

Underneath the aquifer, meanwhile, are basement rocks of sedimentary, igneous, and metamorphic stone, some of which are quarter-billion year old gifts from Florida's

³⁵ Fernald, Patton, and Anderson, *Water Resources Atlas of Florida*, 47; "Sinkhole, Attractive Nuisance, Lures Curious Florida Tourists," *The New York Times*, 2 June 1981; "A Sinkhole in Florida Buries Seven Vehicles and Engulfs Building," *The New York Times*, 10 May 1981.

³⁶ Florida Springs Task Force, *Strategies for the Protection and Restoration of Florida's Springs the Florida Springs Task Force*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 2000), 8. Note: there are also submerged springs, both along the coast and in inland areas such as Rodman Reservoir.

ancient African geologic heritage.³⁷ Around it, the Gulf and the Atlantic create a tenuous lateral pressure balance with the aquifer. Where the surface stratum above it is a thin or porous material, such as sand or light clay, water simply seeks its own level—its potentiometric level—and can emerge in low areas as seepage springs. However, where the overlaying sediment is thicker or less permeable, such as with heavier clays, or where other hydrologic forces are brought to bear, pressure builds up. When that water finally finds a porous outlet, a release valve is created. “Where the pressure is great enough and there is a fracture or permeation between the surface layer and the aquifer, water is forced out in the form of artesian springs.”³⁸ Or, more simply, “where a ground-water stream can find no way to go but up, it bursts forth as a spring.”³⁹

Interior Florida’s karst terrain provides an “ideal” location for such springs to proliferate, and the state has the largest number of first magnitude artesian springs (those with average flow rates of just over 44,883 gallons per minute, or gpm) in the United States, with 33 of the 84 total in the nation. Additionally, the vast majority of the more than 700 total springs in Florida are artesian in nature.⁴⁰ “In general, all large springs in Florida . . . are fed by underground streams running through caverns.”⁴¹ And though all the springs and sinks are not directly connected to one another, they all stem from a larger hydrologic system: “A karst terrain may be likened to a giant plumbing

³⁷ Lane, *Florida's Geological History and Geological Resources*, 12-14.

³⁸ George E. Ferguson, *Springs of Florida*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1947), 9.

³⁹ Whitney, Means, and Rudloe, *Priceless Florida*, 116.

⁴⁰ C. Wythe Cooke, *Geology of Florida*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1945). Ferguson, *Springs of Florida*, 15; Elizabeth Purdum et al., *Florida Waters: A Water Resources Manual from Florida's Water Management Districts*, (Brooksville, Fla., 2002), 49.

⁴¹ Ferguson, *Springs of Florida*, 15. Note: The figures on the number of Florida springs vary between sources, but not by enough to warrant inclusion.

network under the ground.”⁴² In other words, Bartram’s conjecture about underground rivers was not very far off base.

And while Barbour and others may have hoped for living samples of bygone fauna, the springs have proven to be excellent windows into the past not just as sources of fossil records but also of archeological relics. They are “time capsules that contain valuable information about our environmental and cultural past,” providing insights into the earliest human presence in Florida.⁴³ As freshwater sources, they offered everything early humans might have needed to survive. Abundant supplies of fresh water, aquatic food sources, chert, and clay made Florida’s springs highly desirable habitation sites. Items recovered from Florida springs include tools, weapons, physical remains, and even preserved human brain matter dating back more than 10,000 years.⁴⁴

And it is not just that the springs contain such artifacts, but also the wealth of perspective they provide. According to anthropologist E. Thomas Hemmings, “few other areas of comparable size in the Florida peninsula combine such a long record of human occupation, uniquely favorable preservation, and definable geo-chronological context.”⁴⁵ We know, for example, not only that early humans in Florida hunted extensively at springs sites, but also that humans likely hunted the mega-fauna. “The contemporaneity of man and extinct animals in Florida has not been demonstrated beyond dispute,”

⁴² Beck, *Sinkholes in Florida*, iv.

⁴³ Scott, *Springs of Florida*, 12-14.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ E. Thomas Hemmings, “The Silver Springs Site, Prehistory in the Silver Springs Valley,” *The Florida Anthropologist* 28, (December 1975): 155.

wrote archaeologist Wilfred Neill in 1964 after finding what appeared to be the tips of Suwannee-era Paleo-Indian weapons and other artifacts near mastodon and mammoth remains at a Silver Springs dig during the previous several years. "But a growing body of evidence suggests that the makers of Suwannee points were actually in contact with at least a remnant of a Pleistocene fauna that has since vanished."⁴⁶

Divers today can still find fossils and other remains of life long departed, but they would be hard-pressed to ignore the living relics that still inhabit Florida's springs and their river runs. Prehistoric bowfin and longnose gar are common in many spring runs, and the ancient alligator, the iconic symbol of Florida, seems once again omnipresent in most Florida waterways. In springs and their runs closer to either coast, the West Indian manatee is a most favored seasonal visitor. With Florida's springs maintaining average temperatures just above 70 degrees, these gentle-giant sea-cows seek refuge there from the cold waters of the Atlantic and Gulf in winter. The manatee, which Thomas Barbour called "the most satisfactorily prehistoric-looking of all the wild creatures of our country," has been visiting Florida's springs for upwards of a million years, and its ancestors for up to 45 million years.⁴⁷

While the enormous schools of fish that Bartram reveled over are certainly diminished, there are still more than enough to tantalize. Schools of shiners, chubs, killifish and minnows dart between larger, predatory largemouth bass, bluegill, and black crappie. More than a half-dozen species of turtle are often seen sunning themselves on

⁴⁶ Wilfred T. Neill, "The Association of Suwannee Points and Extinct Animals in Florida," *The Florida Anthropologist* 17, (March 1964): 29-30.

⁴⁷ Barbour, *That Vanishing Eden*, 98; Nick Jans, "Manatees in the Midst," *Defenders Magazine* 84, (Spring 2009), http://www.defenders.org/newsroom/defenders_magazine/spring_2009/manatees_in_the_midst.php, accessed May 15, 2010.

partially submerged branches and trunks of deadfall, falling off into the water like a squadron of fighter planes at the too-close approach of humans.

In the branches overhead, on land, or in the water beneath, the ever-dangerous Eastern Cottonmouth may be lurking, but almost invariably a swimmer or boater's panic at an approaching "water moccasin" in the water is wasted on the innocuous anhinga, or "snakebird." The anhinga may look like a prowling viper in the water, but on shore it is almost comical, spreading its wings wide to dry —like its doppelganger, the double-breasted cormorant—and looking, for all the world, like an avian exhibitionist.

On shore, observers can still see white-tailed deer, wild boar, or even a black bear taking a drink from a spring or spring run. On some days, river otter may frolic incessantly near a spring boil or along the run. At night, American eel emerge unseen from their underwater caves to join raccoon, bats, and other more nocturnal hunters, serenaded by the plaintive cries of limpkin or the bellows of amorous alligators. In the daytime, eels are not often seen, though one may think he or she is passing over great schools of them. Aptly named eel grass abounds in many springs and provides shelter and habitat for smaller aquatic creatures, as do red Ludwigia, pond weeds, and other plants.

For bird lovers, Florida's springs can be a paradise. Perhaps attracted by the transparent waters and the ease of spotting their prey, fishing birds abound at most springs. Osprey glide overhead in their distinctive "M" shape as Mohawk-headed belted kingfisher dart from tree to tree. The "who-cooks-for-you" mantra of barred owls can be heard among the screaming "kee-yaas" of red-shouldered hawks and the harsh "jeebs" and clicking "chucks" of boat-tailed grackle. Heron of all shapes and sizes strut along

the shore amidst wood stork, ibises, and stilts. Cartoonish pileated woodpeckers may chase each other around the base of red maple trees while American coot and pied-bill grebes float purposefully along through yellow-bulbed spatterdock, white spider lily, and dazzling red cardinal flowers. Around the knobby wooden stalagmites of bald cypress “knees,” one may see the red, green, purple and white wood duck, a living work of abstract art that John James Audubon called “this most beautiful bird,” and whose Latin name translates as “water bird in bridal dress.”⁴⁸

Florida’s springs, spread out from the Atlantic coast to the panhandle, can vary greatly not only in their sizes, but also in their resident flora and fauna. The Silver Springs area, for example, the largest of the springs, contains a total of thirty-seven species of fish, ten amphibian species, and thirty varieties of reptile. Along and above its banks, eighty-six species of birds have been known to visit or reside there along with twenty varieties of mammal. These numbers are impressive since Silver Springs is in a developed area that abuts Ocala, a city of over 50,000 and center of a metropolitan statistical area of more than 300,000.

Still, at the far more remote Ichetucknee Springs in rural Columbia County, by comparison, thirty-nine species of fish are present, but there are also seventeen types of amphibians, all but one of which are frogs. Meanwhile, there are forty-six species of reptiles, including twenty-three kinds of snake. Well over 150 varieties of birds have been sighted there, and it is home to twenty-nine kinds of mammals. Homosassa Springs, meanwhile, far closer to the coast than either Silver or Ichetucknee, is home to

⁴⁸ John James Audubon and William MacGillivray, *Ornithological Biography, or an Account of the Habits of the Birds of the United States of America; Accompanied by Descriptions of the Objects Represented in the Work Entitled the Birds of America, and Interspersed with Delineations of American Scenery and Manners*, vol. 3, (Edinburgh, 1831), 52.

many creatures not seen in any of the other two. Shrimp and crayfish, stingray, and pelican venture here, but are almost complete strangers to inland springs.⁴⁹ As Carr wrote, “Each spring is different from all the others; but in the intensity of its grace and color each is a little ecologic jewel in which geology and biology have created a masterwork of natural art.”⁵⁰

Nevertheless, as a whole, Florida’s springs are far more alike than they are different from each other. And while one may argue that Florida has no more a monopoly on springs than it does on average rainfall or the number of lakes, its springs are indeed different from those around the nation, and not just in their superior sizes and quantity.

First, almost none are geo-thermal (“warm” or “hot”) springs, nor are they for the most part considered mineral springs, the two types of springs best known as tourist destinations throughout the rest of the nation and world from the late eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. Unlike thermal springs, Florida’s springs tend to remain at about the mean average air temperature and are unaffected by any underground heat sources. Warm and hot springs cover the globe: they are on every continent, they span almost pole to pole (there are hot springs in both the Arctic Circle and on Antarctica), and they range from below sea level to thousands of feet above. Most of the well-known springs around the world are warm or hot thermal springs. To get a sense of just how prevalent geothermal springs are, the National Geophysical Data Center lists 1,661

⁴⁹ Florida Department of Environmental Protection, *Silver River State Park Unit Management Plan*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 2002), A5 13-17; Florida Department of Environmental Protection, *Ichetucknee Springs State Park Unit Management Plan*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 2000), A5 10-20; Florida Department of Environmental Protection, *Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park Unit Management Plan*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 2005), A4 8-12.

⁵⁰ Carr and Carr, *A Naturalist in Florida*, 239.

such springs in the United States, the vast majority of which are west of the Mississippi River. Nevertheless, only two of Florida's more than 700 springs, Little Salt Spring and Warm Mineral Springs near Tampa, are included on the list.⁵¹ The reason for this dearth of thermal springs may be Florida's unique shape and location, as it is continually bathed deep along the aquifer by cooling sea water on three sides.⁵²

Still, while hot springs are far more prevalent than so-called cold springs around America, they do not tend to get nearly as large. Not a single one of the hot springs in the United States is classified among the seventy-eight first-magnitude springs. The Big Spring in Thermopolis, Wyoming, which lays claim to being one of the largest hot springs in the world, has an average flow of about 3,000 gallons per minute, or gpm, while the entire Hot Springs grouping there discharges 4,861 gpm. By definition, each of Florida's thirty-three first-magnitude springs, by comparison, has a minimum average flow of about 44,861 gpm, or more than nine times the flow of the entire Thermopolis system.⁵³ The flow of the Silver Springs group can be as much as eight times that again.

The flow at Silver Springs emanates from sixteen different springs set around its slightly oblong springhead, which measures about 200 feet by 300 feet, and along the first 3,500 feet or so of its six mile spring run to the Ocklawaha River. (About half of the flow issues from the main spring at the springhead.) Silver Springs and the densely

⁵¹ George W. Berry, Paul J. Grimm, and Joy A. Ikeman, "Thermal Springs List for the United States," *National Geophysical Data Center, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration*, http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/nndc/servlet/ShowDatasets?dataset=100006&search_look=1&display_look=1, accessed March 10.

⁵² Douglas L. Smith and George M. Griffin, *The Geothermal Nature of the Floridan Plateau*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1977), 36.

⁵³ Bern S. Hinckley, Henry P. Heasler, and Jon K. King, *The Thermopolis Hydrothermal System, with an Analysis of Hot Springs State Park*, (Laramie, Wyo., 1982), 1-2.

wooded run are part of the larger Ocklawaha River Valley, noted for its extensive cypress strands, hardwoods, wetlands, and exceptional fish and game populations. The spring run, known as the Silver River, follows a winding and narrowing course eastward into the Ocklawaha River. The Ocklawaha, in turn, once perhaps the ancient coastline of Florida itself, runs in a windy northern direction from its origins in a chain of lakes in Lake County and then eastward to its confluence with the St. Johns River across from Welaka, a distance of roughly seventy-five miles. Although awesome in its discharge, much of what comes from a main spring near the top of the run, the springs create a gentle current of about one-half mile per hour over depths of between six and thirty feet along its course. The temperature of the crystal clear water fluctuates only a couple of degrees, from 72 to 74 degrees Fahrenheit, and the flow rates are generally steady outside of drought years or significant weather events such as hurricanes.⁵⁴

Ironically, in the 1870s and 1880s, when Florida was trying to stake a name for itself as a destination for invalids, it could not capitalize on its abundance of springs, even as mineral springs were at the zenith of their popularity as resort “spas.”

Guidebooks at the time listed hundreds of mineral springs throughout North America, but Florida often garnered passing mention at best.⁵⁵ Interestingly, several minor spas

⁵⁴ Ferguson, *Springs of Florida*, 122-28; Rosenau and Ferguson, *Springs of Florida*, 276-80; Scott, *Springs of Florida*, 243-45; Steven Noll, “Steamboats, Cypress, & Tourism: An Ecological History of the Ocklawaha Valley in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 83, (Summer 2004): 8. Note: A dam has since been built and a large reservoir created along the Ocklawaha, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

⁵⁵ See John Jennings Moorman, *Mineral Springs of North America: How to Reach, and How to Use Them*, (Philadelphia, Pa., 1873); Winslow Anderson, *Mineral Springs and Health Resorts of California, with a Complete Chemical Analysis of Every Important Mineral Water in the World... A Prize Essay; Annual Prize of the Medical Society of the State of California, Awarded April 20, 1889*, (San Francisco, Calif., 1892); George Edward Walton, *The Mineral Springs of the United States and Canada, with Analyses and Notes on the Prominent Spas of Europe, and a List of Sea-Side Resorts*, 2d ed., (New York, 1874).

did develop in Florida, but not at any of the major springs. Instead, they cropped up at smaller springs in relatively remote places and most arose only after spas “more advantageously located had been developed.”⁵⁶ The role of springs generally in helping to create a leisure and tourist class in the United States will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Florida’s springs are different even from America’s few other clusters of large, non-thermal springs. There are a handful of other clusters of first magnitude springs around the U.S., in Oregon, Idaho, California, Texas, and the Ozarks. Of those, only the Ozark and Texas springs are limestone springs and only the Texas springs occur in relatively flat terrain. Flat terrain is crucial in creating crystal clear water. In Florida, “owing . . . to the low relief of the land, the dense vegetation, and the mantle of sandy soil through which the water largely enters the limestone, the spring water is very clear and does not generally become muddy even at times of greatest discharge.”⁵⁷ Then, because of the active circulation of the large volume of water being held within the aquifer, the water remains very clear as it passes through the limestone quickly enough to generally avoid picking up soluble minerals.⁵⁸ Although water in the lower parts of the Floridan Aquifer may be tens of thousands of years old, the water that feeds Florida springs generally

⁵⁶ Burke G. Vanderhill, “The Historic Spas of Florida,” *Geographic Perspectives on Southern Development* 12, (June, 1973): 71.

⁵⁷ Oscar Edward Meinzer, “Large Springs in the United States,” ed. U.S. Geological Survey, Water Supply Paper (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Gov’t Printing Office, 1927), 9.

⁵⁸ Ferguson, *Springs of Florida*, 9; Meinzer, “Large Springs in the United States,” 10.

comes from an area called the upper aquifer and spring waters have been estimated through chemical dating to have fallen only between about eight and sixty years ago.⁵⁹

Finally, as the water erupts onto the surface, the flat terrain often affords for slow, gradual, and sometimes shallow runs to develop, allowing not only for the added scenic beauty of crystal clear water, but also for marine life to migrate from downstream to linger at the springhead. With a shallow base of light-colored sand and sediment reflecting Florida's abundant sunshine, the water can be illuminated in a manner and to an extent that springs in high-relief areas like the Ozarks cannot.⁶⁰

Of course, not all of Florida's springs are clear; in fact, they offer a wide array of appearance that reflect their location and composition. To wit,

Black Spring in Jackson County is highly colored with organic matter; Green Cove Springs in Clay County emits a sulfur odor; Salt Spring in Marion County is, as its name implies, salty; Copper Spring in Dixie County has deposits of iron around the pool and its run; Indian Springs in Gadsden County yields water whose dissolved solids concentration is as low as any water in the natural environment in Florida.⁶¹

And where Florida does offer geothermal or mineral springs, it does so on a grand scale. Warm Mineral Springs, for example, has a flow rate equivalent to that of the Thermopolis grouping. Salt Spring, along Lake George, is a colder but more mineral-laden body than Warm Mineral Springs, and is even nine times larger than that.

Nevertheless, the jewel in the crown of Florida's springs is Silver Springs in Marion County. The largest and most celebrated of Florida's springs, Silver Springs churns out more than a half-billion gallons per day, or enough to supply the residential usage of

⁵⁹ Scott, *Springs of Florida*, 13. James D. Happell et al., "Apparent Cfc and 3h/3he Age Differences in Water from Floridan Aquifer Springs," *Journal of Hydrology* 319, (March 2006).

⁶⁰ Meinzer, "Large Springs in the United States," 18.

⁶¹ Rosenau and Ferguson, *Springs of Florida*, 29.

Wisconsin, with more than half again left over.⁶² Since it became a tourist destination in the 1870s, it has buzzed with visitors almost constantly, and its wonders were recorded in the literary musings of some of the great writers of the nineteenth century. Yet, for all the uniqueness, beauty, and wonder, Florida's springs remained largely unknown or inaccessible well into the nineteenth century, even as some of their cousins around the nation were becoming famed resorts. The last addition to the American family east of the Mississippi, Florida remained to most a distant and exotic land. Its heart, the interior peninsula, was a frontier as forbidding and savage as any other on the continent and in the imagination. Florida had for centuries been an exotic and mythic place, which offered a potential Eden or Fountain of Youth. The jewel in its crown of springs would be Silver Springs, but to get there, one first had to cross through the Slough of Dispond. It would more than three centuries years for that region to be tamed and made accessible.

⁶² Wisconsin has a population of about 5.6 million, and residential use there is 56 gallons per day for a total of 313.6 million gallons per day.

CHAPTER 3 THE WILDERNESS AND THE DESERT: 1513-1825

The image of Florida in the American mind has been, historically, an evolving and often schizophrenic one. As historian Gary Mormino describes it, “[f]rom its founding as an imperial outpost to its modern identity as tourist empire, Florida has evoked contrasting and compelling images of the sacred and profane: a Fountain of Youth and a Garden of Earthly Delights, a miasmic hellhole and scuzzy wasteland.”¹ Indeed, after Juan Ponce de Leon gave the land its inviting and optimistic name (from the Spanish words for Festival of Flowers), it was not again until American acquisition of Florida that anyone other than the intrepid naturalist William Bartram, who set out alone and unafraid into the interior, seemed to find anything redeeming about the landscape. Even on the eve of its incorporation into the United States as territory in 1821, skeptics abounded. When the issue of acquisition came before the House of Representatives for debate, for example, Virginia Congressman John Randolph reportedly declared, “Florida, sir, is not worth buying. It is a land of swamps, of quagmires, of frogs and alligators and mosquitoes! A man, sir, would not immigrate into Florida—no, not from Hell itself!”²

Indeed, relegated largely to the dry and sandy coasts until the nineteenth century, Europeans found life on the land hard-going. At the end of the seventeenth century, Spanish-governed St. Augustine was a place of “accustomed tensions of privation and poverty.” At mid-century, the fortunes seemed ready to turn but the outbreak of war between Spain and England in 1762 quickly strangled the town’s supply lines and

¹ Gary Ross Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2005), 2.

² George E. Buker, “The Americanization of St. Augustine: 1821-1865,” in *The Oldest City, St. Augustine: Saga of Survival*, Jean Parker Waterbury, ed., (St. Augustine, Fla., 1983), 151.

“starvation once more faced the inhabitants.” The war ended the following year with England taking possession of Florida and splitting the colony in two, creating East and West Florida. A mere twenty years later, the Floridas were returned to Spanish control and East Florida was “condemned to vegetate for four decades.”³ It was not until Anglophones began encountering and describing the peninsular interior that Americans began to warm to the potential of the land and that Florida as a desirable place entered into the American imagination.

Bartram, as noted, offered some of the first positive notions of Florida to the American people, but where he saw an intrinsic beauty in the flora, fauna, and topography of the Florida interior, most descriptions at the beginning of the nineteenth century were far more utilitarian. Strategic, economic, and expansionist motives engendered descriptions of Florida in terms of its potential agricultural and commercial productivity. In the first four decades of the nineteenth century, as physical and political obstacles impeded the settlement of the northern interior, the Florida garden remained largely unknown to all but Bartram and few others. That would change only after the Second Seminole War pushed the frontier into and beyond the spring-laden interior of Florida.

The term “frontier” in American history is a loaded one, thanks to Frederick Jackson Turner, and has come to connote the idea of a broad, westward moving vanguard of settlement. Indeed, some historians might argue, the word has become

³ Jean Parker Waterbury, “The Castillo Years: 1668-1763,” in *The Oldest City: St. Augustine Saga of Survival*, Jean Parker Waterbury, ed., (St. Augustine, Fla., 1983), 62, 87; Abel Poitrineau, “Demography and the Political Destiny of Florida During the Second Spanish Period,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 66, (April 1988): 443.

ambiguous enough as to be almost unrecognizable.⁴ As long ago as a half century, academicians of frontier philosophies were willing to simply accept that the idea of frontier, “in all the vague meanings of the word, was a significant influence in American history.”⁵ If one simply accepts the Merriam-Webster definition of frontier as “a region that forms the margin of settled or developed territory,”⁶ it seems clear that most of Florida was, until well into the nineteenth century, beyond the frontier. It was the antithesis of Eden. It was wilderness.

Historian Roderick Frazier Nash writes that any notions of a New World Eden “quickly shattered against the reality of North America. Soon after he arrived, the seventeenth-century frontiersman realized that the New World was the antipode of paradise.”⁷ The same can easily be said, it will be shown, for early explorers of the Floridas, from the conquistadors through the first generations who settled there when it became an American territory. Wild animals “added to the dangers of the American wilderness,” Nash writes of colonial New England, citing Francis Higginson’s lament that the new land “doth also abound with snakes and serpents of strange colors and huge greatness.” Again, no serpents of huge greatness in North America can compare with the alligators of Florida, especially in the hyperbolic descriptions of early explorers.

“[S]avages were almost always associated with the wilderness,” and New Englanders,

⁴ For a good historiography of the debate over Turner’s work, see Mack Faragher’s afterword in Frederick Jackson Turner and John Mack Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” And Other Essays*, (New Haven, Conn., 1998), 225-41.

⁵ Marvin W. Mikesell, “Comparative Studies in Frontier History,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 50, (March 1960): 64.

⁶ *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th Ed., 1995, s.v. “frontier.” Note: Definition used is 2a. Other definitions included are 1a. “a border between two countries;” 2b. “the farthestmost limits of knowledge or achievement in a particular subject;” and 2c. “a line of division between different or opposed things.”

⁷ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 25.

Nash writes, were beset by “hostile” natives “sweeping out of the forest to strike, and then melting back into it.”⁸ The natives of Florida were often no different in the minds of numerous explorers and settlers who described them in similar terms, and would remain so well into the nineteenth century. Wilderness, to Americans at the time, was a thing to be conquered, tamed, and settled as part of God’s divine plan. For more than three centuries after Europeans “discovered” Florida, that wilderness had remained unconquered, untamed, and largely unsettled by whites.

First to arrive in the New World from Europe had been the Spanish, led by Juan Ponce de Leon, in 1513. After several acrimonious encounters with the natives of Florida, Juan Ponce ultimately died from wounds suffered fighting the Calusa in 1521. Subsequent expeditions to Florida under Alonso Alvarez de Pineda in 1519, Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon in 1526, Tristan de Luna y Arellana in 1559, and Angel de Villafane in 1561 all ended without the establishment of a viable colony. The disastrous Panfilo de Narvaez expedition of 1528 ended with some of the earliest writings about Florida, courtesy of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, who detailed a plight of hunger, sickness, and continuous assaults by natives. Ultimately, the survivors of that expedition, having lost contact with the ships that brought them there, decided to take their chances on the water in makeshift rafts rather than remain in Florida. Despite being on the banks of the immensely bountiful seafood and shellfish buffet that was the Gulf of Mexico, the men for some reason resorted to eating their own horses. “In view of the poverty of the land, the unfavorable accounts of the population and of everything else we heard, the Indians making continual war upon us . . . shooting from the lakes with such safety to

⁸ Ibid., 28-29.

themselves that we could not retaliate . . . we determined to leave that place and go in quest of the sea.”⁹ It was not until the expedition of Pedro Menendez de Aviles that a permanent European presence was established in the Floridas, at St. Augustine in 1565. Nonetheless, between 1565 and 1569, at least fourteen additional garrisons were established in the region, not one of which lasted even three years. Six inland garrisons were abandoned within less than a year. Only St. Elena, at present-day Parris Island, South Carolina (then part of La Florida), persisted until 1587. Resistant natives and lack of food were to blame in virtually every case.¹⁰

No sooner had Europeans begun their sustained presence in North America than they began to stain the shores of their new home with each others’ blood. Less than two weeks after establishing St. Augustine on September 8, 1565, the Spanish began a brutal expulsion of a contingent of French Huguenots who had actually arrived prior to Menendez under the command of Jean Ribault. In his precious little time in Florida, Ribault thought he had found a paradise with friendly natives, a “marvelous abundance” of pearls, and a land “under so good a climate that none of all our men, though we were in the hottest time of the year . . . were troubled with any sickness.”¹¹ But Menendez was not about to share Spanish-claimed soil and, in two bloody episodes in late September and October, he executed Ribault and about 200 of his men—even after their surrenders—at an inlet south of Anastasia Island that henceforward has borne the name Matanzas, Spanish for “slaughters.” One survivor of the ordeal was left with quite

⁹ Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca, "Narrative of Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca," in *Visions of the Old South: Eyewitness Accounts, 1528-1861*, Alan Galloway, ed., (Athens. Ga., 1994).

¹⁰ Paul E. Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, (Bloomington, Ind., 2002), 22-46, 54- 55.

¹¹ Jean Ribaut and Jeannette Thurber Connor, *The Whole & True Discoverie of Terra Florida: A Facsimile Reproduction*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1964), 86.

a different notion of Florida than Ribault had been. Upon returning to France, Nicolas Le Challeux wrote: "Who wants to go to Florida/Let him go where I have been/Returning gaunt and empty/Collapsing from weakness/The only benefit I have brought back/Is one good white stick in my hand/But I am safe and sound, and not disheartened/Let's eat, I'm starving."¹² Starvation, along with violent conflicts with natives and the British would be a familiar experience for the majority of the Spanish tenures of Florida. With the French gone, they wasted no time finding new peoples to make war with and "within weeks" of the Matanzas massacres Spanish soldiers provoked a war with the natives that would continue for the next six years.¹³

Spain retained a constant, if often spartan, presence in Florida for the next two centuries, but it was stymied by persistent food shortages, difficulties with the native population, and an inability or unwillingness to cash in on Florida's natural economic resources, according to historian Paul Hoffman. The mission system, an effort to establish a Spanish and Christian presence throughout the colony, failed largely to do anything but alienate natives and accelerate their mortality rates. Although primary sources are slim, historian Robert Allen Matter paints this picture of the mission frontier:

The Spanish missions of Florida did not conform to the romantic notion of cloistered gardens, tolling bells, handsome churches set in idyllic villages surrounded by bountiful fields and orchards and grazing live stock, although a few of those features occasionally were present. The impression gained from available documents, published sources, archaeological research, and from the author's visits to many mission sites is one of stark realism, revealing crude buildings and tools and poverty more often than plenty. Pestilence and war, plus discord, martyrdom, and toil by a handful of

¹² Thomas Hallock, "Between Topos and the Terrain: A Brief Survey of Florida Environmental Writing, 1513-1821," in *Paradise Lost?: The Environmental History of Florida*, Jack E. Davis and Raymond Arsenault, ed., (Gainesville, Fla., 2005), 36.

¹³ Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 57-58.

Franciscans, their Indian converts, and a few Spanish soldiers in a primitive wilderness complete the picture.¹⁴

As it was the bulk of the mission system was west of the Suwannee River, in the area that would come to be known as Middle Florida. When the War of Spanish Succession reached the shores of America, where it came to be known as Queen Anne's War, in 1702, Carolina's colonial governor, James Moore, seized the opportunity and invaded the Floridas, laying waste to the mission system with a "thoroughness and cruelty [that] has few parallels in American history." By 1708, the mission system was gone from Florida and as many as 10,000 to 12,000 mission Indians had been seized by the British as slaves, leaving behind only a few hundred Christianized natives.¹⁵

In the end, the first Spanish effort in Florida was a spectacular failure, and its efforts to settle and colonize the interior had resulted in the decimation of the native people and little else. At the end of that tenure, in 1763, "Spain's La Florida was little more than what it had been in 1565, a garrison precariously perched on a sand spit by the Atlantic Ocean."¹⁶ In the more than 250 years since Europeans had found Florida, the frontier line still lay along the sandy shores and the coastal strand, the "tidewater frontiers," as Hoffman calls them. The wet and fertile interior remained largely unknown and untamed, while the Spanish were ultimately relegated to the arid coastline.

Consequently, perceptions of Florida retained a decidedly after-the-Fall Old Testament

¹⁴ Robert Allen Matter, "Mission Life in Seventeenth-Century Florida," *The Catholic Historical Review* 67, (July 1981): 402.

¹⁵ Michael Gannon, *The Cross in the Sand: The Early Catholic Church in Florida, 1513-1870*, 2nd ed., (Gainesville, Fla., 1983), xiii, 74-76.

¹⁶ Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 206.

cast wherein man had been expelled from the fertile Eden to a barren desert on the fringe of howling wilderness.

To the north, British North Americans in the southern colonies may have been familiar with Florida not just as a haven for escaped slaves and unfriendly natives, but also as just the type of wilderness that Adam and Eve encountered. As Nash explains, Eden was “well watered and filled with plants,” but upon their expulsion, Adam and Eve were forced into a dry and “‘cursed’ land full of thorns and thistles.”¹⁷ When Jonathan Dickinson and his family were shipwrecked on the Florida east coast in 1697, Dickinson wrote, they encountered a “wilderness country [that] looked very dismal, having no trees, but only sandy hills covered with shrubby palmetto, the stalks of which were prickly.”¹⁸ Dickinson and his party were beset by fierce weather, hunger, and sometimes violent natives they believe to be cannibals, “Men-Eaters as cowardly as cruel.”¹⁹ The Florida they found was a wicked place to be survived only through faith and “God’s Protecting Providence,” as he titled his popular account, which was reprinted more than a dozen times between 1700 and 1868.²⁰

Unlike many later writers who would portray Florida as Edenic, points out one historian, Dickinson’s redemptive journey was south to north, out of Florida and towards “civilization,” not into the wilderness. Also, it should be noted, his party kept to the sandy

¹⁷ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 14-15.

¹⁸ Jonathan Dickinson, *God's Protecting Providence, Man's Surest Help and Defence in Times of Greatest Difficulty, and Most Eminent Danger, Evidenced in the Remarkable Deliverance of Robert Barrow, with Divers Other Persons, From ... The Inhuman Ca[N]Nibals of Florida. Faithfully Related by One of the Persons Concern'd Therein, Jonathan Dick[*I*]Nson*, The fourth ed., (London, 1759), 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, preface.

²⁰ Elliot James Mackle, “The Eden of the South: Florida’s Image in American Travel Literature and Painting, 1865-1900,” (Ph.D. diss., Emory University 1977), 8.

coast and did not encounter what would surely have struck them as more providential terrain: the interior. Citing Scripture, Nash explains the dichotomy of wilderness and Eden, “the greatest blessing [God] could bestow was to transform wilderness into ‘a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs.’”²¹ Yet for Dickinson and seemingly every other European who experienced Florida and put pen to paper, the fountains and springs of the Florida interior remained beyond the visible horizon and many observers would dismiss Florida as a desolate wasteland, often simply “desert,” without the least intention of irony. They encountered the sandy soils of the beaches and coastal strands as one would a desert island, but also through the lens of their religious beliefs: As Nash writes, “the identification of the arid wasteland with God’s curse led to the conviction that wilderness was the environment of evil, a kind of hell,” and Florida was both wilderness and wasteland.²²

When the Spanish ceded Florida to England in 1763, their successors did scarcely more to push the frontier inland. “The British in their time did little better with East Florida, where they bedded down on the same coastal strand, except that they expended a great deal more energy than the Spanish had in extracting crops from the sandy soil.”²³ Despite this extra exertion, British settlers often failed to make the best out of a difficult situation, a fact that some later apologists and Florida boosters attributed to the settlers’ own shortcomings. According to nineteenth-century historian Bernard Romans, much of the land around St. Augustine was pine land or “pine barren, which makes up the largest body by far, the Peninsula being scarce any thing else; but about

²¹ The passage, from Deuteronomy 8:7, is cited in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 14.

²² *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²³ Michael Gannon, “Review: [Untitled],” *The American Historical Review* 108, (February 2003): 184.

an hundred miles towards the northwest from St. Augustine.” But while this soil was “barren and unfavorable,” it also “in a wet season bears many things far beyond expectation.” Nevertheless, the settlers often chose not to make the effort. “[E]ither the people do not choose to go out of the old beaten track, or [otherwise] content themselves with looking elsewhere for new land improvable with less cost.”²⁴ (Romans also did much to reinforce impressions of Florida’s Indians as savage and godless, writing at length of their vices and incivility, then adding that “with all these bad qualities, they have one virtue, which is hospitality, and this they carry to excess.”)²⁵

One of the major land grantees in British Florida was Dr. William Stork. In his account of East Florida for the Lord Treasurer, the Marquis of Rockingham, Stork suggested that Florida would inevitably become agriculturally productive because it was a southern colony and southern colonies in North America were more productive than those in the north. He further reasoned that it would be productive also because it lay on the same sunny latitudes as places such as Persia, India, and Arabia, all of which “are, or have been, famous for their riches and fertility.”²⁶ Those who dismissed Florida’s potential for agricultural production, he reasoned, did so because of its deceptive coastal façade. Florida, he wrote, remained for the time being an untapped and wrongly maligned resource whose “sandy beach makes a disadvantageous appearance to ships that sail along [its] coast.”²⁷ But if the fertility and “verdure” of the interior that Stork

²⁴ Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1962), 16-17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39-44.

²⁶ William Stork, *An Account of East-Florida with Remarks on Its Future Importance to Trade and Commerce*, (London, 1766), 13-16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, ii.

would tout in later pages were unknown to all but a few such as himself, Stork's choice of language reinforces the notion that as long as Florida remained untamed and unsettled, it fit into the Old Testament definition of wilderness. "Yet the town of St. Augustine excepted, this country is at present, for want of inhabitants, little better than a des[e]rt."²⁸ The Florida interior was, in the late eighteenth century, as the American interior had been to Michael Wigglesworth in 1662: "A waste and howling wilderness/ Where none inhabited/ But hellish fiends and brutish men."²⁹

Stork, who had a vested interest in the success of Florida, would continue to boost Florida in various publications including a revised version of the above account that included a journal by John Bartram. But many writers in England mocked Florida, and the southern region of North America in general. Historian and naturalist Antoine-Simon Le Page du Pratz described the Florida region as "little more than pine barrens or sandy des[e]rts."³⁰ Alexander Cluny also dismissed Florida as "a flat, sandy, and almost barren desert."³¹ Still another account dismissed Florida as "marshes after marshes, swamps after swamps, pine barrens upon pine barrens."³² An anonymous broadside titled *Present State of Great Britain and North America*. . . derided the "scorching sands and

²⁸ Ibid., xxii.

²⁹ Michael Wigglesworth, *God's Controversy with New England* (1662), in Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land; the American West as Symbol and Myth*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), 4.

³⁰ Le Page du Pratz, *The History of Louisiana, or of the Western Parts of Virginia and Carolina Containing a Description of the Countries That Lye on Both Sides of the River Missisipi: With an Account of the Settlements, Inhabitants, Soil, Climate, and Products. Translated from the French*, (London, 1763), xxxvi.

³¹ Charles L. Mowat, "The First Campaign of Publicity for Florida," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 30, (December 1943): 370.

³² Ibid.: 373.

swamps of Florida,"³³ with special vitriol toward the pine barrens of the region, which were characterized by sparse undergrowth:

Yet these are the only pastures they have in many of our colonies and especially in *Florida*, if it be not in the miry and destructive swamps and marshes. What is worse, these pernicious weeds are not to be extirpated; they have a wing to their seed, which disperses it everywhere with the winds, like thistles, and in two or three years forms a pine thicket, which nothing can pass through nor live in. Thus the land becomes a perfect desert.³⁴

The British government, upon taking over Florida in 1763, divided the territory into East and West Florida and tried to promote settlement by offering both smaller (100-acre and larger) family grants and larger (maximum 20,000-acre) township grants. However, this program was hampered by a land policy that did not take into account the actual terrain of Florida. "It was the rule that a tract must be continuous, one-third as broad as it was long, and that it must run back from a waterway and not have its sides communicating with water. As a result, it was difficult to lay out any tract without having a disproportionately large amount of poor soil or swamp."³⁵

Would-be colonist Denys Rolle, a wealthy Englishman who dreamed of creating a utopian settlement in America, encountered this very obstacle, among many others, in his ill-fated endeavors in East Florida. Rolle had originally planned to build his ideal community at St. Marks (near where de Vaca and his comrades had abandoned Florida to take their chances on the water). He changed his mind and relocated the venture to

³³ William Roberts, *An Account of the First Discovery, and Natural History of Florida with a Particular Detail of the Several Expeditions and Descents Made on That Coast. Collected from the Best Authorities by William Roberts. Illustrated by a General Map, and Some Particular Plans, Together with a Geographical Description of That Country, by T. Jefferys*, (London, 1763), 192.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁵ Charles L. Mowat, "The Tribulations of Denys Rolle," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 23, (July 1944): 4.

the St. Johns River area upriver from St. Augustine in the mid 1760s because he believed a trip through the Florida interior would result in his party being scalped by the natives. Whether Rolle's fears were justified or not, it is clear that the interior fell into the European conception of wilderness. Rolle then complained that there was too much pine barren in eastern Florida to find a 20,000-acre contiguous tract that was anything but mostly "poor" land. The best he could find, according to the surveys with which he was presented, was a tract that contained 800 acres of "good" land, out of the entire 20,000 acres.³⁶ Again, a lack of familiarity with the true nature of Florida was evident and the colony remained barren—a desert in terms of providing the struts of decent living and a sparsely inhabited and lonely wilderness in reality.

Other less restrictive land policies by the British followed, but their rule in East and West Florida, even as the population swelled around St. Augustine from Loyalist refugees during the American war for Independence, was in its last days. In 1783, the British ceded East and West Florida back to Spain and evacuated their remaining outposts from Pensacola and St. Augustine, leaving behind in the latter what Swiss settler Francis Fatio described in 1784 as "a desert guarded by Spanish troops."³⁷

Amidst all the beauty he would come to find in Florida, even naturalist and Floridaphile William Bartram could not help but observe that, from an area south of present-day Interlachen,

On the left hand of those open forests and savannas, as we turn our eyes southward, South-west and West, we behold an endless wild desert, the

³⁶ Denys Rolle, *To the Right Honourable the Lords of His Majesty's Most Honourable Privy Council, the Humble Petition of Denys Rolle, Esq, Setting Forth the Hardships, Inconveniencies, and Grievances, Which Have Attended Him in His Attempts to Make a Settlement in East Florida ... : A Facsimile Reproduction of the 1765 Edition*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1977), 42, 72.

³⁷ Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 234.

upper stratum of the earth of which is fine white sand and pebbles, and at some distance appears entirely covered with low trees and shrubs of various kinds and of equal height.”³⁸

(Although to Bartram, more on whom below, even many of these shrubs were “admirably beautiful and singular.”)³⁹

Nor could West Florida escape being stuck with the label “desert” at least once. In 1777, judge Harry Alexander suggested that western Florida’s “Seat of Government and the Courts of Justice [be] removed from Pensacola to some more Convenient central place on the River Mississippi where the Land is as extremely rich, as all the Country about Pensacola is in the highest degree Sterile, little better than a dry sandy Desert.”⁴⁰

The Second Spanish period did not offer much in terms of developing the frontier of the East Florida interior either, as the total population outside of St. Augustine never exceeded 2,000-2,500 people. Meanwhile, the newly constituted nation to the north quickly began making inroads on other parts of Spanish Florida. During the British period, Florida had welcomed its greatest admirer, the above mentioned William Bartram and his writings would help change the way Florida would be perceived for centuries to come. Bartram’s narrative description of his exploration of the interior of peninsular Florida, *Travels*, published in 1791, would begin to recreate Florida’s image, finding instead of desert or wilderness, something much closer to Eden. Bartram, unafraid to brave the Florida interior alone in 1774, had been looking for natural beauty of a kind not found in his home of Pennsylvania and its neighboring colonies. In Florida

³⁸ Bartram and Harper, *The Travels of William Bartram*, 103.

³⁹ Ibid., 104.

⁴⁰ Alexander to Germain, 25 April 1777, in “Harry Alexander: 18th Century Scotsman,” <http://harryalexander.blogspot.com/>, accessed April 26, 2010.

he found it. “Whilst I, continually impelled by a restless spirit of curiosity, in pursuit of new productions of nature, my chief happiness consisted in tracing and admiring the infinite power, majesty, and perfection of the great Almighty Creator.” Bartram saw signs of God’s work everywhere, on land and in the waters of Florida. Consider “the [e]nchanting little Isle of Palms. This delightful spot, planted by nature. . .what a beautiful retreat is here! [B]lessed unviolated spot of earth! Rising from the limpid waters of the lake. . . . A fascinating atmosphere surrounds this blissful garden.”⁴¹ While the “desert” of the sandy coastal strand and shores largely defined Florida for many, Bartram was able to experience the aqueous and florid spring-laden interior. Although both would be redefined over the next two centuries, the dichotomy between coastal and interior Florida was as stark then as it is today.

As starkly different as the interior was from the coast physically, it was also very different symbolically. Where the coast was desert, Bartram found the interior to be the garden. Critically, it was in Florida’s springs that Bartram found the most visible manifestation, or at least reflection, of Eden:

And although this paradise of fish may seem to exhibit a just representation of the peaceable and happy state of nature which existed before the fall, yet in reality it is a mere representation; for the nature of the fish is the same as if they were in Lake George of the river; but here the water or element in which they live and move, is so perfectly clear and transparent, it places them all on an equality with regard to their ability to injure or escape from one another.”⁴²

⁴¹ ———, *The Travels of William Bartram*, 99.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 106.

As scholar Elliott Mackle wrote in his 1977 dissertation on Florida's image in the nineteenth century, Bartram showed Americans that "Florida, the garden, exists. . . . Eden can be recaptured."⁴³

The Spanish, though, made little effort to do so and their second tenure in Florida was marked by abandonment and neglect in both East and West Florida. Spain, in the midst of its long free-fall from empire status, was busy with rebellions in its Caribbean territories as well as the Napoleonic Wars on the Continent and had little time or money to support and build its all but forgotten possessions, which often teetered on the brink of starvation.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, the speculative eyes of Americans began focusing on the fertile middle region of interior northern Florida, between the Apalachicola and Suwannee rivers. From the early middle eighteenth century through the early nineteenth century, a series of conflicts and treaties had resulted in the Creeks and other confederate tribes ceding territory in a retreating line away from the coast and South Carolina borders into southern and central Georgia. This was true both in Washington and on the frontier. As historian Kendrick Babcock describes it, "[t]he persistent desire of the United States to possess the Floridas, between 1801 and 1819, amounted almost to a disease, corrupting the moral sense of each succeeding [presidential] administration."⁴⁵ For the most part, those administrations saw Florida from a strategic standpoint. The end of Spanish rule there was seemingly imminent and acquisition of Florida would exclude the British from potentially gaining a new foothold on the continent; it would buttress

⁴³ Mackle, "The Eden of the South," 21.

⁴⁴ Poitrineau, "Demography and the Political Destiny of Florida," 443.

⁴⁵ Cited in Edwin C. McReynolds, *The Seminoles*, 1st ed., (Norman, Okla., 1957), 42.

American influence in the Caribbean Sea; and it would serve as a buffer against the influence of slave insurrections such as the 1789 revolt in Haiti.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, a sizeable number of Americans were already living in Spanish Florida both as squatters and as legitimate landholders. Americans with an eye toward annexing Spain's Florida holdings began concocting schemes to use the impotence of Spanish rule as an excuse to step in to defend American citizens there. In 1810, the Americans fomented a rebellion in, and then seized parts of, present-day Louisiana (part of Spanish West Florida at the time). In 1812, a like-minded group of Americans—with tacit approval from President Madison—sought to do the same in East Florida. The Patriot War, as it came to be known, began with a virtual invasion of East Florida in early 1812, but the subsequent War of 1812 against the British complicated official American policy and the Patriot War degenerated into a stalemate punctuated with retaliatory violence and wanton destruction of property throughout East Florida. By 1814, it was over.⁴⁶

During this time, however, the idea of interior Florida as a fertile and inviting terrain took further hold. In 1814, seventy renegade American "Patriots" established Fort Mitchell near present-day Micanopy and sought recognition from the American government. They determined quickly that the land they found in the Florida interior was better than that of Georgia:

Compared to the nutrient-poor soils that supported the ubiquitous pine and wire-grass of southern Georgia, this loamy, productive soil attained almost legendary status among the Patriot farmers. "The [Alachua] country," reported one awe-struck settler, "excels any I have ever seen." Not only did the rich soil produce luxuriant grass for cattle, but orange trees appeared to

⁴⁶ James G. Cusick, *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2003), 2-10.

grow "spontaneously," and wild vegetables were seen in abundance. Climate also played a factor in the minds of the settlers, and the mild winter that the Patriots apparently enjoyed in 1814 heralded a long and productive growing season.⁴⁷

The settlers failed to get support from the American government and the settlement collapsed before the first planting season, but during this time their raids had contributed to further impoverishment of the Spanish colony. Crops and farms were destroyed and a U.S. judge ruling on claims stemming from the raids would later state, somewhat hyperbolically, that "the whole inhabited part of the province was in a state of utter desolation and ruin."⁴⁸ Regardless of any overstatement, however, the Patriot War and its aftermath left the already crumbling Spanish colony even worse off while helping to spread the idea to Americans that Florida was a land of lush and fertile—and soon-to-be-available—soil.

By 1815, Americans had already established inroads in East and West Florida and, the following year, official U.S. forces moved on the renegade "Negro Fort," an old British fort on Prospect Bluff along the Apalachicola River where fugitive slaves had assembled. After destroying the fort, the forces swarmed east to the Suwannee River region. Americans now had at least some working familiarity with the terrain of Florida from St. Augustine to the panhandle. "Prior to this campaign, middle Florida was a region of which but the vaguest knowledge was possessed by the people of the United States."⁴⁹ Now the entire northern swath of the Floridas was at least a somewhat known

⁴⁷ Chris Monaco, "Fort Mitchell and the Settlement of the Alachua Country," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79, (Summer 2000): 8.

⁴⁸ Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 264.

⁴⁹ Captain Hugh Young, Mark F. Boyd, and Gerald M. Ponton, "A Topographical Memoir on East and West Florida with Itineraries of General Jackson's Army, 1818," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 13, (July 1934): 17.

entity, although the bulk of the interior was still terra incognita. So far, Americans—prospective settlers and government officials alike—liked what they saw in what appeared to be an agricultural providence. Others, like Randolph, remained skeptical.

With the end of Spanish occupation apparently imminent and inevitable, American settlers did not wait for the Adams-Onís Treaty, which transferred Florida to the United States, to take effect before relocating there. According to Hoffman, by 1820 “Anglo-Americans already constituted a majority of Florida’s white inhabitants” and “Territorial annexation was an anticlimax.”⁵⁰ After Spain ceded Florida in 1821, though, there was one more political obstacle (aside from the myriad physical ones) to extending the southern frontier: the native people who had moved to Florida for the very purpose of remaining beyond the American frontier. For the time being, the U.S. granted these tribes a large reservation inland from both coasts and south of Alachua (for a variety of reasons, strategic and geographic), giving the Americans title “to the better soils of [Middle Florida, west of the Suwannee River], to the better part of the central ridge, and to the hammocks and drainable swamps that existed in the extensive pine woods of the coastal terraces.”⁵¹

Americans may have been moved toward a warmer (and wetter) sense of Florida thanks to rumors and hearsay, the boosterism of Stork and Romans, and the lyrical musings of the naturalist Bartram. Government officials, meanwhile, also may have been further swayed toward acquiring Florida by accounts from the First Seminole War, from which the first comprehensive first-hand accounts of the interior finally were

⁵⁰ Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 281.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 283.

produced.⁵² Nevertheless, differing opinions about Florida continued to abound and many questioned the wisdom of adding the land to the American inventory. Upon completion of the acquisition of Florida in 1821, the “National Intelligencer” ran two editorials heralding the event that illustrate the stark contrasts of opinions and beliefs about Florida. The first, from the *Virginia Patriot*, called the acquisition of Florida “an event among the most important in the annals of our history since 1803” and trumpeted that “To the Union is added a territory fertile and clime delightful; a territory extensive enough for states.”⁵³ The companion editorial, meanwhile, from the *Charleston Courier*, ran under the loaded headline “Dreams of Gold.” The acquisition,” it began, “served to fill the bosoms of individuals with a species of exhilarating gas, producing fantastic hopes and visions, singular in their appearance and various in their exemplification. It would seem as if every wish was to be achieved in Florida, and every ill to terminate there; that with the soft felicity of her own zephyrs she is to yield to every solicitation.”⁵⁴ Ambivalence, to be sure, was rife.

Upon acquisition of Florida, its interior, between the Suwannee and St. Johns rivers and south of Alachua in particular (the upper end of the peninsula), remained an unknown to many largely because Florida lacked adequate roads and, other than the St. Johns River, most water routes remained unused or impassable. Also, upon American acquisition of Florida, much of the interior quickly became the domain of the Seminoles whose reservation, created in 1824 under the Treaty of Fort Moultrie and

⁵² See Young, Boyd, and Ponton, “A Topographical Memoir on East and West Florida.”

⁵³ “East Florida,” *National Intelligencer*, (Washington, D.C.), 7 April 1821.

⁵⁴ “On the Acquisition of Florida; ‘Dreams of Gold,’” *National Intelligencer*, (Washington, D.C.), 7 April 1821.

expanded in 1827, took up a great deal of the peninsular interior. At the same time, the Seminoles' relationship with their white neighbors alternated between abject dependency and open conflict, the latter often a consequence of the former, giving would-be settlers pause about setting up a homestead too far from established populations.⁵⁵

Men and women of letters, those who could provide accurate and publishable accounts, for the most part simply had not yet gone to the interior, Bartram notwithstanding. In late 1817, for example, during the waning years of the Spanish tenure, the budding artist and naturalist Titian Ramsay Peale, zoologist George Ord, and entomologist Thomas Say had set out to explore along the St. Johns, but abandoned their effort soon after reaching Picolata when they heard numerous stories of conflicts between Europeans and Native Americans both up and down the St. Johns River and even along the coast, near Mosquito Lagoon.⁵⁶

This was a problem that would persist until after the Civil War. "Probably the main reason that Florida had so few visitors during the antebellum period was that it was off the beaten track and that transportation into the state was difficult," historian Benjamin Rogers explained. Hence, "[d]uring the first half of the nineteenth century, there were published both in this country and abroad a great number of books written by travelers in all parts of the United States, and especially in the South. . . . The most famous of the antebellum travelers, however, all seemed to skip Florida."⁵⁷ If getting to Florida was an

⁵⁵ McReynolds, *The Seminoles*, 107-12.

⁵⁶ "Porter, "Following Bartram's 'Track'," 431-33.

⁵⁷ Benjamin F. Rogers, "Florida Seen through the Eyes of Nineteenth Century Travellers," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 34, (October 1955): 177.

obstacle, then travelling within it was even more of an impediment except to the most intrepid of travelers. The few accounts of interior Florida that are available often betray the biases of their writers, who usually had financial interests in the development of Florida, but they also provide interesting insight into the nature of the interior before wholesale European settlement and development redrew much of the landscape. Again, it was in those accounts that Americans learned of a Florida that was not a forbidding wilderness, but rather an inviting garden.

Colonel James Grant Forbes, who oversaw portions of the transfer from Spain, was himself compelled by the “imperfect and contradictory accounts of the Floridas” to write his own appraisal of “what hitherto has been but little known and regarded.”⁵⁸ Unfortunately, Forbes, a booster himself, introduced little new information, relying instead largely on previously published accounts. This did not, however, prevent him from touting the northern interior’s “fertility of its soil, the salubrity of its air, the sublimity of its scenery, [and] its abundant supply of cattle.”⁵⁹ Indeed, the very nature of wetlands entails they are not always submerged. If encountered during their dry periods, they may appear—and are often in fact—quite fertile lands.

William Haynes Simmons, another “land speculator” with a vested interest in erasing negative perceptions of Florida,⁶⁰ also acknowledged that the interior regions still remained largely a mystery: “East Florida, though among the earliest discovered portions of America, seems to have been destined to be the last known; being even at

⁵⁸ James Grant Forbes, *Sketches, Historical and Topographical, of the Floridas; More Particularly of East Florida*, (New York, 1821), v.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶⁰ Buker, “The Americanization of St. Augustine,” 154-55.

the present moment but very imperfectly explored.” Further south, he continued, it was all but unknown: From roughly present-day Lakeland south, “we have but little acquaintance with its interior geography or natural productions.”⁶¹ Unlike many who wrote about Florida in the early nineteenth century without visiting regions beyond the established coastal areas and perhaps a brief way up the St. Johns River, Simmons endeavored to explore the northern interior firsthand. He set out in late winter 1822 from St. Augustine to Alachua, which then encompassed a large part of the north central peninsula. Struck by a desire to be part of the American vanguard in Florida, he had moved there immediately upon its acquisition by the United States in 1821 with the intention “to spend the remainder of his days there” and had fallen in love with what he found.⁶²

Like others sailing into St. Augustine at the time, he would have first been met by a mix of Florida’s coastal terrain: white quartz and silica sand beaches—many millennia worth of gifts from the Appalachian Mountains—studded with coquina outcroppings. Sea oat and sea purslane—the pioneer plants—would both cover and anchor the dunes on the mainland shore and barrier islands. The barrier islands themselves not only provided natural storm and surge protection for the mainland, but also created an estuarine medley of lagoons, inlets, and tidal flats. Just inland from the coast, the terrain would have changed quickly from scrub and marsh to hardwood forests, with cedars and red bays, and live oaks grown wooly with Spanish moss and resurrection fern. Further inland, to the St. Johns River, the pine forests dominated. It was, to Simmons,

⁶¹ Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 22.

⁶² *Ibid.*, xii-xiv.

mostly “an immense and sterile forest of firs, interspersed with cypress and pine ponds, and a few inconsiderable lakes.” Nevertheless, he found, the areas around the rivers and inlets were fertile, and the pine barrens could be made to produce crops and pasturage.⁶³

Just before New Year’s Day, 1822, Simmons sailed from St. Augustine to the St. Johns River and upriver to Volusia, near present-day Astor. He offers little description of the trip, which would have brought him past the confluence with the Ocklawaha River and across massive Lake George. Upon reaching Volusia, though, he marveled at the abundance of alligators and waterfowl, and the water lilies, which he called “wild lettuce, which very much adorns the river, giving a deep green margin to its dark and ample stream.” Leaving Volusia, he visited what today is called Silver Glen Springs, “this famous fountain, of which so romantic an account is given by Bartram.” Observing the sunlight on the sand at the bottom of the spring basin, he wrote, “the genius of classical antiquity would have presented this by the allegory of a water nymph, yielding to the embraces of Apollo.”⁶⁴

Near the St. Johns River, he would have discovered an area dominated by large stands of virgin longleaf pine—as much of the north Florida interior and a great deal of the Southeast once was—offering a canopy for turkey oaks and wiregrass. Traveling west-southwestward, he entered what would later become the Ocala National Forest, moving from the pine flatwoods and hardwood hammocks of the St. Johns area into higher, sandier terrain. As he moved toward the center of the region, he encountered a

⁶³ Ibid., 5-9.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 27-29.

place known then and today as the “Big Scrub,” Florida’s ancient interglacial coastline when the seas were at their highest. The Big Scrub presented a great forest of arching sand pines providing cover for a dense understory of scrub oaks, myrtles, rusty lyonia, saw palmetto, and other scrub flora that created what Simmons called “a complete live fence.” Beyond the Big Scrub, as he neared the Ocklawaha River, he encountered wetter, marshy areas, land that he believed could be easily drained or “would afford fine rice fields.” In lower areas throughout the region, the karst terrain was dotted with sinkholes, some which filled from the aquifer or from rainfall, presenting roundish lakes and ponds. Simmons noted the crystal clarity of these “pure waters, unpassed, as yet, but by the wing of the eagle, or the wild duck . . . so extremely clear, as to admit the Sun’s rays to a considerable depth; and the light may, for some distance, be seen playing upon its bed of silver sand.” Continuing on through an “endless succession of lakes, ponds, and savannas,” Simmons apparently crossed the Ocklawaha River near Lake Weir, which he called Lake Ware, about twenty-five miles north of the Palatlahaha River. It was here that he waxed about the uniqueness of Florida’s pond, lake and marsh-studded terrain. “The number of these pieces of water, which gleam upon the traveller’s eye . . . is scarcely credible, and presents a singularity that, I believe, is not to be met with in the topography of any other region of the world,” he wrote. Interestingly, had he continued in any southerly direction, he would have encountered the even more water-laden regions of either what is now the southern portion of Lake County or, further to the southwest, the area now known as the Green Swamp. Instead, he turned northward, arriving at “the incipient town” of Micanopy a few days later. Micanopy, on the edge of the Alachua Savannah, as Payne’s Prairie was then known, where the

“level waste of weeds” was punctuated with “primeval groves of nature [that] here exhibit a verdure and altitude that are, perhaps nowhere else to be paralleled.”⁶⁵

In general, Simmons, found what he saw to be almost limitless potential for the productivity of the Florida interior due to its “fertility, the nature of its climate, and the adjacency of the greater part of it to convenient navigation,” particularly for the area around the Ocklawaha River and Orange Lake (near Micanopy) where “into Alachua a very good navigation has lately been discovered to exist.” Simmons believed that this “northwestern branch of the [Ocklawaha], though at present obstructed by logs” would become a major artery for Florida development. “Through this channel not only will the produce of the interior country obtain a water carriage to the St. Johns—but the vast bodies of oak timber with which the region abounds can be readily wafted to the points where they may be wanted for ship-building.”⁶⁶ Rather than becoming a reliable conduit in and out of the interior, though, the persistent impassibility of the Ocklawaha would present perhaps the greatest single obstacle to development of that region well into the second half of the nineteenth century.

Another important evaluation of interior Florida during the early territorial years came from Charles Blacker Vignoles, a cartographer and “publicist” whose 1823 map of Florida, along with his book *Observations Upon the Floridas*, had at least some influence in attracting early settlers to Florida.⁶⁷ Vignoles, like many other Florida “observers” of the day had speculative interest in interior Florida, as his family had come

⁶⁵ Ibid., 38, 48.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 51-52.

⁶⁷ Charles Blacker Vignoles, *Observations Upon the Floridas*, A facsim. reproduction of the 1823 ed., (Gainesville, Fla., 1977), x.

into land there during the British period.⁶⁸ Like Simmons, Vignoles traversed the interior—and unlike Simmons, he made the entire journey between present-day Tampa and St. Augustine—and he did so perhaps more than once. He had first arrived in St. Augustine in August, 1821, just days before the outbreak of a yellow fever epidemic that, he wrote, “devastated this city [and] had the effect of stopping all business.” In February, though, he wrote that he was preparing for a voyage around the peninsula to Tampa, where he would then make the overland excursion back to St. Augustine. At the end of March, he wrote that he was preparing to “again set out on a two-month journey,” and by July, he was physically exhausted and ill from his travels through “wild woods and uninhabited regions.”⁶⁹

Vignoles praised “the advantages so liberally bestowed by nature upon Florida” and rebutted the notion that the pine barrens that characterized much of the northern interior represented poor soils. Although they “seem to the superficial view unfit for agriculture, particularly to a northern farmer,” he wrote, they were, in fact, fertile. (Indeed, the term pine barren comes from colonists in the northeast who found the soils of pine regions there to be poor for crops, hence, “barren.”) In Florida, Vignoles found the soils of the barrens “afford excellent pasturage for cattle, and if sown with the artificial grasses would procure abundant crops.” Meanwhile, the freshwater wetlands of the interior were potential treasure troves as well. The Orange Lake area north of Silver Springs, for example, was “entirely inundated,” but, with effort, could become “mines of

⁶⁸ Olinthus J. Vignoles, *Life of Charles Blacker Vignoles ... Soldier and Civil Engineer, Formerly Lieutenant in H.M. 1st Royals, Past-President of Institution of Civil Engineers; a Reminiscence of Early Railway History*, (London and New York, 1889), 78.

⁶⁹ K. H. Vignoles, “Charles Blacker Vignoles in South Carolina and Florida, 1817-1823,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 85, (April 1984): 102-4; Vignoles, *Life of Charles Blacker Vignoles*, 85-89.

wealth, unequalled perhaps by the best Mississippi sugar fields.” He lauded the “beautiful undulating fertile country” of the Alachua region all the way down to present-day Tampa, calling parts of it “a remarkable tract of country” where, in others, it seems “desolate” due to fire, but nonetheless, “[t]he general soil may be described as consisting of a light but rich loamy sand.”⁷⁰

Vignoles concluded that the vast potential of Florida should not be discounted by either “false lights” of over-optimism or “enterprises beyond the bounds of prudence.” But if a picture is worth a thousand words, the impact of Vignoles’s book pales against the map he released with it. In it, a great swath of the northern peninsula, as far south as Tampa and consisting of most of the land west of the Ocklawaha and upper St. Johns rivers, is labeled simply as either “fertile” or as the deceptively viable pinelands mentioned earlier.

Just three years later, however, in February, 1826, after an inspection of the very lands from Alachua to Tampa Bay that Vignoles had described so glowingly, Governor William Duval himself offered a far bleaker appraisal: “I visited every spot where any lands were spoken of as being good, and I can say with truth that I have not seen three hundred acres of good land in my whole route after leaving the [Indian] Agency [near Silver Springs].” To the south and west of the Agency, all the way to Tampa Bay, he wrote, “[n]o settlement can ever be made in this region, and there is no land in it worth cultivation. . . . [I]t is by far the poorest and most miserable region I ever beheld.”⁷¹ But

⁷⁰ Vignoles, *Observations Upon the Floridas*, 14, 74-78.

⁷¹ Duval to McKenney, 22 February 1826, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Vol. XXIII* (Washington, D.C., 1934), 445-48.

that did not, at that time, matter to most Americans, because this was land then reserved to the Seminoles.

Soon more Americans began to move into Florida, primarily from worn-out lands or depleted opportunities in Georgia and South Carolina. Those with wealth moved into Middle Florida around the new capital at Tallahassee and established plantations, while “men with lesser means” squatted on land and practiced subsistence farming and livestock raising, where they could, further to the east, between the Suwannee and St. Johns rivers.⁷² Here, in the interior, settlers and Seminoles met on disputed soil. This was the new Florida frontier and the Americans wanted to push deeper into what was still, to them, the wilderness of the peninsula.

Indeed, the presence of the Seminoles was a critical part of how wilderness was perceived before the turn of the twentieth century.⁷³ As had been the case in Dickinson’s time, the idea of the “savage” native was a critical component of understanding the wilderness as such. As Roderick Nash notes, “for the first Americans, as for medieval Europeans, the forest’s darkness hid savage men, wild beasts, and still stranger beasts of the imagination.”⁷⁴ Even as the notion of the “noble savage” developed (albeit far away from the frontier of Florida), the image was one of dualism, in which natives possessed both noble and ignoble traits. This not only justified the idea of Indian removal to another, yet “untamed wilderness;” it necessitated it. On the Florida

⁷² Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 297.

⁷³ Mark David Spence’s discussion of the “widespread cultural myopia” that developed in which Americans came to perceive wilderness as uninhabited areas will be addressed in a later chapter.

⁷⁴ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 24.

frontier, the growing tension between settlers and the Seminoles would erupt in 1835 into the Second Seminole War.

When that war broke out, the “discovery” of interior Florida halted and even regressed. As late as 1837, General Thomas Sidney Jesup would write that “we have perhaps as little knowledge of the interior of Florida as of the interior of China” and complained during the Second Seminole War that he and his colleagues were the “only commanders who have ever been required to go into an unexplored wilderness, to catch savages, and [to] remove them to another wilderness.”⁷⁵ Many of the known springs of interior Florida, meanwhile, were for the most part those along the frontier during the territorial period, being located mostly around the St. Johns, Suwannee, Santa Fe, and Withlacoochee rivers. These rivers all were outside the boundaries of the Seminole reservation, yet far enough from fortified American settlements to qualify as sort of a “no man’s land.” When the war came, many of the settlers in these hinterlands retreated to concentrated garrisons or left Florida altogether, while the military established new outposts throughout Florida. The upshot for interior development around Florida’s springs was mixed, in that some settlements near springs were abandoned, while outposts near others allowed not only for the establishment of communities there, but also for soldiers to describe them to other Americans for the first time.

By the end of the war, the Seminoles had been relegated to the southern part of the peninsula, and Florida was well on its way to statehood. Much of the former reservation was platted and offered for sale to the next generation of Florida pioneers.

⁷⁵ Cited in Ernest F. Dibble, “Giveaway Forts: Territorial Forts and the Settlement of Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 78, (Fall 1999): 210.

Officials began turning toward developing a viable infrastructure—an objective that would prove elusive—as Florida’s population burgeoned, quadrupling from 35,000 in 1830 to 140,000 in 1860.⁷⁶ Following the Seminole War, when the frontier—and the Seminoles—had been pushed to the far south of the peninsula, those considering a move to Florida no longer need read or hear of a wilderness or desert—that was largely in the past. Nor would they read or hear of it as an Eden—that was yet to come. Instead, thanks to the early boosters and those who came after them, Florida had entered the American mind as a place of arable and productive—and available—lands for homesteading.

Florida also was starting to make a name for itself as a resort destination, especially for the physically infirm. Noting the temperate climate, William Cullen Bryant wrote in 1843 that “I do not wonder, therefore, that it is so much the resort of invalids; it would be more so if the softness of its atmosphere and the beauty and serenity of its seasons were generally known.”⁷⁷ In an era when springs around the country were becoming all the rage, the nation’s “first resorts,” Florida seemed primed to cash in on the phenomenon. Yet, as will be shown in Chapter 4, only a handful of Florida’s springs became spa destinations before (or after, for that matter) the Civil War and of these, all were relatively small by Florida standards and their stints as resort destinations were extremely brief.

⁷⁶ Hoffman, *Florida's Frontiers*, 298.

⁷⁷ William Cullen Bryant, *Letters of a Traveller; or, Notes of Things Seen in Europe and America*, (New York, 1850), 107.

CHAPTER 4

A LAND IN LIMBO, 1825-1860

While Florida's springs would become a major tourist destination after the Civil War, the heyday of American springs travel largely came and went without them. Because of its peculiar history as a largely undeveloped Spanish foothold in North America, Florida had entered the United States inventory as a virtual unknown. Most of its springs had yet to be discovered, let alone named or developed. Moreover, much of the interior was soon proscribed to whites to create the Seminole reservation, and the subsequent Second Seminole War (1835 to 1842) would both delay and, as importantly, help determine the directions of growth and development of the interior peninsula. In the meantime, springs and spring travel were in a period of unprecedented and since unsurpassed popularity throughout much of the eastern United States. As a result, interior Florida did not develop as a spring resort destination during the period and its identity—its place in the American imagination—remained undefined.

The growth of springs travel in the United States in the early and middle nineteenth century was spurred by two separate although often convergent phenomena. The first was the emergence of a resort-based tourist economy in which springs were primary destinations. This began in the late eighteenth century at northeastern "day-trip" spas that were "among the first American tourist destinations to be commercialized and advertised."¹ In the nineteenth century, tourism—and the primary role of springs in that tourism—firmly took root. A trio of academic works published in 2001 recognize and explore springs travel in the nineteenth century, "a popular and widespread institution,"

¹ Barbara Carson, "Early American Tourists and the Commercialization of Leisure," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., (Charlottesville, Va. and London, 1994), 391.

and sought to explain how it “shaped, influenced, and articulated nineteenth-century American society and culture.” They explore this phenomenon in terms of increasingly anachronistic European-style class divisions, of religious revivalism, of the emergence of public space, and even of a travel “vogue” created by the early Hudson River School artists and writers, among other themes. What is clear, though, is that Americans were experiencing a transformation in the way they viewed not only each other but also their physical environments, and springs were a critical component. A combined review of the three works notes that “The resorts that these historians study both created and responded to the major changes of nineteenth-century America: the Market Revolution, the process of class formation, the commercialization of leisure time, and the construction of regional identities.”² Tellingly, the state with the largest collection of springs is not mentioned once in any of these three books.

The second phenomenon was a medicinal fad known loosely as “the water cure craze,” in which the application of cold waters was believed to cure an array of ills. Born of long-standing conjecture about the healing properties of water, hydropathy, as it was sometimes called, became a fad in the 1800s. It had some grounding in the medical knowledge of the time and “medical science did its best to confirm Americans’ belief that the springs contained health-giving properties capable of curing all ailments.” But while it was popular, it was also controversial: hydropathy had become a “medical cult quite

² Thomas A. Chambers, “Review: Tourism and the Market Revolution,” *Reviews in American History* 30, (December 2002): 555-56. The three books in question are: Jon Sterngass, *First Resorts: Pursuing Pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport & Coney Island*, (Baltimore, Md., 2001); Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790-1860*, (Charlottesville, Va., 2001); Theodore Corbett, *The Making of American Resorts: Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, Lake George*, (New Brunswick, N.J., 2001).

outside the limits of regular medicine.”³ Generally, it capitalized on the “supposed virtues of water as a healing agent for almost everything that affected mankind.” The craze blossomed in America in the 1840s and 1850s, with dozens of “water-cure” facilities appearing “in attractive rural areas” from Maine to Georgia where “springs supplied the water.” Neither in this period nor in the later nineteenth century did a single water-cure facility appear in Florida.⁴

While self-branded water-cure facilities tended to be quasi-medical in orientation, the idea of water as a curative agent had a much broader appeal that lent itself to marketing for spas. This perception of the medicinal value of springs often merged with that of leisure tourism, and spa resorts often offered recreation and diversion in addition to the healing effects of the water itself. In 1826, one visitor to Saratoga Springs in New York noted that the parties and nightlife there “I fear will prepare more souls for destruction than these efficacious waters will ever heal infirm bodies.”⁵

Water and pleasure have a long history together. While the idea of cleansing and baptism has given water a sacred place in the rites of Christendom, water has also been associated with some of the very sins meant to be cleansed. Since the fifteenth century, at least, and doubtless much longer, bathhouses were often “sites of sin,” write historians Lena Lencek and Gideon Bosker. When such bathhouses were outlawed in both France and England in the mid-sixteenth century, they were replaced by more

³ Marshall Scott Legan, “Hydropathy in America: A Nineteenth-Century Panacea,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 45, (May-June 1971): 268; Thomas A. Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth-Century Mineral Springs*, (Washington, D.C., 2002), 53.

⁴ Harry B. Weiss and Howard R. Kemble, *The Great American Water-Cure Craze, a History of Hydropathy in the United States*, (Trenton, N.J., 1967), 25, 41-43.

⁵ Sterngass, *First Resorts*, 11.

reputable springs and spas, where “licit pleasure . . . legitimized the sensuous property of water.” Religious and medicinal properties associated with water further fueled spa visitation for the next several centuries. According to historian Jon Sterngass, the British phenomenon of spa visitation—that which Americans were most emulating in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—had their origins in religious pilgrimages to holy wells, although such a pilgrimage was often a “disguised recreational journey.” When Reformation ideology cracked down on such pilgrimages, he writes, “the English had simply created new excuses and new destinations.”⁶

In any event, the growth of spas—medicinal, recreational, and both—flourished in much of the United States in the early nineteenth century. By 1850, spa resorts had been built in twenty of the thirty-one states (including California, which became a state late that year).⁷ Florida, although it actually had several such small resorts in operation at the time, was often overlooked altogether in guides to spring spas in the period. Indeed, as late as 1873, a supposedly “definitive” guide to mineral springs in the United States, running to nearly 300 pages, offered a mere four brief paragraphs about Florida. After passing mention of four minor springs in Florida, the guide dubiously noted that while it was rumored that “Florida greatly abounds in mineral waters . . . too little, as yet, is known of these springs to determine with certainty their relative or positive merits.”⁸ Interestingly, Florida was quickly acquiring a national reputation for offering a salving climate for the infirm. Whereas Walt Whitman had seen in the open spaces of the

⁶ Lencek and Bosker, *The Beach*, 58-60; Sterngass, *First Resorts*, 7-8.

⁷ John C. Paige and Laurie Soulliere Harrison, *Out of the Vapors: A Social and Architectural History of Bathhouse Row*, (Hot Springs, Ark., 1987), 11.

⁸ Moorman, *Mineral Springs of North America*, 217.

American West a source of health and renewal, others were finding it in Florida. Well into twentieth century, physicians were continuing to prescribe to ailing patients a retreat and even permanent relocation to the state's restorative subtropics. Oddly, its springs never acquired a similar status. Only a few medicinal spas emerged, and those were at a handful of smaller, minor springs. None of the first magnitude springs like Silver or Wakulla boasted resorts of any sort until late in the nineteenth century. Indeed, even as Wakulla languished as a mere swimming hole, nearby tiny Newport became a resort spa destination that lasted from the mid-1840s until the Civil War. Similarly, Silver Springs was widely overshadowed by its smaller cousin downriver, Orange Springs.

The two major issues that guided development—or lack thereof—of Florida's springs at this time were the Second Seminole War and the absence of a transportation infrastructure. The latter was not only a direct result, but perhaps also an indirect cause of the former. The failure of the American military to provide quick and stable access to the interior—especially along the Ocklawaha River—left the region vulnerable. The subsequent outbreak of the war put most infrastructure projects on hold as others were both created and destroyed in the fighting.

American tourism had begun in the eighteenth century, but almost exclusively as the province of the wealthy. The transportation revolution of the 1800s, however, “created the American resort as a mass destination.”⁹ First steamships and then railroads helped bring the once-distant world of springs to urban centers. Writing of these developments in northern areas by the 1840s, one historian determined that they “completed the prerequisites for mass travel: a segment of the population with money

⁹ Sterngass, *First Resorts*, 16.

and leisure time, an adequate transportation network, and conditions of reasonable safety and comfort at resort destinations.”¹⁰ But if the major springs and resorts of the North could be accessed safely (frequent train wrecks notwithstanding) to the lucky few, who could afford it at that time, the story was much different in Florida until after the Civil War.

While Silver Springs remained largely inaccessible until after the Civil War, it was the potential ease of access to that location that had been touted since the very first official American presence in the Florida interior. Upon acquisition of Florida, federal officials had quickly recognized the wisdom of having an outpost on the Indian frontier. After years of delay and months of searching, in September, 1825, Colonel Gad Humphreys found a location he believed to be ideal. There were natural advantages: it was on “land of good quality and well adapted to the more valuable products of the Southern Country,” and its relative elevation “warrants the expectation of as much health as falls to the lot of the territory generally.” It was strategically located, “in the direct line of communication, between the Indian & the White population of the territory: thus giving in an extensive degree the power to regulate and control the intercourse between them.”¹¹

Most importantly, though, it was just a few miles from what was expected to be a major navigable water route through the territory, the Ocklawaha River. For “the inconsiderable sum of \$300,” Humphreys believed, “a perfectly good and easy navigation might be opened” linking the site with the Ocklawaha and then to the St.

¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹¹ Humphreys to McKenney, 20 September 1825, in Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Vol. XXIII*, 323-4.

Johns at Welaka, just south of Palatka, easing the task of provisioning the Agency and rendering the overland route obsolete.¹² The site he had chosen was Silver Springs.

Soon, as relations with the Seminoles soured, the U.S. government decided to locate an armed fort in the interior. Under the direction of Col. Duncan Clinch, U.S. soldiers built Camp King, later Fort King, between Humphreys's location (he had sought high ground, slightly removed from the springs) and the Silver Springs springhead, about a mile to the southwest of the latter. Again, the potential for quick and inexpensive resupply along the Ocklawaha was critical. "Colonel Clinch was aware of the geographical advantage which had caused [Humphreys] to place his headquarters in this vicinity – the opportunity for water transportation." A quick trip down the spring run to the Ocklawaha and then to Palatka would "make needless the hauling of supplies over the rough route he had followed for more than one hundred miles from Tampa Bay."¹³

The original plan was to ship supplies from St. Augustine as far inland as Palatka, put them on smaller boats for the trip to Silver Springs, then haul them overland the last mile or so to the fort. But when Clinch's men arrived, the Ocklawaha was "so clogged with fallen trees and other obstacles that its navigation was impossible." Clinch ordered his men to clear the river, "through which channel he can receive his supplies at much less expense than by way of [Fort] Brooke."¹⁴ Officials originally estimated that by June,

¹² Ibid., 324.

¹³ Eloise R. Ott, "Fort King: A Brief History," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 46, (July 1967): 30.

¹⁴ Clinch to Adjutant General, 1 April 1827, in Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Vol. XXIII*, 807-8.

1827, the entire route would be navigable for “large boats and barges,”¹⁵ but the project quickly lost its urgency as the U.S. began to downsize its presence in the Florida interior in favor of coastal forces that could be deployed inland if needed. Work slowed down even as a surveyor’s report determined that an overland route from Palatka to Fort King would be all but impossible except in the dry season, when only a “rough wagon road” would be feasible.¹⁶

By March 1828, the river route remained blocked. Instead, boats from Palatka were unloaded about twenty miles or so upriver at Payne’s Landing and hauled overland from there. As tensions with the Seminoles escalated in 1830, Florida settlers and officials clamored for a stronger military presence, but officials in Washington by then had deemed Fort King a “useless expense” and affirmed their intentions to police the interior with expeditions from coastal garrisons.¹⁷ The troops at Fort King were recalled and the outpost was essentially abandoned in 1829.

It is unclear exactly when or why Fort King was reoccupied, but there were again troops there by June 1832.¹⁸ Now, though, even the rough road from St. Augustine to Fort King was “entirely impassable for wagons & other Wheeled Carriages.”¹⁹ Finally, by 1833, round-trip boat service was established between Fort King and Palatka, but even then only a single small pole and oar boat was employed on the river and the round trip

¹⁵ Newcomb to Quartermaster General, in *Ibid.*, 844-45.

¹⁶ Newcomb to Glassell, in *Ibid.*, 924-25.

¹⁷ Macomb to Eaton, 28 January 1830, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Vol. XXIV* (Washington, D.C., 1934), 339-40.

¹⁸ Ott, “Fort King: A Brief History,” 34.

¹⁹ Memorial to Congress by Citizens of East Florida, December, 1831, in Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Vol. XXIV*, 621.

took eighteen days.²⁰ In February, 1835, with war becoming increasingly inevitable, Congress approved \$10,000 “for clearing out the Ocklawaha River from the St. Johns to [Fort King].”²¹ The section of road from St. Augustine to Palatka, meanwhile, remained “impossible to pass . . . even on horseback.”²² Instead, troops and provisions for Fort King from St. Augustine were diverted overland to a point near present-day Jacksonville, and then ferried to Palatka to march to Fort King. At least one company that made this journey took a full nine days to travel what would have been only about seventy-five miles as the crow flies.²³

This effort failed in no small part because the officer in charge, Lt. Francis Dancy, was an opportunist with his eyes set on an assignment closer to Tallahassee where he could curry favor with the wealthy and powerful Florida elite to further his career. After he told his superiors in April, 1835, that the work could not be done during the summer months because of the “vast number of sand flies, mosquitoes and other troubling and annoying insects,” the project was put on hold and Dancy received his transfer.²⁴ When the war broke out, the campaign quickly moved away from Fort King and the Ocklawaha clearing project was all but forgotten for nearly another decade.

In 1844, Florida officials once again turned their attention to the Ocklawaha, this time as a conduit for commerce. “Increasing trade and growing population of the country

²⁰ Ott, “Fort King: A Brief History,” 35.

²¹ *An Act for the Completion of Certain Improvements in Florida*, 23rd U.S. Congress II (24 February 1835).

²² Dancy to Jesup, 14 March 1835, in Clarence Edwin Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Vol. XXV* (Washington, D.C., 1934), 117-18.

²³ John Bemrose, *Reminiscences of the Second Seminole War*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1966), 15.

²⁴ Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Vol. XXV*, 136n.

bordering on the Ocklawaha River” meant that clear navigation would be “a matter of vital import” to residents there and that obstructions in the river resulted in it being “much impeded to [their] great injury.” Since Washington had earmarked \$10,000 for clearing the river in 1835—Dancy’s project—and that money had never been spent, Florida officials asked Congress to once again appropriate a like amount to clearing the river.²⁵ Congress never re-appropriated those funds and, while another resolution for clearing the river succeeded in 1846, no such effort materialized the following year.

As it was, when the Second Seminole War erupted in late 1835, Florida had been part of the United States for nearly fifteen years and, other than construction of a road between Pensacola and St. Augustine, seemingly little improvement had been made in the transportation infrastructure. Construction had just begun on the first two railroads, but both were short lines in the Middle Florida region near Tallahassee. Steam travel was possible on parts of most but not all rivers, least of all the Ocklawaha. Roads, where they existed, were rough and internal movement was mainly along Indian trails. The war subsequently halted or even reversed much of what little settlement had occurred in parts off northern Florida, and even where it did not, settlers often clustered together for protection and civilian travel and commerce slowed dramatically. Tourism, needless to say, was not a priority.

Even well to the west of the Suwannee River, far from the theater of war and where the population actually increased during the Seminole War, the threat of Seminole raids sharply curbed travel to Wakulla Springs. Wakulla already had been described by several writers in the 1830s and one had praised it on the eve of the war

²⁵ *Acts and Resolutions of the Legislative Council of the Territory of Florida, 22nd Session*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1844), 11.

as “the most singular of all the greatest natural beauty, and I may say, the greatest curiosity of the whole South.”²⁶ Yet during the Second Seminole War, travel to the springs all but ceased. This occurred despite the facts that it was accessible by the Wakulla River as well as the Tallahassee-St. Marks railroad, and that it was only six miles from the military outpost of Fort Marks. “Even the picnics and pleasure-trips to Wakulla, which the railroad made easier, had to be delayed,” writes historian Tracy Revels. “The reason was the outbreak of the Second Seminole War . . . While most of the fighting took place in the southern and eastern regions of Florida, Middle Florida was plagued with guerilla raids and frontier residents clustered into towns for safety.”²⁷ If a well-known major spring far to the west of the major fighting, with navigable river access and a railroad, not to mention a nearby fort, was a victim of the Second Seminole War, it likely needs no further explanation why other Florida springs failed to become tourist destinations at the time. As was the case with the opening and settling of the American West throughout the nineteenth century, Indian removal in Florida was also a critical component of “taming” the interior.

Still, while the Second Seminole War retarded settlement and development in much of the Florida interior, it also allowed for several phenomena to take place that would greatly influence how Florida developed in the next several decades. The first was the creation of a military infrastructure. An unknown number of forts were built (although certainly at least 130 and possibly more than 200). In some cases, on the periphery of the frontier, these forts reflected previous settlement patterns and their

²⁶ *Letters on Florida*, (New York, 1835), 15.

²⁷ Tracy Jean Revels, *Watery Eden: A History of Wakulla Springs*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1990), 23.

construction simply reinforced a community's existing location. In other cases, many forts "directly influenced settlement patterns in various parts of the territory," dictating future settlement and development. Roughly seventy towns were "created" around wartime forts. Meanwhile, as the forts and the army moved in pursuit of the enemy, infrastructure was created to facilitate the campaign. "General Zachary Taylor reported early in 1838 that he had built or rebuilt fifty-three forts, four thousand feet of bridges, and about one thousand miles of wagon roads."²⁸ These roads, many of which became the postal roads over which business was later transacted, helped determine the paths and destinations of commerce and travel for decades to come.

The war also allowed for an infusion of new visitors and potential residents as 10,000 or so regular U.S. Army troops were called upon for the campaign (in addition to as many as 20,000 militia and volunteers).²⁹ While their experiences in the war would generally range from the tedious and nondescript to the downright miserable, some of them would take advantage of generous land programs later to help populate and defend Florida. Meanwhile, those same land grants would be used to lure other settlers, particularly small yeoman farmers—as opposed to those who might come seeking plantation life—as a means of bulwarking Florida against both Seminole aggressors and foreign invaders through an "armed occupation" policy.³⁰ That this policy, which is described below, impacted the socio-demographics of the northern interior is evident. In Leon County in the 1840s, about 10% of farmers were considered large planters (with

²⁸ Dibble, "Giveaway Forts," 209-11, 223.

²⁹ Richard W. Stewart and Center of Military History, *American Military History*, (Washington, D.C., 2005), 171. John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842*, Rev. ed., (Gainesville, Fla., 1985), 241, 293.

³⁰ Dibble, "Giveaway Forts," 229-33; Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 314.

fifty or more slaves) while another 30% occupied a middle status (eleven to forty-nine slaves). When Marion County was established in 1845, it had only one large planter, (John H. Madison, barely making the cut with fifty-one slaves.) Of the 247 white males over twenty-one years of age, only ten (about 4%) qualified for the rank below.³¹ Hence, most newcomers to this part of Florida were not of the “leisured class.”

It seems counterintuitive, to say the least, that any veterans of the war would choose to move to Florida after a protracted experience with violence and pestilence. One soldier wrote home about “what we all suffer here in Florida almost eaten up by fleas, ants, cockroaches, and almost all manner of vermin. Even the sand is swarming with fleas, and little flies that bite.”³² And this was from Fort Brooke, at Tampa, a veritable Mecca of civilization and comfort compared with the interior of North Florida. North Florida, in turn, was a relatively benign theatre of war compared with the Everglades, where a good deal of the war would be prosecuted. In South Florida, even an uneventful campaign could swell the casualty list. George McCall recounted in his *Letters from the Frontiers* that after one “fruitless” 52-day expedition into Big Cypress, “no more than two hundred men of the eight hundred could be mustered for duty; fevers, diarrhea, and swollen feet and ankles . . . having laid up in the hospital three-fourths of the command.”³³

Occasionally, however, a soldier in the northern interior occasionally encountered one of Florida’s springs and even summoned the appreciation to celebrate it in writing.

³¹ Dorothy Dodd, “Florida in 1845: Statistics - Economic Life - Social Life,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 24, (October 1945): 8.

³² John K. Mahon, “Letters from the Second Seminole War,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 36, (April 1958): 336-7.

³³ George A. McCall, *Letters from the Frontiers*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1974), 397-8.

For example, U.S. Army surgeon Jacob Motte of Charleston, South Carolina, encountered Ichetucknee Springs while moving from garrison to garrison in North Florida in 1837. Of one march, he wrote:

We reached an oasis in this desert, which broke upon our vision like the fairy-land sometimes seen in dreams. Ichetucknee was the name of this terrestrial paradiseIn a hollow dell where the very air seemed concentrated in coolness, a grassy slope of the most rich and velvet green extended to the margin of translucent and placid spring, whereon was faithfully reflected the green foliage that thickened over it; and in its transparent water might be clearly discerned the tiniest object at the bottom, clothed in the blent hues of the o'erarching sky, the babbling of the stream and faint rustlings of the foliage as the breeze passed gently over the impending shrubbery, were the only sounds heard in this sweetest of sylvan solitudes.³⁴

The beauty of the springs was a stark contrast to the “desert” that North Florida had become and the wanton destruction that the war had brought. After spending the heat of the day at the springs, Motte and his troops moved on and “soon passed upon the road the carcass of a horse, who with his rider bearing an express had been shot by the Indians a little while before.”³⁵ Moreover, this rare—if not singular—celebration of Florida’s beauty amid the suffering was lost on Motte’s contemporaries; for reasons unknown, his journal was not published until 1953.

As miserable as the experiences of soldiers in the Second Seminole War may have been, the enticement of cheap land in the Florida interior after the conflict was apparently too great for many to resist. In the years immediately following the Second Seminole War, the population of the northern peninsular interior swelled. The origin of many settlers of the time is unknown, but neighboring states certainly contributed a fair

³⁴ Jacob Rhett Motte, *Journey into Wilderness; an Army Surgeon's Account of Life in Camp and Field During the Creek and Seminole Wars, 1836-1838*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1953), 88.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

share. "It is certain, however, that Georgians and South Carolinians constituted a very appreciable element of the population, although all of the older Southern states probably contributed some settlers."³⁶ Despite their miserable experiences during the war, soldiers who served in the Second Seminole War welcomed low-cost, or sometimes free, land from the federal government and even solicited their friends and families from back home as well. In Marion County, "[m]any of the first residents . . . were those hardy veterans of the Indian wars to whom were awarded bounty grants of land from the government. These, establishing themselves, sent to the other southern states from which they had come for their relatives."³⁷

The creation of Marion County in 1845 (the same year Florida became a state) attests to the rapid post-war growth of Florida's northern interior, as it does to the continuing difficulties of traversing the region. In 1840, all of Alachua County, then encompassing much of the north Florida interior, had 2,282 residents.³⁸ As the war wound down, anticipation of new land sales—the Seminoles were to be relocated and their reservation opened to settlement—spurred Congress to create a middle-Florida land district in Newnansville, about fifty miles north-northwest of Silver Springs. At the time, "very little land in that area had been sold, but hundreds of people were beginning to settle in the region." Although there was just one sale at the Newnansville office in 1844, it "became the most important land office in Florida after 1845."³⁹ But while

³⁶ Dorothy Dodd, "Letters from East Florida," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 15, (July 1936): 55.

³⁷ Eloise Robinson Ott, "Ocala Prior to 1868," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 6, (October 1927): 94.

³⁸ "Florida Historical Census Counts," *University of Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research*, <https://www.bebr.ufl.edu/node/18>, accessed July 16, 2010.

³⁹ Sidney Walter Martin, "The Public Domain in Territorial Florida," *The Journal of Southern History* 10, (May 1944): 181-82.

Newnansville thrived as the Alachua County seat, the influx of new residents around the old Fort King would have had to travel several days to the courthouse there to conduct any official business. It was quickly apparent that a new county would have to be created with a seat closer to this new growth.⁴⁰ Marion County was thus carved from parts of Alachua and the former Seminole reservation and, by 1850, it boasted 3,338 residents, half again more than had resided in the whole region ten years earlier. By 1870, Marion County's population would more than triple, to 10,804 residents.⁴¹

During this time, two federal land programs helped fuel the growth: the preemption act of 1841 and the Armed Occupation Act of 1842 (AOA). The former act essentially allowed squatters first right of purchase of public lands while the latter encouraged settlement in unsettled or sparsely settled areas of Florida to those who would develop and—critically—protect them. All but three (Fort King being one of those) of the wartime forts were to be deactivated after the war, and the AOA made available only land that was at least two miles from those three “permanent” forts. “Forts as refuge came to an end, but forts continued to be major magnets as centers for settlement.”⁴² For whatever reason, possibly because of the tendency of Florida's rivers to flood the areas around their banks, only a few forts had been built near springs.⁴³

⁴⁰ Eloise Robinson Ott and Louis Hickman Chazal, *Ocali Country, Kingdom of the Sun; a History of Marion County, Florida*, (Oklawaha, Fla., 1966), 41.

⁴¹ "Florida Historical Census Counts," accessed July 16, 2010.

⁴² Dibble, "Giveaway Forts," 230.

⁴³ Fanning Springs on the Suwannee seems to be the one notable exception, where Fort Fanning lent its name to the town that arose there.

Unfortunately, the rules of preemption and those of the AOA sometimes came into conflict with each other since squatters “usually waited, however, until their lands were in danger of being sold before they actually put in claims for preemption.”⁴⁴ Such was the case with Silver Springs. According to Marion County historian Eloise Ott, a man named F. C. Humphrey filed a claim on the land in 1842 and then, believing he had met the AOA requirements left to serve in the Mexican-American War. (It is very possible that this person was Frederick Clinton Humphreys, Gad Humphreys’s son. Little information is available about the younger Humphreys before the 1850s, although he would have been twenty-years old at the time of the land dispute and he was in the U.S. military with an officer’s rank by the outbreak of the Civil War.) During his absence, James Rogers, of Baldwin, Georgia, filed for pre-emption. Rogers prevailed in the legal contest (possibly because of the land’s proximity to Fort King and the AOA’s required distance from permanent forts), and became the first private owner of the land around Silver Springs.⁴⁵

The surrounding lands also were quickly gobbled up, with about 300 claims being made within twenty miles of (and, presumably, more than two miles from) Fort King during the first nine months of AOA.⁴⁶ At this time, another critical decision delayed the growth of Silver Springs. When Marion County was created in 1845, Silver Springs was surprisingly considered for the new county seat. At the time, wetlands and seasonally inundated lands could not easily be drained. Since the wetlands around the spring run

⁴⁴ Martin, "The Public Domain in Territorial Florida," 184.

⁴⁵ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 41; Frederick Humphreys, *The Humphreys Family in America*, vol. II, (New York, 1885), 532.

⁴⁶ Dodd, "Letters from East Florida," 53.

flooded regularly, settlers located a few miles west of Fort King, in what became Ocala.⁴⁷ For the time being, Silver Springs would remain a sparsely inhabited area, home to minor commercial traffic in the form of pole and oar barges and some citrus and row crops set back in the uplands near the spring run.

The new county residents, ambitious as they may have been, were met with some stark realities. Florida, at the end of the Second Seminole War, lacked both a robust economy and a viable transportation network beyond the military roads, which almost certainly discouraged the development of many springs or other potential tourist resorts. Never mind that Florida's cold springs offered relief in summer, when it made little sense to travel there from the north, but even southern travelers would have had difficulties reaching such remote outposts on the frontier, where luxury was a veritable unknown.

Retarded in its economic and infrastructural development by European possession and neglect, the war, and its own difficult terrain, Florida—and the area east of the Suwannee in particular—found itself in dire economic circumstances on the eve of statehood. In 1845, Apalachicola was Florida's major commercial center, due largely to location on the Gulf of Mexico at the southern end of the Apalachicola, Flint and Chattahoochee River system that flowed through the cotton-raising sections of Alabama and Georgia.⁴⁸ Any hopes of rapid development in East Florida during the territorial period were derailed by two major obstacles. Not only was much of the land tied up in legal claims over conflicts with Spanish land grants, but even as those claims began to

⁴⁷ Ott, "Ocala Prior to 1868," 89.

⁴⁸ Dodd, "Florida in 1845," 10, 11, 15-16.

be cleared up, the Second Seminole War intervened, halting and even undoing much of the progress that had been made in settling the interior.⁴⁹ Within weeks of the outset of the war East Florida's sugar industry was "wrecked" by marauding Seminoles, who also destroyed plantations, including sixteen during the first month of 1836.⁵⁰ Eastern Florida's economy would remain so grim throughout the territorial period that many voters there may have resisted statehood because they did not want to lose the federal largesse that came with territorial status. "Impoverished East Floridians were also being forced to accept the elevated expenses of a statehood sought primarily by the wealthy Middle Florida planters," concludes historian Steven Moussalli.⁵¹ While Eastern Florida lagged behind, the wealth, and with it any substantial measure of "high society," concentrated in the area of Middle Florida, the swath of the northern peninsula between the Apalachicola River and the Suwannee River.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, that region became home to three of the four spa resorts that developed in Florida before the Civil War. Two of these were on a section of the Suwannee where the river snakes through north Florida near Live Oak. White Sulphur Springs had been known to residents of the region as far as Georgia who followed Indian trails there during the 1820s and early 1830s. (One writer has suggested that the natives considered the area sacred, brought their sick and wounded there, and forbade fighting within seven miles of the springs.⁵²)

⁴⁹ Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, (Coral Gables, Fla., 1971), 137.

⁵⁰ Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War*, 102, 135.

⁵¹ Stephanie D. Moussalli, "Florida's Frontier Constitution: The Statehood, Banking & Slavery Controversies," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 74, (Spring 1996): 435.

⁵² Dorothy Kaucher, *The Suwannee*, 1st ed., (Lake Wales, Fla., 1972), 80.

During the war, those trails had been replaced by military roads and an 1848 advertisement indicates that visitors could travel along the military road from either Jacksonville or Tallahassee to Alligator (present-day Lake City), where another military road bisected it, and from there be transported via stage to the springs “with no inconvenience.” Steamboat travel had begun on the Suwannee in 1834, but only on a stretch from Cedar Key to a point near Alligator. One bold steamboat captain reached as far as White Sulphur Springs in this period, and even then, only when the river was flooded and at the cost of substantial damage to the vessel.⁵³

There is little extant information on White Springs, as it came to be known. Advertising touted that an existing hotel there had been renovated and now offered “new furniture.” The cuisine was “as good a table as can be found in the South.” Beyond the creature comforts, the proprietors echoed the sales pitches of their northern brethren by boasting of the “almost miraculous” curative powers of the spring water as well as a suitable destination for “seekers of pleasure.”⁵⁴ White Springs, within twenty miles of the Georgia border, resided in what was a prosperous and expanding plantation region and at the intersection of two military roads with stage lines. The arrival of rail lines from the east and west in 1860 and 1861, respectively, allowed White Springs a brief stint as a “fashionable” resort on the eve of the Civil War.⁵⁵

⁵³ Kevin McCarthy and Lindon Lindsey, *Cedar Key, Florida: An Illustrated History*, 1st ed., (n.p., 2006), 15. Carr and Carr, *A Naturalist in Florida*, 54-5.

⁵⁴ "Article: [Untitled]," *Floridian and Journal*, (Tallahassee), 16 June 1849.

⁵⁵ Vanderhill, "The Historic Spas of Florida," 61.

The second spa, about twelve miles downriver at Suwannee Springs, offered promises both modest ("beds will be properly attended to and kept clean and airy"⁵⁶) and bold (the "Fountain of Youth where both body and mind can be restored."⁵⁷) C. C. Clay, a judge and son of a former Alabama governor, visited Florida's spas from Huntsville in 1851, seeking to recuperate from a bronchial condition. He found the Suwannee Spring both "singular & rather wonderful," with boarding houses "comfortable & capable of accommodating about 100 visitors. Still, there was a sense of remoteness to the resort for Clay, made more profound by his failure to receive postal correspondence there. "Surely this is a *terra incognita*, an *ultima thule* that no letters or newspapers from my home can reach it," he wrote. "I feel now, as I did when I slept in the road between Lake Monroe and Tampa--that 'lodge in some vast wilderness, some boundless continuity of shade.'"⁵⁸ Remote as they may have seemed, Suwannee and White Springs certainly benefitted from their location on the bounds of Middle Florida's and Georgia's plantation regions, as well as from their location near major transportation arteries, such as they were. This area would enjoy occasional eras of popularity into the mid-twentieth century.

To the west, Newport Springs similarly benefitted from its location. While Wakulla Springs was known and celebrated as early as the 1820s, it was the spring at nearby Newport that stole the show in the 1840s and 1850s. Closer to the bustling port of St. Marks and within twenty miles of Tallahassee and the plantation region of Florida,

⁵⁶ Cited in Dodd, "Florida in 1845," 26.

⁵⁷ "Article: [Untitled]," *Floridian and Journal*, (Tallahassee), 18 June 1859.

⁵⁸ Olin Norwood and Clement Claiborne Clay, "Letters from Florida in 1851," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 29, (April 1951): 279.

Newport Springs became a resort destination possibly as early as 1846, and by 1850 two hotels had begun operating there. An advertisement in an 1849 newspaper touted the benefits of the newly built Wakulla Hotel at Newport Springs, of which “the virtues of the water are well-known and require no adulation.”⁵⁹

In addition to trying to cash in on the purported medicinal values of the water, Newport, like northern spas of the times, also offered “dancing and other social benefits” and tried to lure people from beyond the Middle Florida region. This was not uncommon at spas throughout America. Although many ostensibly visited them for restorative purposes, those activities used served “only as a prelude to the more social activities of gambling, promenading, horse racing, and gambling.”⁶⁰ Located near navigable waterways and within a few miles of the mule-driven rail cars of the Tallahassee-St. Marks line, Newport even attracted visitors from the North. Nevertheless, an 1858 editorial in the Tallahassee newspaper *Floridian and Journal* lamented that “We think our people had better patronize our own watering places, at Newport, Suwannee, &c,” but acknowledged that many would inevitably travel north to sites such as Montvale Springs, in Tennessee.⁶¹

One spa that defied the odds and thrived in the antebellum period despite its location on the frontier was Orange Springs, along the Ocklawaha River about halfway between its confluences with the St. Johns River at Palatka and with the Silver River. Seemingly little is known about the development of the spa, but it likely did not hurt the fortunes of this area that the land around the spring was owned by U.S. Senator David

⁵⁹ *Floridian and Journal* (Tallahassee), 18 June 1859.

⁶⁰ Paige and Harrison, *Out of the Vapors*, 12.

⁶¹ “Article: [Untitled],” *Floridian and Journal*, (Tallahassee), 19 June 1858.

Yulee and future Confederate militia commander John W. Pearson. While the Ocklawaha had yet to be cleared for steamboat travel, pole and oar boats could make the arduous journey upriver. Also, Orange Springs was on a stage line and Pearson soon built a boarding house for up to sixty guests. By 1852, it was a relatively popular resort destination by Florida standards.⁶²

Historian George Bancroft visited Orange Springs in 1855 and wrote that it was “the best hotel thus far discovered in Florida. The place takes its name from one of the thousands of fountains for which the peninsula is famous. . . . There sulphur water bubbles up, in a large sheet of transparent water, which flows off in a little brook.” Bancroft acknowledged the popularity of the resort, particularly for its curative properties, and also its renown beyond Florida. “The hotel is crowded; the place has a great name as a safe winter’s resort for invalids for all the physicians now send their patients in countless numbers to Florida.”⁶³

Silver Springs, farther up the river, meanwhile, remained a minor stagecoach stop, receiving its first post office in 1852.⁶⁴ Several years later, entrepreneur Hubbard Hart would take over the stage line and Silver Springs’s fate would change forever, but for the time being it paled against Orange Springs in popularity, though certainly not in beauty or grandeur. Upon reaching Orange Springs, Bancroft wrote, “I should have been much struck with it, had I not already seen Silver Spring.”⁶⁵

⁶² Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 51.

⁶³ Patricia Clark and George Bancroft, “A Tale to Tell from Paradise Itself”, George Bancroft’s Letters from Florida, March 1855,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 48, (January 1970): 272.

⁶⁴ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 52.

⁶⁵ Clark and Bancroft, “A Tale to Tell from Paradise Itself,” 272.

Despite the relative popularity of these several spas, development of Florida as a resort or travel destination was hindered dramatically not only by the lack of a transportation infrastructure, but also a lack of transit into Florida. "The tourist of the 1850s confronted certain hazards, not the least of which were wretched traveling conditions," according to Patricia Clark, who edited George Bancroft's 1855 Florida travel correspondence. There were no railroads into the state, so visitors could either travel over rough roads, or by sea, which was often the case. "As a consequence, exposure to stormy seas, often accompanied by seasickness, or, as sometimes happened, temporary immobilization when the ship ran aground, were an accepted part of any voyage."⁶⁶ During the nineteenth century, there were 120 recorded shipwrecks off northeastern Florida, north of Cape Canaveral, not including ships lost during the Civil War.⁶⁷

Upon safe arrival at one of Florida's port towns, visitors who wanted to travel inland were often left with no options other than stage lines over roads that were poorly maintained and subject to flooding, a handicap that had hindered overall settlement of the interior. "Development of the pioneer country during this period was erratic with inadequate transportation facilities proving one of its greatest handicaps."⁶⁸ In 1837, John Lee Williams had observed that "a great variety of public roads" had recently been built, but much "still remains to be done to facilitate traveling through the territory."⁶⁹ To

⁶⁶ Ibid.: 264.

⁶⁷ Steven D. Singer, *Shipwrecks of Florida*, 2nd ed., (Sarasota, Fla., 1998), 169-181.

⁶⁸ Alice Whitman, "Transportation in Territorial Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 17, (July 1938): 25.

⁶⁹ John Lee Williams, *The Territory of Florida: Or, Sketches of the Topography, Civil and Natural History, of the Country, the Climate, and the Indian Tribes, from the First Discovery to the Present Time*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1962), 144.

that end, on the eve of statehood, territorial officials made numerous requests for federal aid to build roads, canals, and bridges. Even Florida's Constitution recognized that a "liberal system of Internal Improvements being essential to the development of the resources of the country," the state should facilitate "improvement in relation to roads, canals and navigable streams."⁷⁰ Little progress was made on this front over the better half of the next decade, and at mid-century, while there were more than 9,000 miles of rail east of the Mississippi River, Florida contained all of twenty-three miles of track on two lines, both mule-drawn.⁷¹ A frustrated Governor Thomas Brown in 1852 chastised the legislature:

It is a melancholy reflection, that while the spirit of improvement is pervading every other state—opening new sources of wealth, of comfort, and stimulating human industry in all its varied departments—Florida alone, like the slothful servant who buried his talent, seems well nigh content with inaction and repose on this vital subject.⁷²

Despite Brown's lament, some improvement had been made in the interior, as Williams had noted. Florida officials had requested federal approval of a mail route through the region, giving birth to a post office at Fort King in late 1845.⁷³ In 1846, construction began on a road to Fort Butler, near Astor, the latest in a series of efforts to link the interior to the St. Johns River and the east coast of Florida.⁷⁴ However, roads to

⁷⁰ Florida Constitutional Convention, "Constitution, or Form of Government, for the People of Florida," *State Library and Archives of Florida*, http://www.floridamemory.com/Collections/Constitution/1838_index.cfm, accessed January 3, 2011.

⁷¹ O. M. Powers, *Commerce and Finance, Designed as a Text Book for Schools and a Volume of Business Information for the General Reader*, (Chicago, 1903), 422; Gregg M. Turner, *A Journey into Florida Railroad History*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2008), 2.

⁷² "Florida Internal Improvements," *New York Daily Times*, 16 December 1852.

⁷³ Ott, "Ocala Prior to 1868," 91. (An unofficial post office was created the previous year, according to Ott and Chazal.)

⁷⁴ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 53.

and from the Silver Springs area would remain troublesome for years to come. A regular stagecoach line was established by 1851 to convey the mail as well as passengers twice a week between Palatka, on the St. Johns, and Tampa via Ocala. (A post office also opened at Silver Springs in 1852 to handle whatever mail came in along via pole and oar boats. The postmaster there, Hiram T. Mann, also welcomed boarders in his modest home.⁷⁵) Still, the river route was slow and tedious and, like the roads, not always reliable. The stage coaches were “cumbersome and uncomfortable,” and the roads were often “deep in sand.”⁷⁶ When Bancroft made his 1855 trip to the interior by stage from Palatka, he wrote that “the road level is passable, but sandy and made rough by the knotty tough fibrous roots of the palmetto or the roots of the pine; the stagecoach a stout vehicle of wood, made to encounter the roads.”⁷⁷

As it stood, whatever spa and resort tourism there was in Florida was directed at the few aforementioned minor springs, and not to the larger gems like Wakulla or Silver Springs. This was not from any lack of appreciation of the beauty of the latter, as Bancroft’s account attests, or of its tourism and commercial potential, as the following two contemporary accounts demonstrate.

The first is the story of Englishwoman Lady Amelia Murray’s visit to Silver Springs, Orange Springs, and Ocala in the winter of 1855. Murray, an amateur botanist and geologist, was traveling through America to learn more about the land’s natural and social peculiarities, particularly on the slavery question. Interestingly, Murray never indicates a reason for going to Silver Springs. Instead, it is a trip that, along with viewing

⁷⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 57.

⁷⁷ Clark and Bancroft, “A Tale to Tell from Paradise Itself,” 271.

the orange groves of the region, “must be accomplished,” even at the expense of spending more than a single day in St. Augustine, where “I should like to spend a week.”⁷⁸ The interior of Florida, as represented by Silver Springs, was, apparently, already becoming a “must-see” destination to those with an interest in a more natural Florida.

After an essentially uneventful, albeit “tedious and difficult” trip from Brunswick, Georgia, including a five-hour carriage ride to cover the last eighteen miles from Picolata, Murray reached St. Augustine. At the primary coastal city in eastern Florida, she lamented, there was no railroad connecting the port to the St. Johns River and the interior. Such a railroad to cover a mere sixteen miles over “flat country with timber on every side” would be “the means of improvement and ultimate prosperity,” but she was unaware of even a proposal to build one. Murray then set out for Silver Springs, but was first deceived into travelling to Ocala, a town that she “had never before heard of.” (The reason for this deception, Murray believed, was that the political views of Mann, the postmaster at Silver Springs, were not popular with Ocalans and his enemies were trying to damage his trade by rerouting as much mail and stage traffic as possible through Ocala.)⁷⁹

Murray, after being told that it was not possible to travel the five or so miles from Ocala to Silver Springs (again, Mann apparently had his enemies in Ocala), finally secured a small wagon to Silver Springs. There, she stayed in the Mann’s “little cottage hotel” whose roof and walls were “not wholly closed from the air.” Murray noted crystal

⁷⁸ Amelia M. Murray, *Letters from the United States, Cuba and Canada*, (New York, 1856), 220.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 228-30.

clarity of the water and the appearance of the springhead “as if made out of solid aquamarine—every fish and shell and weed is perfectly visible.” Yet, she seemed more concerned that the commercial potential of Silver Springs was being wasted by the failure to clear the Ocklawaha River, which was chronically obstructed by deadfall from surrounding trees. “[T]here might be a practical water-carriage by the Ocklawaha straight from Palatka to the Silver Springs, where there is a perfect inland harbor for steamers, which ought to make that place a considerable one, with fair usage—that harbor has been neglected or discouraged,” she wrote. Consequently, she observed, goods had to be transported by carts and wagons over the same rough road she had travelled.⁸⁰ Procuring a quick, reliable, and inexpensive means of getting their crops to market was no small item. Marion County’s farms by 1860 were producing cotton, tobacco, citrus, rice, and indigo in enough quantity that, collectively, they were the second most valuable in the state, behind only those of Leon County.⁸¹

After several days, Murray took a “tedious” stage ride to Orange Springs, followed by a “dreary” return to Palatka. Although Murray’s letters indicate an appreciation and knowledge of geology, archaeology, and botany, her accounts of Florida are often reduced to complaints, prompting Branch Cabell and Alfred. J. Hanna later to mock her as a snob who, forced to endure “outhouses not such as politeness would care to describe,” left Florida “in a huff or a dudgeon.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid., 226.

⁸¹ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 60-61.

⁸² Murray, *Letters from the United States, Cuba and Canada*, 235; James Branch Cabell and Alfred Jackson Hanna, *The St. Johns, a Parade of Diversities*, (New York and Toronto, 1943), 200-2.

At the closing of the Civil War, Silver Springs attracted another notable visitor, Colonel John Taylor Wood. Wood, along with former Confederate Secretary of War John C. Breckenridge, were fleeing the continent through Florida and stopped in the Ocala area. While Breckenridge stayed at a nearby plantation, Wood lodged at Mann's "log cottage hotel" and paused long enough to observe the "most beautiful submarine view I have ever seen."⁸³ Immediately after the war, Silver Springs was visited by someone with a decidedly different political bent than Wood, an outsider who had an even lower regard for Florida culture than Murray had. Northerner George Thompson travelled the state immediately after the Civil War on an inspection for the Freedmen's Bureau and was consistently frustrated and bewildered by the difficulties he encountered (although he often attributed them more to indolence and incompetence than anything else.) When he arrived at Silver Springs, he called it "one of the most enchanting natural scenes I have ever seen . . . The water is very clear so that you can easily discern the bottom at any place in passing over it in a boat. The fish as well as any object in the water has the appearance of silver and probably from this peculiarity it derives its name." But Thompson, perhaps as much disgusted by Florida's "poor white trash" as lamenting the relative remoteness of the springs, determined that it was wasted in its present location. "Could the spring be located in New York or some place where its beauty and perhaps medicinal properties be appreciated it would be a popular place of resort."⁸⁴ Of course, this was as much a reflection of Thompson's disdain for

⁸³ Alfred Jackson Hanna, *Flight into Oblivion*, (Baton Rouge, La., 1999), 136-37.

⁸⁴ George Franklin Thompson. "Journal of Geo. F. Thompson, as Inspector, Bureau Freedmen, Refugees and Abandoned Lands, on a Tour of Central Florida and Lower West Coast." (University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries, 1865), <http://web.uflib.ufl.edu/spec/pkyonge/thompson/gftdiary.html> accessed June 12, 2010.

southern culture as anything else. Part of the charm of the Silver Springs, especially during the next few decades, was its very remoteness. As will be shown in Chapter 5, it was as much the voyage to Silver Springs, along the wild and exotic Ocklawaha River, as the destination itself that would define the experience in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

By 1855, the journey to Silver Springs remained a difficult one for those, like Murray and Bancroft, intrepid enough to make it. Fortunately for the future of the springs, another outsider arrived in the region that year, Hubbard L. Hart, a man who would help elevate Silver Springs to national renown and develop a tourist trade beyond comparison in Florida. Also, while Florida had struggled to create a tourist identity during the period from the outset of the Second Seminole War to the end of the Civil War, those struggles set the stage for a more distinctive place for Florida in the American imagination. The delays and the abortive efforts to establish spring-based resort travel set the stage for a spring-based tourism that was much different from such tourism elsewhere in America. Silver Springs, an overlooked and neglected outpost at mid-century, would crash into the American consciousness with profound impact in the later nineteenth century when further improvements in transportation and a desire for post-bellum reconciliation would combine to invite a more continental and less regional approach to both tourism and national identity. Rather than celebrate medicinal qualities or a “high society” party atmosphere, the springs of Florida’s interior would become known not only for their natural beauty and grandeur but also as part of a redemptive journey into the last vestiges of the then mostly vanquished wilderness. Old World ideas of society and New World ones of mass tourism would meld with emerging notions of

Romanticism into a new form of travel that embraced nature as an end in itself. Florida would enter into the American imagination as a desired destination, and its interior landscape would be the defining feature.

CHAPTER 5 PARADISE DISCOVERED, 1865-1895

When William Cullen Bryant returned to Florida in 1873, thirty years after his previous visit, he was unimpressed with what he found. "In that time several of our western states, which then lay in wildernesses, have become populous and boast their large cities and intersecting railways, and count their millions where they counted their hundreds of inhabitants," he wrote. "East Florida still remains for the most part a forest. . . . How does it happen that East Florida is still for the most part a wilderness?" Bryant then took the steamboat voyage up the Ocklawaha to Silver Springs and was unmoved by what he saw on the river in the daylight, "a woodland solitude, mostly a morass." Only at night, with the tree canopy lit up by torch-light, "[t]he strong ruddy glare of the fire seemed to bring closer to each other the leafy walls of the green arcade through which we were passing, and, changing their hue to the eye, gave them an unearthly yet beautiful aspect, such as we might ascribe to the groves of the Underworlds."¹

Bryant's commentary on the spring itself is brief and uninspired, but his jaundiced eye toward Florida did not go unnoticed. On a side trip from the springs, a local guide took him on a winding walk through the orange groves that then thrived in the area. "I do this," [the guide] said, "that you may see that Florida is not all swamp and sand, but contains good land." Bryant may have been swayed slightly by his guide, but not nearly as much as he was by the influx of visitors he was seeing in Jacksonville, along the coast, "a northern invasion," as he called it.²

¹ William Cullen Bryant and Charles I. Glicksberg, "Letters of William Cullen Bryant from Florida," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 14, (April 1936): 257, 260, 269.

² *Ibid.*: 271-72.

For my part I have no doubt that the number of those who resort to Florida will increase with every season--for this reason, if for no other, that this region may be reached without a sea voyage. With the increase of resort, the accommodations for visitors will be improved and multiplied. There will be better means of reaching Silver Spring and the glades of Ocala.³

Bryant was correct about the growth of Florida's tourism, but he had entirely missed the boat, so to speak, about access to Silver Springs and the role it would play in the late nineteenth-century trade. The steamboat journey Bryant had just taken to the Florida interior was already well on its way to becoming an iconic late nineteenth-century American voyage. This was in no small part due to the vision and effort of Hubbard L. Hart.

In July, 1855, an advertisement appeared in Florida newspapers announcing a "Change in Proprietorship" of the U. S. Mail stage coach lines into and through the interior. Hart, the new owner, was a 28-year-old Vermont native who had most recently run a mail line in Savannah, Georgia.⁴ Hart set up shop in a Palatka hotel, where he offered twice weekly runs each way between Tampa and Palatka, where steamers connected from the former to New Orleans and Key West, and to Savannah and Charleston from the latter, by way of the St. Johns River. The stage coach line also intersected a north-south stage line between Ocala and Alligator, with stops in Newnansville, Micanopy, and Flemington. Extra horses and carriages would be kept on hand in Palatka for direct trips to Micanopy and Flemington, as well as other nearby

³ Ibid.: 272.

⁴ Noll, "Steamboats, Cypress, & Tourism," 10. State Library and Archives of Florida, "Florida Memory," <http://www.floridamemory.com/PhotographicCollection/displayphoto.cfm?IMGTITLE=PR13134>, accessed October 15, 2010.

locales not on the scheduled line. The only one of those other locales mentioned by name was "Silver Spring."⁵

"Hart studied the springs, fascinated by what he saw and the possibilities for some kind of commercial development," wrote Silver Springs historian Richard Martin.

Whatever possibilities Hart saw initially, however, would have to wait until after the Third Seminole War, during which time he was compelled to seek military escorts for his mail runs, (even though the fighting was to the south and the danger to his line "imaginary."⁶)

When the war ended in 1858, Hart recognized that opening up a steamboat line to and from Silver Springs could be a bonanza for tourism. In 1860, he established the Ocklawaha Navigation Company and bought a steamboat, the *James Burt*, which he used to begin clearing the river.

There is some discord regarding who exactly recorded the first steamboat trip up the Ocklawaha and Silver Rivers. Henry Gray had been operating a pole and oar barge up the river to Silver Springs, perhaps as early as 1855, and Daniel Brinton took such a vessel to Silver Springs in December, 1856. Although his journey upriver was slow and arduous, Brinton recognized that even by pole barge, "to be appreciated in its full beauty, [Silver Springs] should be approached from the Ocklawaha."⁷ Some area historians believe Gray's steamer, *Emma White*, was the first to navigate the

⁵ Edward A. Mueller, *Along the St. Johns and Ocklawaha Rivers*, (Charleston, S.C., 1999), 80.

⁶ C. Bradford Mitchell, "Paddle-Wheel Inboard: Some of the History of Ocklawaha River Steamboating and of the Hart Line," *American Neptune* 7, (1947): 119.

⁷ Daniel Garrison Brinton, *Notes on the Floridian Peninsula, Its Literary History, Indian Tribes and Antiquities*, (Philadelphia, 1859), 183-4; Mitchell, "Paddle-Wheel Inboard," 124.

Ocklawaha, while others insist that evidence “argues against it.”⁸ Most sources credit Hart with initiating steam traffic to Silver Springs, but while steamers ran the St. Johns prior to 1860, none is known to ever have entered or even attempted to enter the Ocklawaha, which with “shallow spots and hairpin turns excluded all but microscopic steam craft.”⁹ John Le Conte’s December 1859 article on the springs, meanwhile, suggests small steamers already were reaching the springhead at that time.¹⁰ Whoever may have been first, it would take the efforts of Hart to clear the river and, later, his ingenuity to develop a steamer that could consistently navigate the narrow and windy Ocklawaha. Steamboats had been developed mostly in the eighteenth century and were in commercial operation in North America since the early 1800s. The first passenger steamboats began plying the St. Johns and Apalachicola rivers in 1829, and regular service began on the St. Johns the following year. By taking the vagaries of the winds and currents out of the equation, steamboats allowed for reliable and quick travel to points upriver, a development that gave birth to the tourism industry in interior Florida. Still, most steamboats were designed and built with deeper and wider northern rivers in mind, and special modifications had to be made to accommodate the sinuous southern waters and their shallow depths. Even then, the steamboats available at mid-century could not navigate the Ocklawaha River. Cedar and cypress was floated downriver, but people could not be transported up except by arduous and lengthy pole and oar boats.¹¹

⁸ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*; Edward A. Mueller, *Ocklawaha River Steamboats*, 1st ed., (Jacksonville, Fla., 1983).

⁹ Mitchell, "Paddle-Wheel Inboard," 119.

¹⁰ John Le Conte, "On the Optical Phenomena Presented by The "Silverspring," In Marion County, Florida," *American Journal of Science and Arts* 31, (May 1861): 2.

¹¹ Bob Bass, *When Steamboats Reigned in Florida*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2008), 3-8.

In general, the river remained as clogged with deadfall as it had been at the outbreak of the Second Seminole War.

Hart's *James Burt* succeeded in clearing the river, but no sooner had it done so when Florida was once again thrown into war. The Civil War would allow Hart to flourish running supplies around the rivers of Central Florida. By selecting his boats—he had added a second vessel, *Silver Spring*, to his fleet on the eve of the war—with an eye toward the peculiarities of the Ocklawaha, he could stay beyond the reach of the Union. The river's "shallow waters and twisting narrows prevented deeper draft vessels from navigating the river." Most of the river action took place on the St. Johns, though, and "[s]ince few boats traveled the river during the war years . . . its passage became more and more clogged with snags and obstructions."¹² Also, toward the end of the war, the Union may also have intentionally downed trees to form obstructions in the river,¹³ and by 1865 many stretches were in a "clogged and all but damned condition."¹⁴

After the war, Hart quickly ingratiated himself with the Reconstruction government and obtained a contract to again clear the Ocklawaha, this time using Freedmen to perform the labor and accepting remuneration in land along the river valley.¹⁵ By the end of 1867, steam passage was possible from Palatka to Silver Springs, although accommodations in the Florida interior remained sub-par. Union General J. F. B. Marshall wrote that, other than a hotel in Ocala and another in Newnansville, "[i]n the

¹² Noll, "Steamboats, Cypress, & Tourism," 11.

¹³ Richard A. Martin, *Eternal Spring; Man's 10,000 Years of History at Florida's Silver Springs*, (St. Petersburg, Fla., 1966), 113.

¹⁴ Mitchell, "Paddle-Wheel Inboard," 126.

¹⁵ Noll, "Steamboats, Cypress, & Tourism," 12.

interior of Florida there are not good hotels that can be recommended to tourists or invalids.”¹⁶ Over time, this would change, but it would be several more decades before the lodgings at Silver Springs itself could be considered much more than Spartan.

Hart also set himself about the business of building his fleet, and doing so with boats specifically suited for the narrow and serpentine Ocklawaha River—steamboats with “a boxed stern-wheel set so far into a cleft in the stern that it was completely invisible from abeam.”¹⁷ Despite early competition from Gray, Hart quickly established his fleet as the dominant steamboat line to Silver Springs, running six days a week by the mid-1870s. He had built it, and they would come. They would come in droves.

As it turned out, Hart could hardly have picked a better time or place for his venture. Florida was economically devastated by the war as many of its able-bodied white men were conscripted into the conflict and away from their livelihoods while critical harbor cities like Palatka and Jacksonville suffered great damage during Federal assaults and/or occupation. In the eyes of one northern visitor in early 1870, Florida was no different then than it had been before it became part of America. “The truth should be told. All of Florida is a vast sandy desert, where it is not a malarious marsh, or bushy swamp.”¹⁸

That perception changed quickly. In the early 1870s, Silver Springs became one of the chief beneficiaries of the “discovery” of the South that took place as northern

¹⁶ Patricia P. Clark and J. F. B. Marshall, “J. F. B. Marshall: A New England Emigrant Aid Company Agent in Post-War Florida, 1867,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 54, (July 1975): 56-7.

¹⁷ Mitchell, “Paddle-Wheel Inboard.”

¹⁸ John T. Foster, Herbert B. Whitmer, and Sarah W. Foster, “Tourism Was Not the Only Purpose: Jacksonville Republicans and Newark’s Sentinel of Freedom,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 63, (January 1985): 321.

interests, both economic and political, sought to reconcile the bloody division of the Civil War. The interior of Florida, as it rapidly became more accessible, offered the perfect locale: Florida itself was a relative newcomer to the Union, without a long or very acrimonious history with northern states, from which it was easily the most remote. With a small population and inexpensive land, Florida would almost immediately welcome an influx of newcomers, including many northerners, and thus become even more of a neutral ground for reconciliation. And, critically, Florida's interior was still largely wilderness—a place where Americans could enjoy the nationalism-reaffirming experience of penetrating, exploring, and taming the unknown wilderness that distinguished the nation from its European counterparts.¹⁹

Historian Marguerite Shaffer, in explaining the project, process, and purpose of national tourism after 1880, argues that the breakdown of time and distance between regions with the growth of transportation networks created a framework in which “tourist industries manufactured and marketed America as ‘nature’s nation,’ defining a shared history and tradition that manifested an indigenous national identity sanctioned by God and inscribed across the natural landscape.”²⁰ Shaffer’s thesis is compelling, but her focus on the West and on the period after 1880 is doubly flawed. The creation of national identity through tourism actually began earlier in the century as Americans turned to their natural landscape to define themselves against the Old World.²¹

¹⁹ The role of nature and the idea of wilderness in shaping ideas of an American identity are explored in Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*; Smith, *Virgin Land*; Perry Miller, *Nature’s Nation*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York, 1989), to name but a few.

²⁰ Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940*, (Washington, D.C., 2001), 5.

²¹ Sears, *Sacred Places*, 4.

Moreover, while Shaffer's argument is certainly true in the framework of westward-looking (of course) "Western history," it is no less true when trying to find the place of the southern frontier in the greater American narrative. The scale may have been smaller—clearing the Ocklawaha does not compare with driving the Golden Spike—but the same phenomena certainly played out in Silver Springs as residents of the North and South traversed the wilderness to discover a new "frontier." (It likely did not hurt that image when George McCall's glowing portrait of Silver Springs as it appeared on his visit to that "magic theatre of nature"²² in 1826 was finally released in 1868 as part of his territorial-era memoirs, *Letters from the Frontiers*.) An 1874 article in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* about the potential of Florida even suggested that "The young man whose physical system best endures a warm climate should 'go South,' rather than 'go West.'"²³

This process played out in the increasingly "mass" media of the time, as northern publications spread to national audiences. The impact was swift and broad: Silver Springs and the Ocklawaha were largely unknown and unsettled before the Civil War. Within a few years after the end of the war, accounts of the region would fill northern publications and fire the imagination of their readers. In twenty-first-century terms, literary celebration of Silver Springs went viral. And this happened just as Hart was establishing his steamboat line there. (Wakulla Springs also enjoyed a good measure of popularity and literary praise during this time, but nowhere near that of Silver Springs—it

²² McCall, *Letters from the Frontiers*, 152.

²³ "History, Biography, and Topography," *The Methodist Quarterly Review* 26, (April 1874): 348.

was too remote and travel features about Wakulla often complained about the lack of facilities and the isolated location.²⁴⁾

Civil War historian David Blight has suggested that “[b]y the mid-1880s and throughout the 1890s, American culture was awash in sentimental reconciliationist literature, published especially in successful magazines.”²⁵ In fact, the process began in the early 1870s with travel literature celebrating some of the sites of the South as American wonders. One academician traces the phenomenon to 1870, when *Appleton’s* began a series called “Picturesque America” with a travel sketch of the St. Johns and Ocklawaha Rivers. The series—which utilized leading nature artists such as Thomas Moran and was edited by the aforementioned Bryant—“embodied the surge of scenic nationalism” of the time and “not only tapped into established tourist interests, but also encouraged a ‘cultural reunification’ which attractively presented southern landscapes as a praiseworthy subject for national art and magazine sales.”²⁶ This project, according to English professor Sharon Kennedy-Nolle, culminated with Edward King’s “Great South” series in 1873.²⁷

²⁴ Revels, *Watery Eden*, 30.

²⁵ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 216.

²⁶ Another scholar, Elizabeth B. Heuer, takes the opposite tack, arguing that the series “cynically . . . denies the existence of Florida’s scenic beauty and fashionable watering holes, the very basis of picturesque tourism.” Elizabeth B. Heuer, “Inventing the Past: The Representation of Florida in Picturesque America,” *Athanos* (Florida State University) 19, (2001), http://www.fsu.edu/~arh/images/athanor/athxix/AthanosXIX_heuer.pdf, accessed March 15, 2011.

²⁷ Shaffer, *See America First*, 175. Sharon Kennedy-Nolle, “‘We Are Most of Us Dead Down Here’: Constance Fenimore Woolson’s Travel Writing and the Reconstruction of Florida,” in *Constance Fenimore Cooper’s Nineteenth Century Essays*, Victoria Brehm, ed., (Detroit, Mich., 2001), 145-6.

That series, which would become a book in 1875, was initiated when *Scribner's Monthly*, created in 1870, sent the veteran reporter and novelist King on what would become a 25,000-mile tour of the South in 1873. The goals of his editors were two-fold: "in promoting nationalism and sectional reconciliation, and in increasing the popularity and success of the magazine." King would be "followed by hundreds of others who generally echoed his 'Edenic' version of Florida,"²⁸ and "similar material in *Harper's*, *Lippincott's*, *Appleton's*, and the *Atlantic* were widely read, received favorable reviews, and served to soften the northern attitude toward the South."²⁹ King describes Silver Springs as a "resort," though in a different meaning since "the hotel accommodations in the interior of Florida are far from excellent." The "fairy spring" itself was enchanting to King, who was "quite overcome with the strangeness of the scene. There is nothing like it elsewhere either in Europe or America."³⁰

Access to Florida itself, meanwhile, had been improved with the extension of a rail line from Savannah to Jacksonville, although that trip—sixteen hours according to one 1870 *Harper's* writer—was not necessarily preferable to the sea route: "There are two ways of getting to Jacksonville, and which ever you choose, you will be sorry you had not taken the other."³¹ (The Savannah to Jacksonville trip, a distance of about 160 or so miles along a direct route, at that time instead went through Lake City via Waycross,

²⁸ Tommy R. Thompson, "Florida in American Popular Magazines, 1870-1970," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 82, (Summer 2003): 1-2.

²⁹ Edward King, W. Magruder Drake, and Robert Rivers Jones, *The Great South*, (Baton Rouge, La., 1972), xxvii, xxxiv.

³⁰ Edward King, *The Great South: A Record of Journeys in Louisiana, Texas, the Indian Territory, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, and Maryland*, (Hartford, Conn., 1875), 408-15.

³¹ "Six Weeks in Florida," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, October 1870, 655.

Georgia, adding substantially to the distance and travel time.) Once journalists arrived, however exhausted and rumpled for their journey, the tenor of their writing changed dramatically, particularly in regard to the Silver Springs excursion. Many accounts of the Ocklawaha voyage to Silver Springs, according to Florida writer and historic preservationist Margot Ammidown, “equate the journey with a spiritual transition to the afterlife, or refer to the time-honored notion of the river as a metaphor for a spiritual journey to the source.”³² Ammidown further believes the practice of tourism is intended to evoke a sense of moving or being transported not just physically, but also “spiritually, from the mundane to a state of wonder.” She cites Mircea Eliade’s belief that the sacred and something as mundane as a family road trip “might inspire associations with a pilgrimage—especially if the destination is paradise.” In Eliade’s notion of “crypto-religious behavior,” even those who do not actively pursue religious meaning can still experience it at “privileged places” of personal or symbolic meaning, where the sacred “irrupts” into the ordinary world. Silver Springs, then, even for a person who is not actively religious, may offer just such a location. As it was, early observers of Silver Springs reacted with a mixture of emotions and sentiments, but there was a common thread of heightened wonderment, even as nature was seemingly unveiling itself. The transparency of the water was at once revealing, but it also invited further speculation as to what lay beyond the springhead, out of sight at some still mysterious source. Even the most muted of descriptions belied the sense of *je ne sais quoi* that the springs evoked. In 1827, during some of the earliest discussions about clearing the Ocklawaha, Lieutenant Francis Newcomb wrote to General Thomas Jesup after visiting the springs,

³² Margot Ammidown, “Edens, Underworlds, and Shrines: Florida’s Small Tourist Attractions,” *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 23, (1998): 245.

The character of the [springs and river] being somewhat singular, I hope the General will excuse me for giving a slight sketch of it—it seems a river issuing from the bowels of the Earth . . . it is subterraneous altogether. The principle characteristics of the small streams in this country are that they sink into the earth and reappear again . . . no part is known save this small branch, which appears to be the trunk of a large river . . . The water is so pure and clean, that when the surface is unruffled, at the depth of 37 feet the most minute object may be discovered, even to the smallness of a pin, with as much ease as through a glass medium of ordinary thickness.³³

Four decades later, passengers and commodities finally began to flow in large amounts along the Ocklawaha, Hart's steamboats carried agricultural products from the interior—including Hart's own renowned oranges—while ferrying a growing number of tourists back and forth to Silver Springs.³⁴ For many visitors, the journey was as memorable as the destination. In an 1871 article for *Lippincott's*, J. P. Little wrote that "no more singular a journey can be imagined" than a voyage up the Ocklawaha. "I could imagine this to be the river Styx; our long coffin-like boat, the carrier of condemned souls; our black, silent boatmen, Charon and his crew." At the end of the voyage through this wilderness, though, was redemption, "this cup of crystal water, which bears the name Silver Spring. . . ." Of all the beauty and wonder he had seen in Florida, Little wrote, "nowhere have I ever seen such a gem of perfect beauty as Silver Spring."³⁵ Lippincott would also publish articles and books on Florida by Sidney Lanier, as well as history of Florida by George Fairbanks. In Fairbanks's 1871 work, *History of Florida from Its Discovery by Ponce De Leon, in 1512, to the Close of the Florida War, in 1842*,

³³ Newcomb to Jesup, 16 May 1827, in Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Vol. XXIII*, 844-45. Note: At the time, Silver Springs was sometimes referred to as either "Big Spring" or "Glassel's Spring."

³⁴ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 61.

³⁵ J. P. Little, "More About Florida," *Lippincott's Magazine of Popular Literature and Science*, November 1871, 489-91.

he seized upon the springs of Florida as the possible manifestation of the Fountain of Youth legend often cited (erroneously) as the primary motivation of Juan Ponce de Leon. The Fountain of Youth trope was not uncommon in contemporary writings about the springs, but it is notable that Fairbanks would digress so far into personal rumination in a historical narrative.

[E]ven the fabled fountain might seem to find a realization in some of the remarkably beautiful springs which exist in various portions of the country. Who that has ever floated on the bright waters of Silver Spring, or the bosom of the Wakulla, has not felt his pulses thrill with delight at the almost unreal character of the scene?—the waters so pellucid that one seems suspended in mid-air.³⁶

By the time King's articles on Silver Springs appeared in *Scribner's* in 1874 and he released the compendium of his travels, *The Great South*, the following year, tourism to Silver Springs was already in vogue. In both works, he noted that already "a journey up the Ocklawaha is as fashionable as a promenade on the Rhine, and really more interesting and amusing."³⁷ King was surely smitten. Despite all his travels, "King was most enchanted with his visit to Silver Springs," writes literary historian Anne Rowe.³⁸ The voyage up the Ocklawaha by steamboat was "supernatural," he wrote, marked by constant points "from which there seemed no possible egress." This was the wilderness, mysterious and forbidding. The Silver River, by contrast, presented a far less ominous sense of intrigue, a "delicious forest" that was "mirrored so completely in the water that we seemed suspended or floating over an enchanted forest." The "novelties of the

³⁶ George R. Fairbanks, *History of Florida from Its Discovery by Ponce De Leon, in 1512, to the Close of the Florida War, in 1842*, (Philadelphia and Jacksonville, Fla., 1871), 18.

³⁷ King, *The Great South*, 409.

³⁸ Anne E. Rowe, *The Idea of Florida in the American Literary Imagination*, (Baton Rouge, La., 1986), 33.

tropics . . . kept us in a perplexed wonder,” and the springhead itself was “one of the wonders of the world,” a “fairy spring.”³⁹

The descriptive language employed by Little, King, and most other writers of this time stands alongside, yet apart from, similar efforts to create “nature’s nation” in the West. Silver Springs and the Ocklawaha for the most part evoked a sense of the supernatural, mystical, and otherworldly that was relatively benign—more the stuff of pleasant fantasy that portended a happy ending that, at the end of the upriver journey, Silver Springs provided. Western vistas tended to be vast and panoramic ones that evoked more sublime reactions. Parts of Yellowstone, for example, “excite[d] merriment as well as wonder” and boiling springs “looked like nothing earthly we had ever seen,” wrote Nathaniel Pitt Langford in 1871. But those same springs were “as diabolical in appearance as the witches’ cauldron.” Canyons that were “wonderful” to view were attended with “horrible” stillness, “the oppression of absolute silence.” In one sentence, Langford celebrated “the majestic display of natural architecture;” in the next, “the deep gloom of the scene,” the dreadful verge,” and the “horrid gulf.”⁴⁰ Florida and its interior may have been forbidding, but the emotional pangs they evoked were of excitement, not existential dread or smallness.

Not all writings about Florida during this time drew on emotion, nor were they all positive. In several ante-bellum works on Silver Springs, scientific rationalism trumped visceral emotion. John Le Conte, for example, visiting the spring in late 1859, acknowledged the spring was remarkable, but pointed out that “many reputed facts

³⁹ King, Drake, and Jones, *The Great South*, 410-412.

⁴⁰ “The Wonders of Yellowstone,” *Scribner’s Monthly*, May 1871, 10-15.

vanished under the scrutiny of careful observation, and all its so-called mysterious and wonderful phenomena are obviously referable to well-known physical principles." Still, Le Conte at times resorted to exclamatory punctuation to note some of those phenomena: "Every feature and configuration of this gigantic basin is as distinctly visible as if the water was removed and the atmosphere substituted in its place!"⁴¹ An 1861 writer for *The Friend, A Religious and Literary Journal* similarly noted that the visual effects that some found "mysterious," were in fact "exactly in accordance with recognized optical principles."⁴²

Still other writers in the immediate post-war period were dismissive of Florida in general, particularly those with a political axe to grind or lingering moral contempt over the slavery question and southern mores. George Franklin Thompson's critique of Florida in Chapter 4 is one example. Another is that of Whitelaw Reid, a journalist who had almost enlisted in the Union Army and later ran for the Republican presidential nomination. Reid accompanied Salmon Chase to Florida after the war. Commenting on the seduction and subsequent kidnap of a minor girl by a former Confederate soldier, and the indifference of local residents, Reid recorded it "as good an illustration of the Florida cracker stage of civilization as could have been found."⁴³

For the most part, though, whether driven by pecuniary concerns or desire for national reconciliation, many works of the late 1860s and 1870s portrayed the people of Florida as quaint and friendly, at the least, and gushed over Florida's natural beauty and

⁴¹ Le Conte, "On the Optical Phenomena," 3.

⁴² "'Silver Spring,' Florida," *The Friend; a Religious and Literary Journal* 34, (1861): 189.

⁴³ Whitelaw Reid, *After the War: A Southern Tour. May 1, 1865, to May 1, 1866*, (Cincinnati, Ohio, and London, 1866), 166.

the majority of descriptions of Florida were aimed at a northern—and white⁴⁴—audience. Ledyard Bill, writing in 1870, appealed to the northern ego in the introduction to his guidebook, *Winter in Florida*. “[W]hereas a diversified industry among a people not only makes them more independent, but greater enlightenment follows. There is no country on the globe where this is so remarkably emphasized as in ‘sterile’ New England. The whole southern country today needs, more than all things else, a broader culture both in the field and in the school.”⁴⁵ Some writers simply wrote Florida destinations as analogies of northern ones. In the anonymously authored *Guide to Florida*, for example, published under the name “Rambler” in 1873 (and reprinted in 1875 and 1876), Green Cove Springs on the St. Johns River and the budding resort there were “the Saratoga of the St. Johns. . . . Its importance is assured and several wealthy families have expressed the intention of building winter residences in its neighborhood.”⁴⁶ Ledyard Bill advised Yankees that “there is a large hotel here, the Union House, kept by Mrs. Eaton, though nominally in charge of Mr. Remington, a northern man.” Bill himself stayed with the Coleman family, “of Orange County, New York,” who offered “the perfect art of house-keeping as known in our northern homes.”⁴⁷

⁴⁴ George Pozzetta, for example, argued that there was a none-too-subtle racial message in some of these appeals for immigrants: “Superimposed over these basic concerns for settlers, however, was a strong and pervasive white discontent with the character of black labor within the state.” George E. Pozzetta, “Foreigners in Florida: A Study of Immigration Promotion, 1865-1910,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 53, (Oct., 1974).

⁴⁵ Ledyard Bill, *Winter in Florida: Or, Observations on the Soil, Climate, and Products of Our Semi-Tropical State; with Sketches of the Principal Towns and Cities in Eastern Florida. To Which Is Added a Brief Historical Summary; Together with Hints to the Tourist, Invalid, and Sportsman*, 2d ed., (n.p., 1869), 9.

⁴⁶ Rambler, *Guide to Florida*, (New York, 1873), 93.

⁴⁷ Bill, *Winter in Florida*, 97-99.

The message is clear: northerners could expect to feel welcome at Green Cove among fellow northerners.

Green Cove Springs, it should be noted here, had quickly emerged as “the most touted and highly fashionable” post-war spa and resort in Florida, thanks largely to its location on the St. Johns River with its regular steamboat traffic. As many as ten hotels were built there in the 1870s and 1880s, and it drew its guests almost exclusively from outside Florida. Like its northern cousins, it offered “concerts, horse racing, dancing, and other amusements.” The resort at nearby Orange Springs, meanwhile, faded in this time before a brief renaissance in the late 1880s.⁴⁸ Silver Springs, which had by the early 1870s added a warehouse, tavern, and store to its post office and small boarding house, despite all the visitation there in the post-war years, would not have its first hotel as such until the mid-1880s. Instead, visitors would stay in Ocala or return on the steamboats on which they had voyaged there.⁴⁹

In addition to literary visitors, late nineteenth-century Florida also hosted a substantial number of paid travel guide writers. Subsidized by the state or, as likely as not, steamship and/or rail companies, many were “hacks” who, according to Florida scholar Elliot Mackle, “continue[d] to appropriate and exploit the image[s]” of Florida for their own gain.⁵⁰ Despite the financial motivations of some writers for penning the guides, many betrayed a true appreciation of Florida’s natural landscape. The writer who most bridged the gap, where there may have been one, between what writers were writing and *why* they were writing it was the poet Sidney Lanier.

⁴⁸ Vanderhill, “The Historic Spas of Florida,” 64-6.

⁴⁹ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 106.

⁵⁰ Mackle, “The Eden of the South,” 84.

Lanier, needing money in the early 1870s, had taken a commission from the Atlantic Coast Line Railway to write a Florida guide book (also to be published by Lippincott). The motive was strictly mercenary: "The state was then beginning to gain popularity as a winter resort, and this work was intended to give information that would attract the tourist," historian Lena Jackson acknowledged. Nevertheless, Lanier's writing was from the heart. "Though it was essentially hack-work [and] quickly done, he put into it much poetry and much of himself."⁵¹ Lanier's 1875 book, *Florida: Its Scenery, Climate and History*, was reprinted three times by 1881 and remained among the most popular guides to Florida into the twentieth century. The tubercular Lanier opened it with a brief and rambling introduction in which he lauded the healthful climate of Florida while lowering expectations of "tropical ravishments and paradisiacal glories," then moved immediately into an account of the Ocklawaha River and Silver Springs.⁵²

"For a perfect journey God gave us a perfect day," Lanier began. From the St. Johns, Lanier's steamer turned into the Ocklawaha, "the sweetest water-lane in the world," and headed upriver. Along the river, Lanier reveled in the flora and fauna and let his imagination run wild:

One sees all the forms one has ever known, in grotesque juxtaposition. Look! Here is a great troop of girls, with arms wreathed over their heads, dancing down into the water; here are high-velvet arm-chairs and lovely green fauteuils of diverse pattern of the softest cushionment; there the vines hang in loops, in columns, in arches, in caves, in pyramids, in women's tresses, in harps and lyres, in globular mountain-ranges, in pagodas, domes, minarets, machicolated towers, dogs, belfries, draperies, fish, dragons. Yonder is a bizarre congress—Una on her lion, Angelo's

⁵¹ Lena E. Jackson, "Sidney Lanier in Florida," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 15, (October 1936): 119-20.

⁵² Sidney Lanier, *Florida: Its Scenery, Climate, and History, with an Account of Charleston, Savannah, Augusta, and Aiken, and a Chapter for Consumptives, Being a Complete Hand-Book and Guide*, (Philadelphia, 1875), 9-17, quot. on 15.

Moses, two elephants with howdahs, the Laocoon group, Arthur and Lancelot with great brands extended aloft in combat, Adam bent with love and grief leading Eve out of Paradise, Caesar shrouded in his mantle receiving his stabs, Greek chariots, locomotives, brazen shields and cuirasses, columbiads, the twelve Apostles, the stock exchange. It is a green dance of all things and times.⁵³

The breathless, rapid-fire imagery borders on ecstatic, a sharp contrast to Lanier's muted wonder upon encountering the spring itself. "How shall one speak quietly of this journey over transparency?" he mused. After an attempt at dry description of the spring and the emerging township on its banks, Lanier surrendered to his awe. "Then the claims of scientific fact and guidebook information could hold me no longer. I ceased to acquire knowledge and got me back to the wonderful spring, drifting over it, face downwards, as over a new world of delight." Lanier marveled at the "quaint profundities" and the "charming mosaic of brilliant hues," phenomena that Le Conte had chalked up to "well-known physical principals." Then, when he thought the spring could offer no further delights, an oar splash set the water rippling "until the whole spring, in a great blaze of sunlight, shone like an enormous jewel that without decreasing forever lapsed away upward in successive exhalations of dissolving sheens and glittering colors."⁵⁴

The project of national reconciliation and the desire for more tourism dollars were not the only forces driving the scores of writers heaping praise on Florida during this period. Some writers had vested interests in Florida's economic future and sought northern capital for investment, others wanted to aid in—or capitalize on—Reconstruction, while others may have just wanted to gloat to their chilly northern friends. The *Sentinel of Freedom*, a Newark, New Jersey, newspaper, printed fifty-one

⁵³ Ibid., 27-28.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 35-38.

articles about Florida by various correspondents between 1868 and 1875. Many of the articles describe Florida's mild winter climate and its beauty, topics which attracted tourists and people suffering from pulmonary diseases such as consumption. Of course, "there were many references to the beauty of Florida's springs and rivers." Beyond just selling the natural comforts of Florida, "while many articles in the *Sentinel* described Florida's climate and beauty, they also noted its agricultural potential." Some of the letters, aimed at attracting like-minded and well-off immigrants from the North, "represented a direct attempt by a portion of Jacksonville's Republican community to encourage economic growth while furthering their own political and social objectives." Wrote one such correspondent: "We want more men; active energetic, wide-awake men in order to hasten the work of Reconstruction and make more permanent its resultant civil and religious institutions."⁵⁵

But if the early post-war writings about Florida or Silver Springs could in any way be dismissed as mercenary booster-ism or reconciliatory rhetoric, the tidal wave of lyrical praise that was to follow can only be interpreted as possessing an overwhelming aspect of true Romanticism. Romanticism, as Roderick Frazier Nash writes, "resists definition, but in general . . . implies an enthusiasm for the strange, remote, solitary, and mysterious."⁵⁶

One writer who brought a complex set of motivations to the table was Harriet Beecher Stowe, and for many northerners, her words would transform their notions of Florida altogether. Stowe's relationship with and affection for Florida is a complicated

⁵⁵ Foster, Whitmer, and Foster, "Tourism Was Not the Only Purpose," 320-24.

⁵⁶ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 47.

affair. Some historians suggest she moved there out of “a desire to participate in its transformation into a progressive place,” that she wanted to be part of “the deliberate transformation of a state and of a people.” One writes that, “for Stowe, Florida was not just a retreat, it was a political project: using tourism as a catalyst for colonization, which would, in turn, cleanse the old Confederate states of their racism.”⁵⁷ Later, according to historians Sarah Foster and John Foster, she wrote with an eye toward a narrow group of potential immigrants, the ill and infirm, naturalists and outdoorsmen, and “industrious young men” who would help improve Florida’s agriculture.⁵⁸ Still later, according to other scholars, Stowe had completely assimilated herself into an idealized southern lifestyle, content to while away her golden years in “a proverbial faraway country where life might be lived in a leisurely, even courtly, fashion impossible in the modern North.”⁵⁹ As literary historian Anne Rowe writes, “The harshest critic of the South before the war, Stowe became the most vigorous promoter of idealizing literature of the post-war South.”⁶⁰ In any event, her very presence in Florida and the (perhaps opportunistic) acceptance by her neighbors adds credence to the notions of a larger process of reconciliation. Ironically, the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which Abraham Lincoln

⁵⁷ Diane Roberts, “Harriet Beecher Stowe and Florida Tourism,” in *Literary Tourism and Nineteenth-Century Culture*, Nicola J. Watson, ed., (Basingstoke, England and New York, 2009), 197.

⁵⁸ John T. Foster and Sarah Whitmer Foster, *Beechers, Stowes, and Yankee Strangers: The Transformation of Florida*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1999), 1, 4, 89.

⁵⁹ Anne E. Rowe, *The Enchanted Country: Northern Writers in the South, 1865-1910*, (Baton Rouge, La., 1978), 17; Maurice O’Sullivan and Jack Lane, eds., *The Florida Reader: Visions of Paradise from 1530 to the Present*, 1st ed. (Sarasota, Fla., 1991), 140.

⁶⁰ Rowe, *The Idea of Florida in the American Literary Imagination*, 43.

supposedly called “the book that started this great war,” also, in the words of one historian, “invented the Florida tourist industry.”⁶¹

From 1870 to 1872, Stowe wrote eighteen articles for the *Christian Union*, many of which were included in her 1873 book, *Palmetto Leaves*. The book, which “abandoned any attempt to promote the strong thesis of reform” in her earlier works,⁶² unfortunately did not include an article she wrote that year for the *Union* that celebrated the journey to Silver Springs. Stowe had put off the excursion for some time because it appeared to her to offer nothing but discomfort and inconvenience. Once, she had “turned down a trip because of the appalling appearance of the vessel *Ocklawaha*. ‘We had always dreaded the boat as the abatement of pleasure,’ she recorded. Without glass windows, it resembled a ‘coffin in the twilight.’” After several years of hearing accounts of the journey from “more venturesome friends” who had returned “inebriated with enthusiasm, wild with incoherent raptures,” Stowe summoned the courage to sail into the wild and unknown. “The details of the trip fascinated readers,” according to the Fosters.⁶³

It was a voyage, Stowe wrote, “to dream-land, to the land of the fays and the elves, the land where reality ceases and romance begins.” Despite Bryant’s criticism of the steamer’s creature comforts, even that aspect of the trip caused no complaint. “We found a neat, well-ventilated cabin, with berths for eight ladies, as comfortable as could be desired.”⁶⁴ But it was the scenery that truly mesmerized Stowe, and she described her arrival at the springhead as follows:

⁶¹ Roberts, “Harriet Beecher Stowe and Florida Tourism,” 197n.

⁶² Rowe, *The Enchanted Country*, 18.

⁶³ Foster and Foster, *Beechers, Stowes, and Yankee Strangers*, 3.

⁶⁴ Harriett Beecher Stowe, “Up the Oklawaha--a Sail into Fairy-Land,” *Christian Union*, 14 May 1873.

We seemed floating through an immense cathedral where white marble columns meet in vast arches overhead and are reflected in the grassy depths below. The dusky plumes of the palmetto waving above, lit by torchlight, looked like fine tracery of a wondrous sculptured roof. The brilliant underwhite of the bay leaves, the transparent red of the water-maple, and the soft, velvet feathers of the cypress, had a magical brilliancy as our boat passed through the wooded isles. The reflected fire-light gave the most peculiar effect. The gray moss that streamed down seemed like draping veils of silver and was of wonderful profusion. Clouds of fragrance were wafted to us from orange groves along the shore; and the transparent depth of the water gave the impression that our boat was moving through the air. Every pebble and aquatic plant we glided over seemed, in the torchlight, invested with prismatic brightness. What a sight was that! There is nothing on earth comparable to it!⁶⁵

The next day, when “our romance was over and our faces set homeward,” Stowe and the other passengers listened to the steamer crew sing the book of Revelations, “wild words, breathed into the dark arches of the forest by these wild voices, singing as many parts as the birds and the winds, and all with the same wild accord.”⁶⁶

Religious imagery, including that of Revelations, was echoed in the accounts of non-secular visitors to the springs. Reverend Theodore Cuyler, a Presbyterian minister and prolific author who wrote a series of articles for several publications during an 1876 visit to the springs, was inspired to Biblical reference. Upon reaching the springhead, he wrote, “The forests are around us. The golden sun gleams on the silver surface. And I find myself repeating to myself this verse: ‘He showed me the river of the water of life *clear as crystal*, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,’” the opening verse of Revelations: 22.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Theodore L. Cuyler, “Up the Ocklawahaw,” *New York Evangelist*, 13 April 1876.

Cuyler drew a number of other spiritual lessons from the springs. The first was from the fact that the springhead was always full and the flow constant, a “beautiful emblem of the fullness of mercy in God. . . .” When a person cuts oneself off from God, “he has ‘forsaken the living Fountain’” and must go back to Jesus, “the one only Fountain of all grace and strength. A genuine and powerful revival in a church is simply the outwelling of a Silver Spring from the hearts and lives of Christ’s brotherhood.” Cuyler further likened the invisibility of the source of the spring to the spirit of God and sought to be “more like unto that celestial stream.”⁶⁸

The confluence of the Silver and Ocklawaha Rivers were also cause for reflection:

As soon as the crystal waters of the creek mingled with the waters of the Ocklawaha, they lost their transparent purity and became but common water after all. So when a Christian attempts the dangerous experiment of conformity with the world, he soon loses the spirituality of character which he drew from Christ the Fountainhead. ‘Come out and be ye separate, saith the Lord.’ A Christian can never save the world, while of the world.⁶⁹

Cuyler, who lived at Saratoga Springs in New York, may have welcomed the absence of a spa or resort at Silver Springs. As early as the 1820s, the resorts at Saratoga Springs had become fashionable party destinations and many spring resorts were places of play, not reflection. In fact, at many Virginia springs, a resort’s ballroom also doubled as its chapel, causing one visitor to lament that religion was “very little thought of in this place, and surely, it ought to be made a place of prayer.”⁷⁰ According to the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, the term springs appears at least fifty times and the

⁶⁸ ———, “The Silver Spring and Its Spiritual Lessons,” *The Independent: a weekly journal of free opinion; Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts*, (Boston), 20 April 1876.

⁶⁹ ———, “From the Silver Spring--Homeward,” *New York Evangelist*, 20 April 1876.

⁷⁰ Chambers, *Drinking the Waters: Creating an American Leisure Class at Nineteenth-Century Mineral Springs*, 104-5.

associations are almost always positive, of “upsurging, ‘living’ water that becomes synonymous with the sustaining and refreshment of life.” Moreover, the springs of the Bible “frequently appear in a desert or wilderness landscape.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, among all the other descriptors of Florida as either wilderness or desert, or later, Eden or garden, biblical allusion surprisingly was not the dominant trope for discussion of interior Florida’s springs specifically among writers of any generation. Still, it would be short-sighted to imagine that Americans with a Judeo-Christian background did not experience the springs of Florida through that lens, at least subconsciously if not consciously or, as Eliade would have it, “crypto-religiously.”

In any event, by the end of the 1870s, Florida’s overall Edenic image had been firmly entrenched in the American mind, thanks to the discovery of its garden interior, as well as its agricultural and therapeutic potentials. The idea of an American Eden, celebrated by Romantic writers and Hudson River School artists, had been born in the Northeast and come of age in the West, but it was now expanding to encompass Florida’s anomalous landscape. Nineteenth-century American tourists were “pilgrims” and the nation’s natural features provided the “sacred places” to reaffirm America as the Promised Land, writes historian John E. Sears.⁷² Following the Civil War, Americans needed that sense of exceptionalism reaffirmed and the South had to be reincorporated into the imagined antebellum landscape of an American Eden. In the 1870s, Silver Springs became Florida’s prime beneficiary of this intrigue, with some estimates placing

⁷¹ Leland Ryken et al., eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Ill., 1998), 810-11.

⁷² Sears, *Sacred Places*, 6-7.

annual visits there at 50,000 by the end of the decade.⁷³ Soon, a new kind of tourism would emerge, less an active pursuit of “discovery” or reconciliation and more a passive one of leisure and sight-seeing. Reconstruction had ended, thanks in part to Florida’s role in the disputed 1876 presidential contest, but Silver Spring had played its role in the sectional reconciliation. Among the untold northern visitors to the springs had been Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman, arguably the most symbolic figures of the once-despised North as were alive at the time.⁷⁴

As tourism continued to grow, the literary celebrations kept coming, Abbie Brooks, who wrote under the name Sylvia Sunshine, provided a lengthy description of the Ocklawaha voyage to “the Mirror of Diana,” as she called the spring, complete with a lengthy retelling of a legend about the suicide of an Indian girl named Weenonah at the springs.⁷⁵ The journey, she explains, is not just one of appreciating nature, but also one of pillaging it. Along the Ocklawaha, passengers wantonly shot at birds who “sing songs of joy as we pass; but when wounded, their helpless bodies fall into the turbid waters the last that is seen of them being a fluttering pinion, signaling their sinking condition, with no one to pity or rescue.”⁷⁶

By the turn of the decade, when Brooks made her journey to the springs, development was evident along parts of the Ocklawaha, which had become known as fertile ground for citriculture at the same time as its abundant cypress strands and

⁷³ Derrell C. Roberts, “Joseph E. Brown and Florida’s New South Economy,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 46, (July 1967): 53n.

⁷⁴ Tim Hollis, *Dixie before Disney: 100 Years of Roadside Fun*, (Jackson, Miss., 1999), 146.

⁷⁵ The legend tells the story of two star-crossed young lovers. When the girl’s father, an Indian chief, kills her lover, a rival chief, the girl takes her own life in the springs. There is apparently no factual basis for the story in regard to Silver Springs.

⁷⁶ Sylvia Sunshine, *Petals Plucked from Sunny Climes*, 2d ed., (Nashville, Tenn., 1886), 56.

domes continued to be plundered for timber. "Civilization has commenced making its mark on the Ocklawaha, and the march of improvement, which never tires in its efforts, is leaving its footprints here. These new developments are visible from the various landings which the steamer makes," she wrote. The area around the springhead itself apparently remained much unchanged from what it had been a decade earlier. "The land improvements near the springs are not particularly fascinating," she wrote, with the same turpentine distillery, warehouse "to furnish the back country," dry-goods store, tavern, and boarding house comprising much of the immediate surroundings. Because Brooks did not believe the spring water held any curative properties, she found the boarding house gratuitous, "unless the scenery would compensate for the lack of life-giving properties in the transparent fluid."⁷⁷ (The boarding house was run by Frances Howse, It is unclear when the Howse family took possession of the property, though it appears Frances Howse ran the boarding house from at least the early 1870s.⁷⁸) Instead, visitors usually stayed in Ocala or returned on the steamboats to Palatka the same day.

While there were now more visitors to Florida than at mid-century, these new tourists also were a different type than earlier and an increasing number were now staying. During the 1870s and 1880's, the percentage of invalids and consumptives continued to decline while the tourist business boomed. At the same time, northern immigrants were having an increasing influence on the development of the state and, by 1882, George Barbour commented that "Florida is rapidly becoming a Northern

⁷⁷ Ibid., 66, 81-2.

⁷⁸ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 106. In fact, Howse owned the property when he died and bequeathed it to his wife. Records of land ownership around the springhead are spotty at best until the turn of the century.

colony.”⁷⁹ Barbour’s *Florida for Invalids, Tourists and Settlers*, published by Appleton, was one of the more popular among the litany of Florida guidebooks during this period and enjoyed several re-printings. It shows a Florida interior much changed (and still changing) from just a decade earlier. Along the St. Johns, “settlements are frequent,” and are usually attractive appearing villages . . . everything wearing an air of long-established prosperity.”⁸⁰ Beyond the now well established Green Cove Springs, Barbour encountered Palatka, a “beautiful young city,” apparently bearing no more scars from the war. Blue Springs in Volusia County was a “rather interesting landing-place,” with orange groves and a house on a hill. Although it was to Barbour, “a fine site for a winter hotel,” the recently created town of Orange City, for which it served as a port, had been safely situated away from the river, “on the high lands two miles to the [east].”⁸¹ Along with De Land and Spring Garden, it was one of “three places that impressed me as favorably as any I have seen in Florida.”⁸²

On his trip up the Ocklawaha, meanwhile, Barbour was enthralled by the scenery but seemingly could not find original words or phrases for the much described journey: “grand, impressive, strange, tropical—now gloomy and awe-inspiring, now fairy-like and charming, and again weird and wild.”⁸³ (The language of travel literature may have, in his defense, become somewhat shopworn, as boosters in the West were also touting natural sites such as Yellowstone as “strange and weird, enchanted, unusual, and

⁷⁹ George M. Barbour, *Florida for Tourists, Invalids and Settlers*, (New York, 1882), 184-85.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 40, 119-20.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 43.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 130.

unique.”)⁸⁴ Silver Springs itself offered “nothing especially interesting” to Barbour beyond the spring itself, a “wonder of nature,” but Ocala, with its “enterprising and energetic population” seemed “destined to be an important railway center.”⁸⁵

For the past fifteen or so years, Hart’s steamers, had “afforded the only means of access and transportation” for interior Florida, and “until recently Silver Spring had been the end of the ordinary tourist journey on the Ocklawaha, but [now] the little steamers go far beyond that,” to the lakes area between Leesburg and Tavares, in Lake County. (The steamers had traveled there, in fact, since at least 1876, when Woolson made her voyage.) Moreover, “[r]ailroads are now penetrating [the region] and in a few years the whistle of the locomotive will be heard in every hamlet.”⁸⁶ Railroads would soon supplant steamboats as the preferred mode of travel, and the inland springs they bypassed would suffer greatly as tourist destinations, although this would allow them to remain largely undeveloped and “natural.” For now, though, Florida’s limited rail system had just been expanded to include a “rickety, narrow gauge” line from Palatka to Ocala, but the regional network would soon tie Ocala into a regional web. A brief connection from Ocala to Silver Springs had been established in 1879, when a wooden track was built. According to Marion County historian Louis Chazal, “All went well except that the small engine set the track on fire now and again,” and it was replaced with a mule drawn tram.⁸⁷ The Fernandina-Cedar Key east-west line, finished on the eve of the Civil War and partially torn up during the conflict, had been rebuilt. A connecting line was

⁸⁴ See Shaffer, *See America First*, 50.

⁸⁵ Barbour, *Florida for Tourists, Invalids and Settlers*, 131-34.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁸⁷ Ott and Chazal, *Ocala Country*, 118.

then extended from Waldo to Ocala, and a branch from Ocala to Silver Springs opened on July 4, 1880. The rail line from Waldo was then extended south all the way to Panasoffkee by New Year's 1883.⁸⁸ The frontier was now well beyond Silver Springs.

For some who may have found the Ocklawaha River journey to Silver Springs too frightening or "torturous and slow,"⁸⁹ this rail provided an alternative route to visit the springs. One such person was the English noblewoman Lady Mary McDowell Duffus Hardy, a prolific writer who travelled the United States following the death of her husband. (While Hardy's motives for visiting the United States may have been motivated in part by her personal loss, she also was one of many English citizens travelled to and through America during the nineteenth century. Some were "utterly captivated" by the social and political experiment at work, but many others "began their journey here as a quest for a New Eden," writes literary historian James C. Simmons.⁹⁰)

Hardy tried the rail in the early 1880s and her experience was not a pleasant one. "It was the first time we had been on the genuine 'narrow' gauge, and I fervently hope our last. . . . It was like traveling on a see-saw or a bicycle; the cars oscillated fearfully side to side, we had to hold on to the straps for dear life; even when it came to a stand it was not still, but slowly rocked from side to side." After two breakdowns, the train finally arrived well after midnight, in the pouring rain. The next day she set off back to Palatka, on an Ocklawaha River steamboat where her "comforts [were] well looked after."⁹¹

⁸⁸ Turner, *A Journey into Florida Railroad History*, 115.

⁸⁹ Martin, *Eternal Spring*, 137.

⁹⁰ James C. Simmons, *Star-Spangled Eden: 19th Century America through the Eyes of Dickens, Wilde, Frances Trollope, Frank Harris, and Other British Travelers*, 1st Carroll & Graf ed., (New York, 2000), 1.

⁹¹ Mary McDowell Duffus Hardy, *Down South*, (London, 1883), 184-5, 198.

Rather than finding it narrow or forbidding, Hardy delighted in the journey. On the Silver River, “[i]t seems as though by some strange magical process the green earth had been liquefied purely for our accommodation in passing through, and anon the stream spreads out like a shining silver mirror in the heart of a jungle of overhanging trees.” The Ocklawaha was a “dreamy flow,” where “multitudes of strange forms dazzle our eyes and bewilder our imagination.”⁹²

Somewhere in this heyday of late nineteenth-century tourism on the Ocklawaha, glass-bottom boats were introduced at the springhead, allowing for a further enhancement of the experience. (The transparency of the water viewed through the glass is not altered or obscured by surface waves or ripples.) Tourism spiked at the springs as trains, the Hart Line, and, soon, a competing steam line run by Capt. J. Ed Lucas all brought visitors to the region. Ironically, that competition “reached a peak of intensity in the very years that passenger traffic on the Ocklawaha was beginning to decline.”⁹³ Ocala, meanwhile, even after a devastating fire in 1883, became large enough to add an opera house, host state political conventions, and support numerous hotels, including the grand Ocala House. Silver Springs itself had added a 200-room hotel of its own, which burned itself in the late 1880s and was soon rebuilt. During this time of plenty, however, a series of changes had begun that would literally alter the direction of development in Florida. It signaled the beginning of the end of the Golden Age of steam-boating in Florida, as well the coming twentieth century decline of Palatka and, with them, a period when Silver Springs and its cousins would largely be forgotten.

⁹² Ibid., 192-98.

⁹³ Martin, *Eternal Spring*, 143.

The first was a change in the motivations of Florida visitors, who were increasingly seeing tourism as a form of leisure and recreation rather than as a voyage of personal or national “discovery,” or cultural reunification. Nor was Florida particularly viewed as a haven for the sick any more. “Florida was the resort of invalids for many years . . . but those who spent their winters there, now go to the so-called piney-woods and mountain resorts of Georgia and the Carolinas,” wrote one 1890s observer.⁹⁴

Northerners had rejected as “misconceptions of ignorance” the obsolete images of “swamp and marshes, and their repulsive paludal populations of alligators,” along with “gloomy vistas [and] deadly undergrowth,” all “heavy with the poisons of malaria,” as one 1888 journalist wrote.⁹⁵ Moreover, they now saw Florida as something altogether different. It was no longer a place for either the infirm or the intrepid; rather, it was a place for leisure and escape, “a resting place for those who can afford to loaf at the busiest time in the year—the men who have ‘made their piles,’” Julian Ralph wrote for *Harper’s* in 1893. As historian Tommy Thompson concluded, by the end of the nineteenth century, “Florida’s popular image was changing, but only slightly. Originally celebrated for its healthful qualities, it had quickly been recategorized as an escape for America’s wealthier classes. Florida was still an Edenic garden for them.”⁹⁶

The term “slightly” seems an enormous understatement. While western tourism was becoming more “an expression of the mass consumer culture shared by people of every class,” rather than simply the “elite,”⁹⁷ Florida was turning into “a reflection of the

⁹⁴ Rogers, “Florida Seen through the Eyes of Nineteenth Century Travellers,” 184.

⁹⁵ George Canning Hill, “Florida for the Winter,” *New England Magazine*, March 1888, 210.

⁹⁶ Thompson, “Florida in American Popular Magazines,” 3-4.

⁹⁷ Sears, *Sacred Places*, 209.

power and affluence” that Americans were increasingly seeing their nation as representing. Meanwhile, “Nature seemed a willing partner as entrepreneurs worked their wonders on the face of paradise.”⁹⁸ These wonders would follow the newly built rail lines down the coasts of Florida.

Enter the Captains of Industry, the railroad magnates of the era who left their individual stamps on American development, perhaps nowhere as visibly as Florida. As the focus began to turn away from the interior and toward the beaches in the late nineteenth century, one man seemingly controlled the destiny of the entire eastern half of the state. Henry Flagler had just begun building his hotel and railroad empire when his initial coolness toward building a hotel in Palatka in 1885 led to a testy exchange of words with civic leaders. Three years later, Flagler returned to rebuild the critical railroad bridge across the St. Johns River, connecting the city with St. Augustine and the north-south Atlantic Coast [not its name] rail line, but was denied the opportunity to purchase water-front property other than enough to build footers for his bridge. A “disgusted” Flagler, who had in the intervening three years reconsidered the idea of building a hotel in Palatka, abandoned the plan and focused instead solely on his growing coastal empire, starting with a hotel at the next stop on the line, Ormond.⁹⁹ Hence, Palatka, the regional hub of St. Johns and Ocklawaha River activity, would not benefit from Flagler’s Midas touch, and instead would grow increasingly irrelevant as the new century arrived and progressed.

⁹⁸ O’Sullivan and Lane, eds., *The Florida Reader*, 167.

⁹⁹ Sidney Walter Martin, *Florida’s Flagler*, (Athens, Ga., 1949), 132.

As the grand beachside resorts rose to prominence and came to define Florida in the twentieth century American imagination, the Ocklawaha River region would fade from the collective national memory and consciousness until its resurrection as a private attraction in the mid-twentieth century.

CHAPTER 6 A LAND FORGOTTEN: THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

When Constance Fenimore Woolson took the steamboat journey up the Ocklawaha River, Silver Springs was not the last stop, as it had been in the years immediately after the Civil War. The steamboat now went further south and west, up the river to lakes Eustis, Griffin, and Harris. On their shores, Woolson and her companions saw new towns, “Leesburg, Okahumkee, and others—and we said, with regret, ‘Florida is growing.’ . . . Florida has always been a faraway land, a trackless tropical wilderness . . . O lovely, lazy Florida! Can it be that Northern men have at last forced you forward into the ranks of prosaic progress?”¹

It likely is not surprising that Woolson, a grand-niece of James Fenimore Cooper and an established writer herself who spent winters in St. Augustine, might lament the impact of development and growth on Florida. What likely is surprising, however, is that she wrote this in 1875. Woolson’s observations, at a time when the railroad magnates had yet to begin in earnest their consolidation of northern Florida and conquest of the South, were anomalous to say the least, but certainly prescient. The “Northern men” would indeed have their impact on Florida and it would happen sooner rather than later. And while Woolson looked at Silver Springs and commented that “eventually the beautiful lakelet must be a resort,” the first grand resorts of Florida would be built away from the interior and its springs, some in parts of Florida that were more sparsely populated than even these small hamlets when she wrote. Various parties would invest in Silver Springs, including building a large hotel there and replacing it after it burned, but visitation would continue to decline throughout the 1890s and early 1900s as

¹ Constance Fenimore Woolson, “The Oklawaha,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, January 1876, 175.

tourists and travel writers alike became increasingly enamored with Florida's emerging coastal resorts.

That the coast and its beaches would supplant the interior and its springs as water destinations for tourists does not necessarily speak to an overarching difference in the fundamental aesthetics of either. Instead, rather, it may suggest the replacement of the need to conquer wilderness personally with the ability simply to appreciate society's conquering of nature on a grander scale. Lena Lencek and Gideon Bosker, in the introduction to *The Beach: The History of Paradise on Earth*, offer a history of beach visitation that echoes Sterngass's history of springs and spas. Looking primarily at the origins of European travel to such sites, as Sterngass does, they note the ancient sacredness of such sites, and their significance as places of origination. However, they point out, beaches and shores were also places of battle and conquest not only between people, but also between people and nature. "From Biblical times the voice of God has sounded loudest and clearest at the seashore, where the tumultuous meeting of elements bore witness to the divine judgment of the Great Deluge or the profound wisdom of creation."² A raging sea, more so perhaps than the serpent- and "savage"-filled vine-tied wilderness, brought with it images and mythologies of God's wrath and nature's fury.

Even into twentieth century, beaches could be easily imagined as "portals of entry for death," by enemy invasion or invisible disease. By taming the beach and turning into a place of fun and leisure, the vulnerability of people against both nature and other people could be forgotten. "[T]he story of the beach replays many of the grand themes

² Lencek and Bosker, *The Beach*, xx.

of human conquest—those heart of darkness turnarounds—in which the domesticating and refining propensities of culture eventually triumph over the savage and unknown.”³

Florida’s beaches had been, from the very first arrival of the Europeans, sites of death and slaughter. Europeans fought not only the natives, but also each other. Pedro Menendez de Aviles in 1565 convinced more than one hundred French Huguenots, some of the survivors of shipwrecks in a failed attack on St. Augustine, to surrender to his forces at an inlet south of St. Augustine. Then, even as their comrades lost at sea in the storms may have still been washing ashore, Menendez slaughtered all but a handful. Less than two weeks later, at the same site, Menendez convinced another 150 Frenchmen, also shipwrecked survivors from the failed attack, to surrender. He slew all but sixteen. The inlet is still known as Matanzas, the Spanish word for “slaughters.”⁴

But if the shores were a site of the fury of humans and nature alike, so they could also be conquered and tamed. The hotels and resorts of the early twentieth century were a testament to the consummation of the New World’s conquest. The original foothold in North America had been a place of death and wilderness. Now it was a place to relax and play, looking back across the Atlantic with a subconscious sense of victory. And if this experience could be had from the patio of a resort, complete with morning golf, cold afternoon beverages, and a mighty buffet for dinner, all the better. The “Heart of Darkness” voyage into the wild and forbidding interior had become unnecessary. The heavy lifting of the nineteenth century—industrialization, urbanization, and the conquest of nature—had been done by the pioneers who had come before. It was now for these

³ Ibid., xxi, xxiv.

⁴ “The Massacre of the French,” *U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service*, http://www.nps.gov/foma/historyculture/the_massacre.htm, accessed February 28, 2011.

new tourists and immigrants to reap the fruits of those efforts. One could “rough it” in a relative sense, and trek to the springs of the interior, or one could enjoy a comparable aesthetic from the relative comfort of a beachside lounge chair. To describe this coastal aesthetic, Lencek and Bosker quote swimwear historian Richard Martin, whose description invokes more the notion of a Florida spring than that of any beach: “[T]he water of the sea is everlastingly reflective, its pools ever fresh and translucent, its promise of youth, its refreshment, an unceasing recreation.”⁵

This new-found desire to enjoy the triumph over nature without conquering it personally dovetailed nicely with another critical phenomenon taking place in the American psyche. By the end of the century, the post-Civil War conciliatory desire to reunite the republic was changing into something quite different. David Nolan, author of *Fifty Feet in Paradise: The Booming of Florida*, argues that “in the gilded age that followed the Civil War, there developed an almost insatiable thirst for things noble, regal, and titled.” Those who gained post-war prosperity “could scarcely wait to separate themselves from the horde, the masses, the common people,”⁶ Travel historian Hugh De Santis similarly describes the period from 1865 to 1885 as “the age of travel exclusivity,” in which railroad companies, hotels, and other tourism interests “flaunted images of status” and “emphasized elegance, luxury, fashionable patronage and first-class accommodations” to the elite.⁷ Both Nolan’s and De Santis’s diagnoses of a travel industry that was catering to an increasingly class- and self-conscious populous

⁵ Lencek and Bosker, *The Beach*, xxiv.

⁶ David Nolan, *Fifty Feet in Paradise: The Booming of Florida*, 1st ed., (San Diego, Calif., 1984), 83-4.

⁷ Hugh De Santis, “The Democratization of Travel: The Travel Agent in American History,” *Journal of American Culture* 1, (Spring 1978): 6-7.

arguably may be accurate on a national level. In regard to Florida, however, the timeline was different. The true advent of leisure tourism in Florida did not begin in earnest until the 1880s, if for no other reason than Florida lacked the trappings that the newly prosperous sought, particularly comfortable travel and grand hotels.

In the years after the Civil War, and especially after the Second Industrial Revolution hit full stride, these types of hotels increasingly sprang up around America. The trend toward lavish resorts also occurred within northern and western cities, arguably the most unnatural of physical environments, and was symbolized by the Waldorf-Astoria, in the heart of Manhattan. A flood of literature from hotel and rail companies advertising these hotels would be accompanied by a corresponding change in the focus of mass media depictions of urban vacation destinations.⁸ Nearby some of these established urban centers, developers also constructed stylish hotels at accessible beaches, such as Coney Island, with “lavish accommodations and exclusive clientele” amid, but separated from, “a rougher element.”⁹

This resort phenomenon spread outside urban areas as well, particularly the western natural vistas where Americans were still discovering and inventing a national identity. Historian Marguerite Shaffer argues that western interests sought to delineate themselves from the elite, provincial, and Europhilic East by promoting an image of “democracy, freedom, nature, and economic opportunity.” Yet, at the same time, she acknowledges, western rail interests and developers also “built lavish resort hotels to meet the desires of upper-class travelers” and “brought Old World elegance and

⁸ Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915*, (Berkeley, Calif., 2001), 84.

⁹ John Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*, (Toronto, 1978), 29-31.

cache[t] to the West Coast in an effort to attract a national and even international clientele.”¹⁰ In the dawning new age of “grandiose palaces,” Florida “was architecturally challenged by comparison.”¹¹ By the early 1880s, though, a resort-oriented “architecture of leisure,” as historian Susan Braden calls it in her book by that title, characterized by wealth and excess, began to emerge in St. Augustine and quickly sweep down both coasts. As historians Gary Mormino and Raymond Arsenault write in the foreword to Braden’s work, “before the robber barons contemplated their dominion of Florida, the image of tourist hotels in particular and Florida in general was lackluster and uninviting.” By the end of the 1880s, “new resorts redefined elegance and winter in Florida.”¹²

Evidence of such a sea-change in both perceptions and portrayals of Florida was everywhere by the end of the 1880s. When the publishing house Appleton replaced George Barbour’s work with James Wood Davidson’s *Florida of Today* as its standard Florida guidebook,¹³ the shift in emphasis from Florida’s native and natural elements to haute culture and the built environment was dramatic and glaring. It also mirrored the shift in why people were traveling there. With recent improvements in the speed and comfort of travel to Florida, Davidson noted in 1889 that

The recent vast increase in pleasure travel has produced two coincident results—fine hotels in Florida and sumptuous means of travel to the state. The tide of fashionable touring and resort-seeking southward has set in within the past year or two; and the health and pleasure resorts have been made to meet the demands of that class. The summer resorts of Newport, Saratoga, Bar Harbor, Long Branch and Cape May are beginning to

¹⁰ Shaffer, *See America First*, 38-43.

¹¹ Nolan, *Fifty Feet in Paradise*, 84.

¹² In Susan R. Braden, *The Architecture of Leisure: The Florida Resort Hotels of Henry Flagler and Henry Plant*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2002); Nolan, *Fifty Feet in Paradise*, 102-10.

¹³ Mackle, “The Eden of the South,” 105.

reappear with at least some of their features and *habitués* at St. Augustine, Pablo Beach, Rockledge, Tampa, Tarpon Springs and Key West, as winter resorts in Florida.¹⁴

(Tarpon Springs, it should be noted, is not even an actual spring. It was apparently named by early visitors who saw what they believed to be tarpon “springing” from the water.)¹⁵ In fact, Davidson not only downplayed the interior, he also mocked Florida’s springs’ mythic and actual roles in helping form the state’s image and identity. “Ponce de Leon’s Fountain of Youth has been discovered a score of times, pretty much all over the state, and the modern wonder is that that grandiose *Adelanto* himself could not find it, when it is so numerous today.”¹⁶ (Apparently, residents across the peninsula already had begun to tout their local springs as *the* Fountain of Youth, a practice that would continue into the twentieth century as different areas with springs competed for tourists’ attention and dollars. Promoters of Silver Springs likely did so as well—though there is no record of it—since, even as traffic there waned toward the end of the century, a number of people invested in the springs’ future as a tourist destination. T. Brigham Bishop, one of those investors, reportedly touted the spring’s curative powers to prospective guests.¹⁷)

If springs were a distinctive part of the Florida aesthetic, so too were beaches. Davidson rejected the former in favor of the latter. With nods to the history, geology, and climate of Florida, he celebrated the hotels and restaurants of resort towns, new and old, with only an occasional reference to the “fine scenery” one might enjoy in Florida.

¹⁴ James Wood Davidson, *The Florida of Today; a Guide for Tourists and Settlers*, (New York, 1889), 74.

¹⁵ Allen Covington Morris, *Florida Place Names: Alachua to Zolfo Springs*, 1st ed., (Sarasota, Fla., 1995), 142.

¹⁶ Davidson, *The Florida of to-Day*, 67-8.

¹⁷ “T. Brigham Bishop’s Hotel,” *The New York Times*, 7 November 1891.

Though he was engaged in citriculture in Dade County, his tastes ran not to nature but to grand examples of the built environment, as did the taste of the social class with which he identified. (It is almost surprising that Davidson, a South Carolinian who fought proudly in Robert E. Lee's army, would even write a guide-book, as he remained and unrepentant and unreconstructed secessionist through his life and prided himself on "pen-fighting carpet-baggers."¹⁸) His description of the Ponce de Leon hotel, for example, is effusive, while his discussion of Florida scenery at times seems to have been written grudgingly. Discussing the Suwannee, Homosassa, and Caloosahatchee Rivers, for example, Davidson wrote, "These features are doubtless equally beautiful and interesting in their three several ways; and in this sense it is idle to make marked discriminations in comparing the separate attractions of a state beautiful from end to end." Not content to paint only these three areas with a broad and bland brush, he continued. "Besides and beyond all these and scores of places of equal interest, there are yet other scores each one of which is known to a select circle as the finest spot in Florida—the Eden of garden-spots—the one Paradise of the Earth—the none-such and only original heaven on earth—and so on." One can almost imagine him rolling his eyes as he wrote. "And most of them *are* very lovely and attractive places" he added hastily, with the italics evoking an almost plaintively apologetic tone, as if he had caught himself in a conversational faux pas.¹⁹

Writer Julian Ralph also betrayed a preferential shift from the natural environment of Florida's interior to the built one of its coasts. Writing in 1893, Ralph described the

¹⁸ Mildred Lewis Rutherford, *The South in History and Literature: A Hand-Book of Southern Authors, from the Settlement of Jamestown, 1607, to Living Writers*, (Atlanta, Ga., 1907), 401.

¹⁹ Davidson, *The Florida of to-Day*, 88, 105.

hotels of St. Augustine in detail. “It is the spot itself—the finding of a group of palaces in such strong contrast with all the rest of Florida. It is the change from a field where the other charms are all natural to a mass of beauties that are made by hand.” And while his description of Florida scenery is admiring in tone at times, his description of the hotels evokes some of the same imagery previously reserved for Florida’s nature. The sight of the three hotels together “charms the beholder. . . . [I]t is a melody or a poem in gray and red and green.” The courtyard, not any spring, was “fairy like.”²⁰ Even the title of the chapter on Florida indicated a desire to re-create Florida as an American destination for people of wealth and lineage: “Our Own Riviera,” a theme that would gain currency into the twentieth century.

One of the harshest literary depictions of Florida is Henry Martyn Field’s 1890 travel book, *Bright Skies and Dark Clouds*. Field, one of four highly accomplished brothers including U.S. Supreme Court justice Stephen Johnson Field, was a minister, editor of the *Evangelist*, and prolific travel writer from Massachusetts. Field was moderately impressed with St. Augustine, mainly for its historic value, “But after all is said and done . . . what remains? . . . What is there that should detain me, or detain any man, very long in St. Augustine or in Florida?” The answer: “I confess there is not a great deal, if we come merely to see the sights. The country is not picturesque, no mountains rear their summits to the sky, nor has it even the full beauty of the sea, for though almost surrounded by it, its long shore-line lies too near the level of the water.”²¹

²⁰ Julian Ralph, *Dixie; or, Southern Scenes and Sketches*, (New York, 1895), 174, 177.

²¹ Henry M. Field, *Bright Skies and Dark Shadows*, (New York, 1890), 40-1.

But if this rare dismissal of the Florida coast seems anomalous, Field's opinion of inland Florida is far bleaker:

If you turn back into the interior, the country has a dreary monotony. For a hundred leagues you ride through an endless succession of pine barrens, and as you look listlessly through your car window, you ask, 'Why do our Northern people come to Florida?' And yet for thousands of them this desolate country has a strange fascination. What can it be?²²

The answer, for Field, was Florida's climate, and that alone. To enjoy the climate, though, "one must have a habitation," he wrote, before setting off on lengthy effusion of praise for the new and luxurious hotels that had recently been opened. Field did not once mention the springs of Florida, but he did coo over an artificial "pool of Bethesda" available in one of the hotels.²³

Florida had come full circle in just a few decades and, once again, its interior was being described by some as "desolate." How had this happened? There were several major factors involved, as noted above, but the forces driving development and tourism away from the interior and down the coasts can also easily be easily located in a pair of "Northern men," Henry Plant and Henry Flagler.

Henry Plant was born in Connecticut in 1819 and had a long and lucrative career in the parcel shipping business that began before the Civil War, even serving as tariff collector for the Confederacy. Henry Flagler was born in New York in 1830 and had gotten in at the ground floor as a partner with John D. Rockefeller in what would become Standard Oil. Both men were in their 50s, and certainly of the means to simply retire, when they embarked separately on their new ventures. Both also had their own

²² Ibid., 41.

²³ Ibid., 49.

vision for Florida, but “the two men operated along parallel lines, creating corporate empires that included trains, steamboats land companies, agricultural experts and resource exploitation,” wrote journalist Mark Derr in his Florida history, *Some Kind of Paradise*. “They were friends and rivals who divided the peninsula rather than wage economic war against each other.”²⁴ Both men saw an opportunity to cash in on bringing people to—and winter crops from—the warm and fertile southernmost state. Where they did compete, Derr notes, is in creating resort empires as both men built and purchased hotels along their rail lines and, in doing so, defined tourist destinations throughout Florida well into the twentieth century.

Their parallel empires were not quite parallel—or synchronous. Through a series of purchases and consolidations, Plant’s railroads were the earlier arrival on the Florida scene, as he began buying smaller lines in 1879, tying together major hubs in Georgia and South Carolina with Florida’s line between Jacksonville and Pensacola, then extending it south through Alachua County. All along, Plant looked to grow his land and rail empire to the south and west, pulling his lines through the fertile Florida interior to the Gulf of Mexico where exports could be shipped throughout the region. Eventually, the Plant Line would run from both Live Oak and Lake City south to the Gulf Coast destinations of Homosassa, Clearwater, Punta Gorda, and Tampa, the latter being the jewel of this crown where steamships plied the Gulf of Mexico to and from Key West, New Orleans, Havana, and other key destinations. Plant’s investment in Tampa would make it the premier Florida port on the Gulf, supplanting Cedar Key. (Plant had looked into a rail line to Cedar Key, but when he discovered he would not have access to the

²⁴ Mark Derr, *Some Kind of Paradise: A Chronicle of Man and the Land in Florida* (New York, 1989), 102.

port, he called off the deal, reportedly exclaiming “I will wipe Cedar Key, Florida, off the map. Owls will hoot in your attics and hogs will wallow in your deserted streets.”²⁵⁾

Interior connections, meanwhile, could be made to Ocala, Palatka, Leesburg, and Sanford, through rich agricultural and phosphate territories. Toward the East Coast, he established a direct connection from Waycross, Georgia, to Jacksonville, substantially reducing the travel time from Savannah to Jacksonville. In Jacksonville, however, he stopped and left the Atlantic Coast up for grabs.²⁶

Henry Flagler, meanwhile, had become enamored with St. Augustine after several visits there and, in 1885, began buying land and building hotels there. The only obstacle he saw for this venture was the north-south rail terminus in Jacksonville. When he had ridden the train down months earlier, he had to disembark, take a ferry across the St. Johns River, and then board another train for the remainder of the journey. What was needed, for transporting both building materials and future visitors south of Jacksonville, he decided, was a railroad bridge. Flagler constructed the bridge and also bought and revamped the existing rail line south from Jacksonville to St. Augustine. Seeing an opportunity to tie into the budding rail system in the central and western peninsula, Flagler then bought the rail line past Toco Junction to East Palatka, then a key port on the St. Johns River for vegetables, citrus, lumber, and tourists, and built a bridge connecting it with Palatka, thus creating another transportation hub.²⁷

It was then, as noted earlier, that Flagler chose not to build a hotel in Palatka. Although he built a bridge spanning the St. Johns River between East Palatka and

²⁵ Kelly Reynolds, *Henry Plant: Pioneer Empire Builder*, (Cocoa, Fla., 2003), 143-44.

²⁶ Turner, *A Journey into Florida Railroad History*, 119-29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

Palatka, he built his depot on the eastern side of the river. One can only wonder what might have been if he had been more enamored with Palatka. Perhaps he would have taken an interest in Silver Springs—or at least the steamboat lines along the Ocklawaha—and the attraction may have prospered well into the next century. Or maybe it was for the best that Flagler moved on, and the springs were not trampled by the path of development. “At the very least, the Flagler touch would have set off rapid growth in the little town” of Palatka, but it was not to be.²⁸ Instead, the land Flagler did purchase in the region was in the agricultural areas of Hastings and San Mateo, east of the river. His hotels would be along the coast.

Plant, meanwhile, built and bought his own hotel chain, most of which was on the Gulf Coast (two in Tampa, and one each in Fort Myers, Punta Gorda, and Clearwater. The first hotel Plant bought was a “comfortable hostelry” near Lake Tohopekaliga in Kissimmee, The rail line had been pushed to Kissimmee in 1882 after Hamilton Disston offered the South Florida Railroad free right-of-way to aid in his efforts to develop the region. Disston had reached a deal with the state to buy four million acres for twenty-five cents apiece if he would drain the Everglades. That project included dredging at Kissimmee, the interior headwaters of the Kissimmee River. In 1883, Plant bought the majority stake in the rail company, while Disston’s quixotic effort continued for the next decade, cutting only a small “mosquito ditch” in the Kissimmee headwaters.²⁹

One of the last hotels Plant would buy was the Ocala House, a three-story, 200-room edifice that dominated the Court House Square in Ocala. That hotel, which he

²⁸ Martin, *Florida's Flagler*, 132.

²⁹ Derr, *Some Kind of Paradise*, 88-92; Gregg M. Turner and Seth Bramson, *The Plant System of Railroads, Steamships and Hotels: The South's First Great Industrial Enterprise*, 1st ed., (Laurys Station, Penn., 2004), 45-47.

purchased at auction in 1895, had been built in 1884 to replace the previous Ocala House, a slightly smaller building that had burned along with much of the city on its opening day just a year earlier. By the time Plant purchased Ocala House, the coast was already well on its way to supplanting the interior in the hearts and minds of both Florida visitors and tourism promoters.

Ocala House was considered among the most, if not the most, luxurious hotels in the Florida interior during the 1880s. It was accessible to Silver Springs by both narrow rail and stage lines. Standard gauge rail was not available between Ocala and Silver Springs until 1897, when local attorney and railroad entrepreneur Herbert Anderson attempted to revive the then-flagging attraction. However, Ocala itself was on a rail line, the Florida Railway & Navigation, which was not part of the Plant system. In 1880, that company built a standard gauge rail between Waldo, Ocala, and points south and west, ultimately ending in Panasoffkee. This line connected with Silver Springs via a short track off a bend in the rail line a few miles northwest of the springs (a spot that would for a time be known as Silver Springs Junction but never develop).³⁰ Plant, meanwhile, in 1883 bought the controlling stake in the narrow-gauge Florida Southern Railway, which served Ocala but not Silver Springs. Later, he would also buy the Silver Springs, Ocala & Gulf Railroad that, despite its name, had never been extended to Silver Springs. Despite the access from Ocala to Silver Springs via the Florida Railway & Navigation, when Plant later advertised Ocala House as “something of a health resort,” write Plant historians Gregg Turner and Seth Bramson, the springs were not a factor. “Apparently,

³⁰ Turner, *A Journey into Florida Railroad History*, 115.

the resinous odors from the region's piney woods had a remedial effect" on visitors, they wrote. Or, perhaps Plant simply did not want to aid a competitor.³¹

The Ocala and Marion County of the late 1880s enjoyed a Golden Age. Visitors seeking comfortable climes continued to travel there in growing numbers; a now thriving citrus trade was at its zenith; turpentine and cypress logging continued apace; and the Silver Springs tourist trade was reaching unparalleled numbers. An annual Chautauqua began at nearby Lake Weir in 1888, followed by an international regatta the ensuing year. In 1889, Ocala also hosted the Florida International and Sub-tropical Exposition, gaining further acclaim for its agricultural products as well as its accommodating climate and hospitality. The success of that venture helped Ocala become the host of the 1890 Farmers' Alliance convention, and the resulting Ocala Platform elevated the city's name to a household term. One delegate there went so far as to call Ocala the "Chicago of Florida," a fitting comparison to an urban outpost in a recently tamed and increasingly agrarian interior.³²

The 1889 discovery of rich phosphate deposits around Dunnellon, about twenty miles to the west-southwest, added to the regional boom.³³ The phosphate bubble would also attract limited attention to Juliette Springs, off the Withlacoochee, a large spring with moderate tourist facilities that would not enjoy wide acclaim until the late

³¹ Turner and Bramson, *The Plant System*, 101. For additional description, see also Ott and Chazal, *Ocala Country*, 130-33.

³² Eloise Knight Jones, *Ocala Cavalcade through One Hundred Years*, (Ocala Fla., 1946), 39; Samuel Proctor, "The National Farmers' Alliance Convention of 1890 and Its 'Ocala Demands'," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 28, (January 1950).

³³ J. Lester Dinkins, *Dunnellon: Boomtown of the 1890's; the Story of Rainbow Springs and Dunnellon*, (St. Petersburg, Fla., 1969), Chapter 6.

1930s, when it was developed and rebranded as Rainbow Springs.³⁴ In the mid-1880s, an upstart community called Silver Springs Park also developed about three miles north of Silver Springs along the rail line and attempted to rival Ocala. The boom-to-bust citrus town both flourished and vanished quickly, leaving behind as its last relic a 100-room hotel that sat unattended from the turn of the century until 1929, when it was razed for its surviving lumber.³⁵

Silver Springs proper also enjoyed the fruits of economic development in this time. Although the date apparently is unknown, sometime in the early to mid-1880s, a New Yorker named J. Brigham Bishop made a deal with the Howse family, who owned the area around the springhead, to develop the area. Bishop's identity, motives, and means of financing remain murky. An 1887 Florida legislative act named an F. Brigham Bishop to the board of a company incorporated to build and operate a rail between Ocala, Silver Springs, and Silver Springs park, and authorized bond sales to "erect a hotel or summer house" at the springs, with "baths and pleasure gardens."³⁶ There is no further record of this company or any such rail, but by the middle of the 1880s, a four-story, 200-room hotel had been built on the northern edge of the springhead. In either late 1888 or early 1889, the hotel burned, however, and Bishop was forced to accommodate visitors in whatever cottages survived the blaze.³⁷ In 1891, a man identified in *The New*

³⁴ Ibid., 53.

³⁵ David Cook, "Silver Springs Park Flourished, Then Vanished," *Ocala Star-Banner*, August 22 2010.

³⁶ "An Act to Incorporate the Ocala, Silver Springs and Park Street Railroad Co.," in *The Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida; First Session*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1887), 249.

³⁷ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 168; William Drysdale, "It Gushes from the Rock," *The New York Times*, 26 May 1889. Note: According to Ott and Chazal, the blaze took place around 1895, an unattributed assertion that has been repeated in many accounts of Silver Springs history. From the author's research of newspaper articles and photographic evidence, it seems clear that the fire took place at the end of the 1880s.

York Times as T. Brigham Bishop, a “confidence man, bunko-steerer, and general crook,” was arrested in New York upon his return from Florida, a state, the newspaper said, he had worked “from end to end,” and one former Silver Springs visitor wrote that he had met Bishop at the springs and was later told that this man was a known land investment swindler.³⁸

Visitors kept coming to both Ocala and Silver Springs, despite the growing popularity of the beach, and a new hotel, the Brown House was soon built at the springhead to replace Bishop’s. Photographs of the two -story Brown House show a slightly smaller and squarer structure than its predecessor with an enclosed tower on one corner of the roof. Other development interests also invested in the area, including a northern group headed by former U.S. Treasury Secretary James Gilfillan that bought the Ocala House and began plans to develop 5,000 acres in Ocala. Ultimately, its designs were to refurbish and expand the modest new Silver Springs hotel and to “make Silver Springs the beauty spot of the world,” with gardens, casinos, and fountains, gondolas on the spring, and a 100-foot wide boulevard and electric rail to connect Ocala and the springs, according to local papers. For whatever reason, however, this venture fizzled. The New York-based Ocala and Silver Springs Company advertised free excursions to its Florida holdings only twice in *The New York Times* in 1892. In 1895, Plant bought Ocala House in a public auction.³⁹

In 1898, local attorney and railroad entrepreneur Herbert Anderson bought the land around the springhead and held it for about a decade amid declining business at

³⁸ “A Long Career as a Crook,” *The New York Times*, 6 November 1891; “T. Brigham Bishop’s Hotel.”

³⁹ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 151, 156.

the springs.⁴⁰ Anderson also had big plans for the area and announced his intention to spend \$10,000 improving the springs, including adding "a handsome casino and dancing pavilion" at the springhead. Like Gilfillan's group, he also sought an electric rail that would connect Ocala and Silver Springs, in addition, apparently, to the branch off the narrow gauge line between Palatka and Ocala, but instead settled for a small steam engine to run passengers and, later, freight between Ocala and the springs. Anderson was described, according to the *Ocala Star-Banner* as "the grand mogul and promoter of the new line," and he took part in the first run to the springs, where passengers spent before an "uneventful" trip back to Ocala.⁴¹ Traveling to Silver Springs via the Ocklawaha was for many at the time an adventure; a monotonous train ride from downtown Ocala may have appealed to some rail travelers not on a line that linked to Silver Springs, but for others, it likely held all the excitement and novelty of an afternoon commute. A 1901 report by the U.S. Interstate Commerce Commission shows Anderson's company, the Silver Springs and Western Railroad Company, still owned the tracks in June, 1900, but no longer operated any trains on the line. Reportedly, his efforts to maintain a freight business along the line had been quashed by competitors with larger rails.⁴² Despite his efforts and aspirations, however, Silver Springs continued to decline as tourists turned to the beach and grand resorts. The new Florida, that which

⁴⁰ Martin, *Eternal Spring*, 156-57.

⁴¹ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 166; David Cook, "The Way It Was: Keeping Track of Ocala's Railroad Lines," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 24 January 2010.

⁴² U. S. Interstate Commerce Commission, *Annual Report on the Statistics of Railways in the United States*, (Washington, D.C., 1901), 202. Note: As late as 1908, it appears that the railroad company, the Howse family, and Sarah Bishop—perhaps wife of T. Brigham Bishop—were in legal wranglings over money allegedly owed between the parties.

was being built on the coasts and marketed to northern visitors, was supplanting the interior in the American mind as to what Florida was and what it represented.

Other Florida springs also failed to become major resorts in this period, but several did grow into minor ones. Worthington Springs in the northern interior, Panacea south of Tallahassee, and Safety Harbor near Clearwater, all emerged in the 1890s as regional destinations, with a sprinkling of hotels and a bottling facility at each, yet none grew very large or prospered very long.⁴³ At Wakulla Springs, a northern couple purchased the land around the springhead in 1882 with lofty plans for a sanitarium, while other interests explored the idea of a paper mill there. The paper mill was never built, the sanitarium project never got off the ground, and the area remained remote. For decades, the springs remained the site of local residents' annual picnic and little else. When geologists evaluated the site in 1913 for possible uses, they recorded "none," writes historian Tracy Revels.⁴⁴

Silver Springs remained popular through the turn of the century, at least locally, but it did not get nearly as much visitation from tourists or attention in the national media as it had in prior years. In addition to the changing focus of Florida literature noted previously, only a smattering of published accounts celebrating the Ocklawaha and Silver Springs appeared as the century waned, compared with the heyday of the 1870s and early 1880s. Tellingly, nature writer Bradford Torrey did not offer a single comment on Florida's springs in his 1894 book, *A Florida-Sketch-book*.⁴⁵

⁴³ Vanderhill, "The Historic Spas of Florida," 66-70.

⁴⁴ Revels, *Watery Eden*, 29-36.

⁴⁵ Bradford Torrey, *A Florida Sketch-Book*, (Boston & New York, 1894). To be fair, birds and flowers were the objects of Torrey's excursions in Florida.

Visitors had previously gone to this part of the interior of Florida largely for the Ocklawaha voyage. Now they were becoming distracted by other pursuits. *New York Times* writer William Drysdale in 1889 praised the river trip to the springs in qualified terms as “one of sights of the country well worth spending some time and taking some trouble to see.” Nevertheless, “there is such a thing as getting too much of it,” he wrote, suggesting that visitors forgo the roundtrip steamboat ride and instead take the train to the springs, and return by the river.⁴⁶ (Recall that Daniel Brinton, traveling by pole-barge more than forty years earlier, recognized that “[t]o be appreciated in its full beauty, [Silver Springs] should be approached from the Ocklawaha.”⁴⁷)

Drysdale paid respectable homage to the Silver and Ocklawaha Rivers (although dedicating less than half of the article to the trip), but wondered aloud why “was there no population in the neighborhood? Why were not the banks cleared and the forests turned into orange groves?”⁴⁸ The “mystery” of the Ocklawaha adventure had certainly changed in just a handful of years from one of seemingly impenetrable nature to a question of when nature would be turned into towns and farms. Perhaps fittingly, *Drysdale*, who was described in his obituary as “a hater of cities” who “took his greatest delight among the grass and flowers of the fields and the trees of the thick forest,”⁴⁹ penned another article for the *Times* the following week about, apparently, the very same journey to the springs. This time, however, he trumpeted the “real Florida” beyond Jacksonville and St. Augustine and mused “Unhappy mortal! To imagine that anyone

⁴⁶ William Drysdale, “A Great Cypress Swamp,” *The New York Times*, 19 May 1889.

⁴⁷ Brinton, *Notes on the Floridian Peninsula*, 183-4.

⁴⁸ Drysdale, “A Great Cypress Swamp.”

⁴⁹ “William Drysdale Dead,” *The New York Times*, 21 September 1901.

goes from New York to Florida to see towns!"⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Drysdale's writings about Florida, which were prolific at the end of the century, can be viewed as emblematic of the changing perceptions of the state. In an as-yet unpublished article, historian Jesus Mendes argues that "Drysdale's letters cover a period when travel to Florida transitioned from a wilderness adventure jaunt in a barely settled frontier area into a pleasurable and comfortable upper and upper middle class journey to a fashionable winter resort destination" and "reflect the views and interests towards the region of both the author and his readers in a tourism context."⁵¹

Even the local residents were beginning to take the beauty of the springs and the spring system for granted. In one of the more egregious examples, J. O. D. Clarke in 1891 explained to northern readers the value of the spring system in the following terms:

Ocala has a natural sewerage system, which partakes of the phenomenal. Beneath the town, at an average depth of 80 to 100 feet, is a swiftly-flowing under-ground river. Connection with this river is obtained by natural "sinks" and bared and piped sewer wells. The town sewage is carried off by two "sinks" or natural sewer wells, one of which is located on the northeast, and the other in the southwest part of the city. The former is in the shape of a deep grotto in a ledge of lime rock, through a fissure in which the sewage passes to the river mentioned.⁵²

As it was, after all the high times of the 1880s, Plant's purchase of the Ocala House in 1895 had occurred squarely in the middle of a string of economic upheavals that, in part resulted from, but also caused, further reorientation of the economic growth

⁵⁰ ———, "It Gushes from the Rock."

⁵¹ Jesus Mendes, *From Adventure Travel to Leisure Tourism: The Florida Letters of William Drysdale in the New York Times, 1884-1893 (Abstract)* (St. Augustine, Fla.: Submitted to the Florida Historical Society, 2010).

⁵² J. O. D. Clarke, *Ocala, Fla. : A Sketch of Its History, Residences, Business Interests, Etc., with Illustrations of Picturesque Scenery and Portraits of Leading Citizens*, (New York, 1891), 19-20.

of Florida away from the interior and its great springs. An outbreak of Yellow Fever in 1888 in Jacksonville led to a brief ban on rail passengers debarking in Ocala, but even that and a financial panic in 1893 caused only an economic ripple in the interior compared with what happened next. In 1894 and 1895 central Florida was hit by two successive freezes that decimated the citrus industry and citrus production dropped more than 50-fold. In the midst of this crisis, the phosphate bubble burst and prices dropped 75%, putting many phosphate companies out of business. Citrus and phosphate had been “the lifeblood” of the railroads through central Florida, and its future seemed in dire peril. Meanwhile, a brief and lucrative experiment with cigar production just west of downtown Ocala had led to the incorporation of the largely Cuban boomtown Marti City. By the second half of the decade, though, the city was all but abandoned as Cubans left for Tampa or to join the revolution in their home country.⁵³

Over time, a more diversified agriculture would emerge in Marion County, and phosphate would bounce back under a more consolidated industrial structure, but the economic impact would be felt for years. Flagler, for his part, helped where he could, but he also turned his attention even further southward down the coast, beyond the reach of the inevitable freezes. He extended his coastal empire down to Miami, where he delivered tourists and picked up winter crops, which were equally important to the success of his railroad. In an 1898 advertisement for his coastal rail line depicted a map of Florida with the east coast lit up by sunshine while the rest of the state lay shrouded in shadow. Other than the cities his rail served, no other place name appeared, and the

⁵³ Nolan, *Fifty Feet in Paradise*, 119-22; R. N. Dosh, “Marion County Newspapers,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 37, (July 1958): 56.

text at the bottom read, “The East Coast of Florida is Paradise Regained.”⁵⁴ Flagler’s focus and intent were clear. Annual tourism at Silver Springs at this time began a decline that would continue well into the next century and reduce it to a regional attraction at best.

Plant, meanwhile, would continue to enjoy the economic fruits of the exports from the region through the port at Tampa, but soon Tampa would become the prime locus of yet another upheaval that moved more capital, labor, and attention away from the interior and to coastal cities. As the century drew to a close, and war with Spain loomed on the horizon, fears of an attack on Florida led to an infusion of money—and visitors in the uniforms of soldiers and sailors—into St. Augustine, Miami, Key West, and other harbor towns. “It was Tampa that got the lion’s share,” though, and “troops began flooding the city for what came to be known as the rocking-chair period of the war; its focal point was the front porch of the Tampa Bay Hotel.” The infusion of people and money did not last long, and “within a year Tampa had gone from boom town to ghost town” in terms of a military presence. In the interim, though, local merchants had prospered and the infrastructure had been developed for future growth.⁵⁵

During the lead-up to the Spanish-American War, author Stephen Crane added to the canon of Florida travel literature in a unique manner. Traveling to aid Cuban revolutionaries in 1896, he was the survivor of a shipwreck off the Florida coast. A fictionalized account of the event, the short story “The Open Boat,” was released the following year. The tale of survival is important in demonstrating the redefinition of

⁵⁴ “The East Coast of Florida Is Paradise Regained (Map),” (Florida East Coast Railway & Steamship, 1898).

⁵⁵ Nolan, *Fifty Feet in Paradise*, 125-8; Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, 314-22.

Florida's natural environment on several points. First, it juxtaposes nature with the built community, writes literary historian Anne Rowe. Crane "uses the hotel omnibus, so characteristic of resort life, as an ironic contrast to the plight of the men in the dinghy."⁵⁶

Moreover, Maurice O'Sullivan and Jack C. Lane suggest, "The Open Boat"

was read as an adventure celebrating a victory over nature. . . . This is not the rejuvenating nature Bartram and others associated with paradise, nor is it the primitive, hostile nature seen by Jonathan Dickinson. In fact, [the narrator] comes to realize that nature is perhaps even worse, for it is 'indifferent, flatly indifferent.'⁵⁷

The idea of an indifferent nature would seem to mark a critical turning point in man's relationship with the surrounding world, particularly for Americans who had first encountered and tamed a hostile "wilderness," and had then come to embrace the idea of their natural environment as a badge of national identity. The rise of Romanticism and its "enthusiasm for the strange, remote, solitary, and mysterious" aspects of the natural world in the nineteenth century had been accompanied by the idea of a "nature's nation." The 1893 publication of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis was followed by several related articles in which Turner once and for all, according to Roderick Frazier Nash "recast [nature's] role from that of an enemy which civilization had to conquer to a beneficent influence on men and institutions."⁵⁸ Nature had always been many things, but it had never been soulless. If anything, Crane's work may have done more to emphasize Lencek and Bosker's aforementioned notion of the coast as a wilderness frontier in its own right.

⁵⁶ Rowe, *The Idea of Florida in the American Literary Imagination*, 51.

⁵⁷ O'Sullivan and Lane, eds., *The Florida Reader*, 167, 170.

⁵⁸ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 47, 146.

Despite O'Sullivan and Lane's reading of Crane, nature did retain strong symbolic meanings well into the twentieth century. Western tourism, for example, continued to play on ideas of an American exceptionalism based on a natural environment laden with moral significance.⁵⁹ In Florida, however, the story was different. It was not that nature had become indifferent to humans, but rather the opposite, if anything. The new Grand Tour of Florida was not to the interior along its natural waterways, but instead a hermetically sealed journey in Pullman cars from one built environment to the next.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the culmination of the reorientation of Florida's growth away from the interior and to its coasts was obvious. Writing in 1902, Alice Brown noted the absence of the "whole fleets" of schooners and steamboats she had observed on the St. Johns River on her last visit, in 1870. "With the advent of the railroad, all this was changed," she wrote, and "wide stretches of the river became empty of a single sail." All along the northern portion of the St. Johns, the railroads had brought brief booms to small towns, but "then everything fell flat and has so remained." Palatka, for its part, was "another spot that has seen its best days," and resource exploitation seemed to be the only industry that remained, taking a growing toll on the scenery. The orange groves there were now dead, and only a cypress saw mill seemed to be thriving, churning out shingles at the expense of the Ocklawaha's former glory. "Alas, man has not spared its beauties; the axe has felled the trees on its banks." The Cypress Gates, sometimes called Hell's Gate, a natural arboreal arch that had once been a noted landmark on the river, had likewise been cut down, while the alligators had all "been killed and turned into handbags." Brown did not comment on Silver

⁵⁹ See Shaffer, *See America First*, Chapters 2-3.

Springs itself on this journey, instead moving on to a description of Ocala after a brief epitaph for the Ocklawaha: "Happy are those who saw it in its first and greatest beauty before it was marred by the hands of man."⁶⁰

Travelers largely no longer came to Florida in droves to see the Ocklawaha or St. Johns Rivers as they had just a few years earlier. Instead, they came to see the great hotels, the new cities, and, equally important, each other. The nation was exploring the impact of changing social and economic classes through tourism and evolving notions of public spaces, particularly the built environments of railroads and hotels, according to historian Catherine Cocks.⁶¹ While Cocks was writing primarily about the rise of urban tourism in older northern and western cities, her argument could equally be applied to the new cities being created virtually overnight along the Florida coasts.

This is nowhere better illustrated than in the final chapter of Henry James's 1907 travel journal, *The American Scene*. James's account of Florida, the last destination on his journey down the east coast of the United States, takes place almost entirely in the "proscenium" of Pullman cars, or in Flagler's lavish hotels. James hinted that he wanted to be embraced in "the bosom of contiguous Nature, whatever surface it might happen to offer." Instead, though, the object of his gaze continuously turned to human interaction and human construction. While riding the train, "I remember no moment, over the land, when the mere Pullman itself didn't overarch my observations as a positive temple of the drama, and when the comedy and the tragedy of manners didn't, under its dome, hold me raptly attent." In Palm Beach, meanwhile, James's attention

⁶⁰ Alice Browne, "A Visit to Florida, February 1870; Florida Revisited after Thirty Years, 1897 & 1902," <http://purl.fcla.edu/fcla/tc/fhp/CF00001670.pdf>, accessed January 15, 2011.

⁶¹ Cocks, *Doing the Town*, 6-7.

was dominated by the “hotel-spirit,” and “Vanity Fair in full blast . . . compressed under vast cover, enclosed in a single huge vitrine.” The ancient city of St. Augustine, meanwhile, James wrote, was “primarily, and of course quite legitimately, but an hotel, of the first magnitude—an hotel indeed so remarkable and so pleasant that I wondered what call there need ever have been upon it to prove anything else.”⁶² According to Rowe, “one comes to Palm Beach, we learn [from James], not so much to bask in the idyllic setting, as to observe who else is there.”⁶³

In the increasingly forgotten interior, Hart and his competitors were forced to develop publicity stunts to try to attract attention. In 1903, for example, river moguls Hart and Lucas staged a steamboat race on the Ocklawaha, despite the fact that the river was not wide enough in many parts to accommodate two vessels. In 1904, Hart launched the *Hiawatha*, the largest and most attractive steamboat thus far on the river, As Richard Martin describes it, the *Hiawatha*’s life was “one of gala trips and dwindling revenues, of thunderous ballyhoo . . . and a gradually spreading silence . . . and finally of a losing struggle against new opposition.” The bulk of this opposition came from railroads and, later, a newer advent, the automobile, but it also came from Columbus “Ed” Carmichael, who bought the springhead property for less than \$3,000 in 1909 and “entertained no romantic notions about steam-boating on the Ocklawaha.” Instead, Carmichael offered faster internal combustion vessels that eliminated the need for the overnight Ocklawaha voyage, its beguiling beauty dismissed for the steel and steam of human innovation.⁶⁴ David Cook, a former editor for the Ocala Star-Banner and amateur

⁶² Henry James, *The American Scene*, (New York and London, 1907), 416, 419-20, 423, 432, 442.

⁶³ Rowe, *The Idea of Florida in the American Literary Imagination*, 61.

⁶⁴ Martin, *Eternal Spring*, 143-46, 157.

historian, suggests that Carmichael may have been swayed to buy and develop the springs because of the battle over legal liquor in Florida. Carmichael, who along with his father had a successful whiskey distillery and a bar in downtown Ocala, saw that the writing was on the wall when a 1908 “wet-dry” election only narrowly failed to outlaw alcohol in Marion County. Realizing their bread-and-butter business was in dire peril, Cook argues, the two purchased the land around the springhead and began farming and growing citrus and making plans for a resort destination. Carmichael even briefly was able to convince Ocala to annex Silver Springs in 1913, an act that was “quietly repealed” several years later, Cook writes.⁶⁵

Still, fewer and fewer people made even that brief trip to Silver Springs. By the beginning of the 1910s, the Brown House inn remained, and glass-bottom boat tours could still be had for twenty-five cents, but the only other business at the springs was a sawmill.⁶⁶ In 1908, Anderson was successful in getting the federal government to set aside more than 200,000 acres east of the Ocklawaha River as the Ocala National Forest, the first such forest east of the Mississippi River. The designation effectively barred further development on what was still a sparsely settled area—and one without a sawmill of its own. If anything, the *Ocala Banner* opined, the forest designation would eventually allow for measures to prevent wildfires, a phenomenon then believed to be

⁶⁵ David Cook, “Visionary Developed Silver Springs,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 30 March 1997. Note: The December 15, 1922 edition of the *Ocala Weekly Star* reported that of 961 registered voters, only 142 voted on the measure, which was to extend an existing arrangement. The final vote was 106 to 26 not to extend.

⁶⁶ Joscelyn Dunlop, “Many Changes Noted by Dr. Peek in the Years He’s Been in Ocala,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 25 September 1960.

detrimental to forest production. (Fire is, in fact, a critical component of the scrub and high pine ecosystems that comprise much of the region.)⁶⁷

Meanwhile, a land boom was heating up in many parts of Florida and, with war beginning to loom in Europe, Florida resorts began aggressively courting wealthy visitors from there, as well as catering to an American elite that increasingly feared to vacation overseas and a European elite that showed no similar fear.⁶⁸ The war itself diverted shipyard labor, a factor Hart cited when he ceased operations altogether in 1919. By 1924, only about 11,000 people visited Silver Springs.⁶⁹

That year, however, two men leased the springhead from Carmichael with plans to once again turn it into a major attraction. These were not “northern men;” they were local men with an attachment to Silver Springs and a vision for its future. These two men, who began as rivals, together would help usher in a new era of tourism in the Florida interior.

⁶⁷ Ott and Chazal, *Ocala Country*, 169; “Forest Service Explains Creation of First National Forest East of the Mississippi River at Ocala,” *Ocala Banner*, 11 December 1908; Myers and Ewel, *Ecosystems of Florida*, 151.:

⁶⁸ J. Bruce Cumming Jr., *A Brief Florida Real Estate History*, (Tampa, 2006), 6. Nolan, *Fifty Feet in Paradise*, 154.

⁶⁹ Martin, *Eternal Spring*, 145-47, 159.

CHAPTER 7 PARADISE REDISCOVERED: 1924-WORLD WAR II

The turn of the century and the advent of the rails-to-resorts tourist economy had relegated Florida's interior communities to forgotten agricultural backwaters after the turn of the century. The extent to which Silver Springs, the iconic symbol of the interior, had languished in the first quarter of the twentieth century while the coastal towns of Florida had prepared themselves for a maelstrom of growth was evidenced in a March 1924 Ocala newspaper article announcing demolition at the springhead to make way for new development. "Let us all clap hands and rejoice," it read. Its owners, "awakening to the realization that they have in their possession something more than the Coral Gables, Treasure Island o[r] Gandy Bridge have decided to hold on to it themselves, reap the golden harvest that its attractions promise." The Gandy Bridge, incidentally, in 1924 had been ranked by the *Tampa Observer* as second in a list of "Florida's Seven Wonders." Silver Springs—previously lauded by some as one of the *world's* seven natural wonders—ranked sixth.¹

Silver Springs had certainly declined in both reputation and visitation since the end of the steamboat era, but during the boom and bust of the 1920s and 1930s, it would reemerge as the leading tourist destination and, along with other nature-based attractions such as Cypress Gardens, would define the interior of Florida. Attractions abounded all over the state, to be sure, but along the coasts they were part of a larger fabric of development and identity. In the interior, they *became* that fabric and identity.

¹ "Developments Going on at Silver Springs," *Ocala Weekly Banner*, 14 March 1924. In "Florida's Seven Wonders," *Ocala Banner*, 10 October 1924. Flagler's Overseas Bridge ranked first, the state's citrus groves third, the most recent Everglades Drainage Project fourth. Tampa and the West Coast ranked seventh. At fifth, the "Tumion Taxifolium Forest" (now Torreya State Park) near Apalachicola was the only other truly natural feature on the list.

Shrewd and persistent marketing combined with a new type of tourist, new desires and expectations for travel, and a new mode of transportation would present a perfect storm of opportunity for interior attractions even as the Depression crashed down on the nation. In the early 1920s, seemingly every Florida interior community saw itself as the next Miami or Palm Beach as the land boom sent prices skyrocketing and speculation reached fever pitch. When the bust brought reality back into focus, the proprietors of the Silver Springs attraction began returning it to its lost iconic status as a tourism destination and then far beyond that. Even as tourists continued to seek out coastal destinations, Silver Springs and other interior attractions remade themselves into essential stopovers along the way.

At the outset of the 1920s, most of the interior counties were relying largely on agricultural productions as their economic mainstays. Marion County had a revival in citrus and watermelon production, and had solid footing in its cattle, swine, and dairy industries. Along with neighboring Levy County, Marion County was mining dolomite and phosphate for fertilizer, and limestone to meet the growing demand for that substance in road construction. To the south, Gainesville now had the University of Florida, which moved there from Lake City in 1906, to help anchor the Alachua County economy alongside its agricultural output. Lake City, meanwhile, remained an important rail junction, despite losing the college, Apopka joined in the growing fern industry, illegal liquor boomed as a business in Florida and, in general, most of the interior counties were able to get by reaping the bounty of their land. But the rapid growth of the coastal counties, particularly in the south, would challenge the willingness of residents of the Florida interior to accept the status quo. Historian Louis Chazal offered an

interesting insight into the ambivalent and changing philosophical and economic outlook of residents of Marion County—and the interior in general—when he wrote that, after World War I, “Marion County turned from the idea that it could progress in isolation. The opinion was general over [sic] fast growing South Florida, that the county had a historic and romantic past . . . but could not compete economically with the counties on the lower part of the peninsula.”² As will be shown below, many areas of the Florida interior accepted the challenge to compete with the coasts, and none more successfully than Silver Springs.

Still, when the *Banner* article came out in early 1924, Silver Springs was at low ebb. The owner (singular, in fact) of the land around Silver Springs, Columbus “Ed” Carmichael, would not manage the property himself for much longer, but the *Banner*’s message had been clear. While other, artificial and, implicitly, less attractive parts of Florida were starting to boom, Ocala and the Silver Springs region had been missing the party and, in fact, heading in the opposite direction. At the close of the nineteenth century, there were nearly a dozen hotels in Ocala, plus the Brown House at Silver Springs. By 1925, only four hotels remained and the Brown House was not among them.³ A linen postcard from the time shows a number of boats at the springhead in varying states of disrepair, and the dockside pavilion and what appears to be another small wood structure sorely in need of paint and perhaps new roofs. In the background,

² Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 176.

³ “Early Ocala Hotels,” *City of Ocala (Fla.)*, <http://www.ocalafl.org/COO3.aspx?id=342>, accessed March 1, 2011.

the Brown House stands, apparently in its final days.⁴ The appropriate response was, in the minds of those who wanted to restore the area to its former glory as a tourist destination, to build. “Attractive surroundings have been its drawback and great need,” the *Weekly Banner* proclaimed, referring to the aesthetic and amenities of the built environment. The area around the springhead offered only “wooden and unsightly” buildings, which were to be knocked down to make way for “more imposing structures.” In addition, towers, slides, and diving platforms would be added, as well as other amenities “found at the most popular watering places.”⁵ Certainly, the magnificent structures and bathing facilities at the coastal resorts had cast their shadows. St. Augustine’s Ponce de Leon hotel had its “pool of Bethesda,” as Henry Martyn Field called it, while the Royal Poinciana and the Palm Beach Inn (later called The Breakers) “on a strip of sand between the sea and the jungle” stood and exhaled their genius to Henry James, who found only Windsor Castle worthy of comparison.⁶ Boosters and residents of the interior alike could—and did—dream of similar palatial structures in their localities.

Two months later, Carmichael leased the property to two local developers who watched and learned as others gambled on riches in the Florida land boom. Those two absorbed the lessons of the ballyhoo advertising, gimmickry, and local promotions that would create one of the greatest real estate bubbles in history. They witnessed local interests of other interior towns trying to compete with the resort industry in both the

⁴ “Postcard,” *RootsWeb*, http://freepages.history.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~putnamcofl/images/eckropp_12170.jpg, accessed March 12, 2011.

⁵ “Developments Going on at Silver Springs.”

⁶ James, *The American Scene*, 426.

established and developing coastal areas. They took note of the budding new transportation system that would free Americans from prescribed routes of travel dictated by railroad companies and travel agents and leave them to “discover” new frontiers for themselves, at their own pace and according to their own tastes. They also observed what the new American travelers expected from their visit to Florida and then physically altered the area around the springs to accommodate those expectations. Under W. C. “Carl” Ray and W. M. “Shorty” Davidson, annual attendance at Silver Springs increased geometrically over the next decade. When they took over in 1924, about 11,000 people per year visited the springs. In 1935, the *Tampa Tribune* announced, Silver Springs was the leading attraction in Florida, with annual visitation topping 500,000.⁷

But a lot changed between 1924 and 1935, and not just the people in charge of developing and promoting Silver Springs. The state and the nation underwent an era of frenzied growth followed by a stunning economic downturn. A new transportation system revolutionized how and where people traveled while new motivations would bring new types of people to new places in Florida. An orgy of land speculation brought wealth and ruin to developers and delivered hundreds of thousands of visitors and immigrants to Florida in the 1920s, only to be met with a series of economic reversals that saw land prices plummet and pie-eyed dreams dashed in the late 1920s. Through the exuberant rise, the dramatic fall, and the long, slow recovery of Florida’s economic fortunes, one thing remained constant—the reemergence and growth of Silver Springs

⁷ “25 Years of Progress,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 23 February 1950; Patsy West, *The Enduring Seminoles: From Alligator Wrestling to Ecotourism*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1998), 24.

as the quintessential Florida tourist destination—a little more artificial than its incarnation in the previous century.

In early 1924, though, Florida was still on the eve of the “incipient boom that had been gathering force since 1921,”⁸ and residents of Florida’s interior towns—particularly Ocala—wondered whether they would enjoy in the promised riches. Silver Springs offered a unique attraction for tourism and development, yet it had been allowed to sit neglected for decades. Near both coasts, investors—mostly northern interests—had begun to develop from scratch entire communities and even cities. The peninsular interior of north Florida, marked as cattle and crop country, were almost entirely ignored by developers. One might assume from the fact that the Farmers Alliance’s decision to hold its 1890 convention in Ocala that residents of interior Florida were staunch and unapologetic agriculturalists, true and devoted husbands of the land, but this was hardly the case. As Florida historian Charlton Tebeau explained, “it is rather remarkable” that the convention was held in Florida at all and, as it was, the Alliance movement in Florida collapsed the following year when its gubernatorial candidate drew only 8,309 votes.⁹

Flagler’s and Plant’s coastal resort destinations had blossomed first. Then, in the 1910s, others joined in. Chicago socialite Bertha Palmer bought up land and encouraged others, including the Ringling circus family, to invest in developing the tiny town of Sarasota. Carl Fisher, a bicycle peddler turned automotive parts designer and auto-racing enthusiast, and Glenn Curtiss, another former bicycle mechanic who thrived after switching his focus to automobiles (as well as aircraft) and racing, poured money

⁸ Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, 384.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 300.

into Miami Beach and Hialeah. George Merrick grew Coral Gables where he once grew citrus. Advertising mogul Barron Collier developed resorts in Naples and Marco Island. The new phenomenon of major league spring training drew “back-home” builders to St. Petersburg, where they trimmed the boom with Mediterranean architecture. Architect Addison Mizner, meanwhile, who later became infamous for his financial chicanery, helped secure financing for the development of Boca Raton. Up and down both costs, unregulated, freewheeling dredge-and-fill projects added hundreds of acres to the state’s land mass.¹⁰

In 1927, economist Homer Vanderblue noted that the boom, while strongest along Florida’s east coast, “spread to the West Coast and to the citrus fruit section in the center of the state” (from Sebring to Kissimmee and Orlando), and that “some sections of the state, notably northern Florida, were scarcely affected at all, because of the efforts of some farsighted people in checking boom tendencies in their early stages.”¹¹ If this were the case, and it was not in Marion County, then it was hardly from lack of effort on the part of many of the interior communities. Scores of these small cities, towns, and virtually every hamlet “large enough to have a post office” sought to capitalize on the boom to attract both tourists and immigrants. By 1926, there were more than 180 local chambers of commerce and boards of trade in Florida, all busy promoting their communities through all manner of advertising as well as assisting new residents with relocation.¹²

¹⁰ See Nolan, *Fifty Feet in Paradise*, 183-207.

¹¹ Homer B. Vanderblue, “The Florida Land Boom,” *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 3, (May 1927): 113, 113n.

¹² Frank Parker Stockbridge and John Holliday Perry, *Florida in the Making*, (New York, 1926), 169.

The community of Lakeland, about thirty-five miles east of Tampa, led the way. It had the second largest chamber of commerce in the state—and the third largest in the nation—with more than 4,300 members, a figure equal to about one in every four residents or more than three times the number of city residents who voted in 1925. The city even had its own theme song recorded in 1926, “Lakeland, City of Heart’s Desire.” Nearby Plant City, the nation’s “Winter Strawberry Capital,” in 1924 reactivated its dormant board of trade, which had almost 500 members by the end of the first week. Bartow, about fifteen miles south of Lakeland, advertised itself as the “City of Oaks” and boasted its road system as its greatest asset. Apopka, “Fern City,” knocked down its city hall to build a forty-room hotel with \$150,000 in public subscriptions after the nearby Wekiwa Springs hotel reopened with numerous improvements. Clermont, in Lake County, styled itself the “Hollywood of Florida” when a movie studio opened there in 1922. The studio failed in late 1923, but the real estate market exploded in 1925 with monthly sales in the millions of dollars. Arcadia, with about 4,000 residents, billed itself as “already a big city in the making in one advertising packet entitled, “Florida’s Future Metropolis” Another billed it as “Nature’s Garden Spot on the West Coast,” despite the fact Arcadia is about forty miles from the Gulf of Mexico.¹³ In 1912, George Sebring had created his eponymous “city on a circle,” alongside Lake Jackson, designed around a central hub with rays of streets leading in and out. The town of Sebring soon became the seat of Highlands County and a major center for citrus and cattle, as well as home

¹³ Ibid., 169-70; Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Florida, *Lakeland*, (n.p., ca. 1935), 61-63; Hampton Dunn, *Yesterday's Lakeland*, (n.p., 1976); Quintilla Geer Bruton and David E. Bailey, *Plant City, Its Origin and History*, 1st ed., (St. Petersburg, Fla., 1977), 197-99; Miriam W. Johnson and Rosemary Y. Young, *Clermont, Gem of the Hills: A History of Clermont, Florida, and Neighboring Communities*, 1st ed., (Tallahassee, Fla., 1984), 129-30, 153, 156; Jerrell H. Shofner, *History of Apopka and Northwest Orange County, Florida*, (Apopka, Fla., 1982), 179, 187.

to a \$30 million resort, Harder Hall. By 1925, its chamber of commerce was marketing it as both the “Orange Blossom City” and the “City of Wealth and Happiness.”¹⁴ From these and scores of other localized efforts, it was clear the interior communities of Florida were not going to surrender the lion’s share of growth to the coasts without a fight.

Marion County’s chamber of commerce was extremely active as well. It was a constant presence on the front page of the *Ocala Banner* and in the minutes of the Marion County Board of Commissioners during the 1920s, and its members led the charge for a new hotel, a major roads project, and a national advertising campaign to promote the county, with much attention to Silver Springs as its major draw. The roads project was critical because, while the advent of affordable automobiles and the construction of roads were quickly reshaping the Florida landscape, the original road system built by 1917 at first largely mirrored the rail system. Two highways entered the peninsular part of the state north of Lake City and Jacksonville, respectively, and generally connected major regions along north-south routes. A major exception, however, was that while Ocala was on the route from Lake City to Tampa, it was not connected directly with the road entering the state north of Jacksonville. Lake City by the 1920s was a major point of entry to the state, but as the state sat on the edge of a land boom, Ocala was in danger of being largely bypassed to the coastal east, figuratively and literally. Ray and Davidson became active in numerous national highway associations, with an eye toward ensuring that did not happen.

¹⁴ *Sebring, Florida: The City of Health and Happiness, the Orange Blossom City* (Sebring, FL, n.d., ca. 1925).

Residents of Marion County and many other interior communities were not about to sit idly by and miss out on this Great Migration of visitors and money. In 1924, county and city officials began the community-financed \$500,000 hotel project in Ocala, a seven-story steel and concrete structure with 100 rooms, stucco walls, Spanish décor, and, important for the new era, a parking garage.¹⁵ The same year, prompted by the Marion County Chamber of Commerce and following an increasingly common form of municipal financing practiced in the boom state, the county's board of commissioners approved a \$4.55 million bond issue to build a network of "paved, macadamized highways" linking Ocala and Silver Springs with the rest of the state. (Nationally, the trend in road building had moved away from local and county governments toward state departments with federal matching grants. In Florida, though, there was no limit on the amount of taxes that could be levied for county bonds, and the state did not become a major player in road construction until 1924. In the interim, both private developers and local governments took the lead in weaving the fabric of roads that would tie together far-flung parts of the state. Polk County issued a \$1.5 million road bond by a three to one vote in 1916, and added nearly another \$1 million in the next several years creating a web of roads linking its communities to the Dixie Highway. Dade County put up \$250,000 just for its portion of the Tamiami Trail. When construction faltered in Lee County, the state created Collier County and that county promptly issued a \$350,000 bond to get the road started again.¹⁶

¹⁵ "Early Ocala Hotels," accessed March 1, 2011.

¹⁶ Chester B. Masslich, "The Effect of Tax Limits on County and Municipal Bonds," *Engineering and Contracting* 56, (October 1921): 337; Baynard Kendrick, *Florida Trails to Turnpikes, 1914-1964*, (Gainesville, Fla., 1964), 20-23, 71; Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, 378-80.

Included in the Marion County bond, which the county commission deemed “necessary, expedient, and for the best interests of [Marion] County,” was the construction of forty-one roads totaling roughly 230 miles in the county limits. By 1930, the commission was reporting completion of the project under budget, and state road maps show at least four major roads entering Marion County from the east and north.¹⁷

Meanwhile, changes were afoot at Silver Springs. In June, 1924, Ray and Davidson announced they had acquired a 50-year, \$400,000 lease from Carmichael on 150 acres surrounding the springhead. Some of their first orders of business would be to install a springboard and high dive tower, build a boardwalk and add benches, set aside an automobile parking area, and re-landscape the flowers and shrubbery around the springhead, clearing out weeds and creating a more park-like appearance. “They expect to make it the most popular water resort in Florida,” announced the *Ocala Weekly Banner*. The benefits of sprucing up the springs would redound to everyone, the *Banner* opined. “Ocala and Marion County will grow by leaps and bounds and property values will double in no time.”¹⁸

By the fall, Ray and Davidson had already rejuvenated activity at the springs with the local clientele, offering weekly Thursday night movies shown on a floating screen, adding new picnic grounds and “water devices,” and hosting vaudeville performances, among other innovations. Meanwhile, the chamber of commerce set out to rebrand Marion County as the “Kingdom of the Sun,” (supposedly based on the sun worship practices of the early native inhabitants) in a national campaign to attract immigrants

¹⁷ Marion County Board of Commissioners Minutes; Book G, November, 1925.

¹⁸ “Silver Springs Leased - Means Much for Ocala,” *Ocala Weekly Banner*, 27 June 1924.

and investors.¹⁹ By the middle of the 1920s, there was no shortage of people looking to move to or invest in Florida.

Journalist Kenneth Roberts wrote several articles during this time for the *Saturday Evening Post* that, “better than any of his contemporaries, sold twentieth-century Americans on the belief that, no matter what their profession, assets, or status in life, Florida was for them.”²⁰ Florida’s “salubrious” climate was well known, and for the several decades since Flagler and Plant had created their resort empires, so was its reputation for recreation. But at the turn of the century, those Florida resorts were largely the winter refuge of the wealthy. Thanks to writers like Roberts, it was becoming fair game for people of all means. As one late 1925 *New York Times* article explained, it was now “promoters, capitalists, salesmen, job hunters, vacationists, farmers who go to till the soil, and ‘Tin Can Tourists’ who make up the army that is moving toward the last frontier.”²¹ (The Tin Can Tourists of the World organization was started in Tampa in 1919, but became a generic term for people who turned their vehicles into mobile homes and toured the country.²²) In the height of the land boom 1920s, many interior communities would promote themselves in ways designed to conform to this changing idea of the Florida dream where tourism was wedded to immigration and development. Seemingly every community believed if it could establish itself as a place to visit, those visitors would fall under the spell of easy living and a sunny clime and buy land there.

¹⁹ Ott and Chazal, *Ocali Country*, 176.

²⁰ Howard L. Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935*, 1st ed., (Knoxville, Tenn., 1991), 118.

²¹ “Florida Trek Draws All Types,” *The New York Times*, 6 December 1925.

²² Nick Wynne, *Tin Can Tourists in Florida 1900-1970*, (Charleston, S.C., 1999). See also Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 34, 56, 74, 97.

Still, wealth and celebrity continued to be a central part of the allure—and the marketing—of Florida. Northern newspapers' society pages wrote often of celebrities spending time in Florida, and Florida promoters spared no effort to make sure those celebrities came to *their* cities. In the new age of mass media, celebrity largely meant Hollywood, music, or sports stars. As David Nolan wrote in *Fifty Feet In Paradise: The Booming of Florida*, "no development was complete without a golf course and a country club. Bobby Jones, Gene Sarazen, and Walter Hagen played at the former . . . Paul Whiteman, Jan Garber, and Isham Jones led their band[s] at the latter." Meanwhile, Babe Ruth, Gertrude Ederle, Red Grange, Bill Tilden, Gene Tunney, Gilda Gray, Rudolph Valentino, and myriad others were among the galaxy of stars who helped Florida resorts and real estate developments make news in northern papers. Political stars were also courted, if they had enough national recognition. Carl Fisher convinced President-elect Warren Harding to vacation at Fisher's Miami Beach hotel before his inauguration, posing for pictures that made national press. George Merrick recruited the Great Commoner himself, William Jennings Bryan, to be a regular speaker before crowds at Merrick's Coral Gables hotel.²³

Numerous baseball teams began to make Florida their spring training homes in the late 1910s and 1920s. Most, but not all, went to coastal cities. The Philadelphia Phillies had stints at Leesburg, Gainesville, and Winter Haven; the Cleveland Indians spent time in Lakeland; and the Chicago White Sox spent one spring in Winter Haven. Meanwhile, northern sports pages carried tales from major league baseball's new Grapefruit League exhibition season, reminding readers that even March was not too

²³ Nolan, *Fifty Feet in Paradise*, 177, 188-89.

cold for America's pastime in the Sunshine State. "The real prize for hosting spring training proved to be the free promotion provided through press coverage," writes Melissa Keller." [P]rofessional baseball, if only in town for a few weeks out of the year, meant an incredible opportunity for publicity."²⁴ The opportunities for cross-marketing were not lost on the owners of both the New York Yankees and New York Giants, who in the 1920s brought their teams to Florida for spring training while simultaneously investing in real estate there.

Politically, Floridians took several steps to make migration and visitation more appealing to outsiders. Voters abolished the state's income and inheritance taxes in 1924.²⁵ That year, they also elected a governor, Marion County native John W. Martin, who was in touch with Floridians' desires to grow and prosper. "The booming economy of the state had given Florida a kind of brassy aura, and the governor, Martin believed, should exhibit a similar quality," writes social science instructor Victoria McDonell. Martin correctly assumed that the voters wanted their governor to be "daring and imaginative, a living advertisement for the splendors of the sub-tropical paradise of oranges, palm trees, and white-sand beaches." Martin did not fail; when he felt Florida was being slighted in the national press, he marshaled the troops. (Tales of northern investors being swindled by land deals were starting to appear by 1925 with distressing frequency in northern newspapers.) Martin brought many of the big guns of Florida development—Collier, Merrick, Paris Singer, and other heavily invested interests—to New York City to confront editors of more than a half dozen major publications at an

²⁴ Melissa Keller, "Pitching for St. Petersburg: Spring Training and Publicity in the Sunshine City, 1914-1918," *Tampa Bay History* 15, (Fall/Winter 1993): 35-36.

²⁵ Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, 382-83.

October, 1925, "Truth About Florida" summit aimed at dispelling negative portrayals of speculation in the Florida boom. Martin even contributed the foreword to Frank Parker Stockbridge and John Holliday Perry's gushing guidebook, *Florida in the Making*.²⁶

Martin also tapped into the voters' desire to build up Florida's road and highway system, making the issue the centerpiece of his campaign, and he would follow through on his promises. Under his predecessor, Governor Cary A. Hardee, the state had spent less than \$17 million total on road construction between 1921 and 1924. Under Martin, Florida would spend nearly \$15 million *per year* on road building between 1925 and 1928. There were about 900 miles of "good" road in Florida in 1924; by 1929, there were more than 3,000 miles.²⁷ Federal road building also played a key role in Silver Springs's growth. The Dixie Highway, a major artery of the 1920s and 1930s, funneled visitors into Florida from Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, and much of the rest of the Midwest and its western route (mentioned above) passed through Ocala.

If the national press ever failed to describe Florida in anything but glowing terms, as Martin had protested in his New York media summit, newspapers within Florida such as the *Ocala Banner* persistently trumpeted Florida's merits, sometimes with disgraceful disregard to objectivity. "The one mission in life of every newspaper in Florida (and every hamlet has one) is to broadcast the virtues and splendors of its hometown at the top its voice. . . . More ink is used on bold faced type in Florida than any other state in the Union," wrote L .F. Chapman in H. L. Mencken's *American Mercury* in 1925.

²⁶ Victoria H. McDonell, "Rise of The "Businessman's Politician": The 1924 Florida Gubernatorial Race," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 52, (July 1973): 44; "Topics of the Times," *The New York Times*, 14 October 1925; Nolan, *Fifty Feet in Paradise*, 212; Frank B. Sessa, "Anti- Florida Propaganda and Counter Measures During the 1920's," *Tequesta*, (1961): 46-47; Stockbridge and Perry, *Florida in the Making*.

²⁷ Kendrick, *Florida Trails to Turnpikes*, 90-92.

Newspapers were shameless boosters, shills to their own advertisers and local Chambers of Commerce. "Their editors drink from the same tap. They are one in making it known to an admiring world that Florida is the g. p. o. e. The greatest place on Earth."²⁸ Looking back from 1950, Davidson told the *Ocala Star-Banner*, "As all of my friends of the press around Florida and south well know, no one knows better than I how they have so generously given of their space to help tell our story during the past 25 years. It is a debt we will never be able to repay." Not that a quid pro quo was not subtly offered: until World War II, it had been a "custom" for Ray and Davidson to host the Florida Press Association's annual picnic.²⁹

The *Banner* certainly beat the drum during the height of the 1920s land boom. On December 12, 1924, as local land sales began to spike and rumors of possible major developments circulated, the *Banner* announced "The Boom Hits Us." By early April, 1925, it was reporting that movie star Thomas Meighan was making a \$250,000 investment in land in the county with plans to film a Booth Tarkington movie there. Locals began speculating that Ocala might be the next Hollywood. As it turned out, though, Meighan ultimately moved not to Ocala, but to New Port Richey on the west coast of Florida where he built a large home. Nor did Meighan film any more of his Florida-location movies in Ocala, opting instead for Miami. Nevertheless, within weeks of the *Banner's* article, Ocala was in a full tizzy. *Time* magazine provided national coverage of the Meighan's brief flirtation with Ocala in June 1925:

Scouts discovered the town of Ocala, Florida—a hamlet charming, provincial, discreet, [and] situated well inland on the Dixie Highway, an

²⁸ L. F. Chapman, "Florida," *American Mercury*, November 1925, 340.

²⁹ "Early Movies of Springs Helped Spread Its Fame," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 23 February 1950; "Editors Coming Again in May," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 23 February 1950.

important artery. Came Mr. Meighan, Lila Lee, their company, [and] much publicity. After six weeks, the town was known throughout the state. Realtors' offices opened. The rude forefathers of Ocala found that their acres had become valuable. Last week, Mr. Meighan sold certain tracts (which he had unobtrusively secured when he first came to Ocala) at a profit of \$500,000.³⁰

(In a further insult, albeit unknown to the locals, even as Ocala was bursting over the idea of becoming an eastern film capital, Meighan already had begun filming Ring Lardner's spoof of the Florida land boom, *The New Klondike*, which premiered in New Port Richey.)

On April 24, 1925, in the midst of the Meighan episode, potentially bigger news hit Silver Springs and Ocala. A northern interest led by New York investor Charles K. Fankhauser, in a deal brokered for \$400,000 by Ray and Davidson, had purchased about 2,500 acres "around and adjoining" Silver Springs with the intention of building a hotel, golf course and clubhouse, an airport, and "the development of the entire property in large plots for high-class building." Stockbridge commented in the 1925 guide *Florida in the Making* that "although Silver Springs is familiar to every Floridian, it is only recently that efforts comparable with those made to attract tourists to other spots in Florida have been utilized to advertise the beauties of this place." Stockbridge, who visited Silver Springs and Ocala in August, 1925, noted that Ocala and Silver Springs had been connected by a paved road, that a new hotel was under construction in Silver Springs, and that "the most interesting body of water is on its way to a national reputation."³¹ (It is interesting to note that Stockbridge apparently was completely unaware of any previous "national reputation" for the area.)

³⁰ "Real Estate," *Time*, 1 June 1925.

³¹ Stockbridge and Perry, *Florida in the Making*, 252.

In September, the *Ocala Banner* (it remained weekly but had shed that word from its masthead), which had never shied from outright—and selective—boosterism, wrote a lengthy article making its case for the area's future growth, giving a glowing description of the "natural aquarium" of Silver Springs. Again, as Chazal noted, Marion County residents were torn between romantic notions of their own regional history and a desire to join the build and boom culture sweeping across the state. Lower in the article, Juliette Blue Springs (the future Rainbow Springs in Dunnellon) received a two-sentence mention. Directly to the right, in an adjoining article with no headline, was a report that Juliette Blue Springs had recently been sold to a Sarasota developer who planned to build a resort there. There was no previous mention or follow-up story and it seems no great leap to assume that the Ocala and Silver Springs business interests to whom the *Banner* was beholden did not look too favorably on competition, especially just down the road in Dunnellon.³²

In December 1925, the *Banner* announced that "Florida's engine of progress can never be stopped," and that "there is no such thing as the Florida bubble." Later that month, with that bubble already stretching dangerously thin (or, in some parts of Florida, beginning to burst) the *Banner* announced "the best news that has ever been given out about Silver Springs." For the past 15 years, until the events of 1924, improvements at the springs had been slow and imperceptible, the *Banner* noted, because "it takes money to improve and until this year money has been liking [sic]." To their credit, Ray and Davidson had "made it look like a different place" in a short few months, but those

³² "Marion Given Big Boost," *Ocala Banner*, 25 September 1925.

improvements and the plans announced earlier in the year would now pale before a newer and even bigger—and more expensive—project.

Fankhauser's group, now named the Silver Springs Development Company, had sublet the springhead lease from Ray and Davidson and planned to begin a \$10 million project to build up around the springs. Included in this expanded project would be a second hotel. This \$1 million "health hotel" was to be run by Dr. Eugene Christian, a self-declared "food scientist." Christian, who had been dismissed as a charlatan in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* the previous year,³³ had visited Silver Springs about thirty years earlier, and believed the time had come for "this priceless jewel set by the hand of Almighty God in the center of Florida" to take its place as a leading attraction for the state. In a 16-page booklet he had published that year about the project, Christian recalled the "tremendous possibilities" he had seen for the springs on his previous visit, but its location in the still primitive interior had made development there premature.

A few pioneers like Plant and Flagler had built around the fringes but the name Florida suggested to most people only swamps, everglades, and alligators. The real charm and true value was there then, but unknown. The American people at last have discovered Florida.³⁴

In addition to the health resort, which Christian believed would take advantage of Silver Springs's "wealth of health giving water," which had previously "rolled uselessly back to the sea but now . . . will give its blessing to the cause of better living and better life, a second golf course also had been added to the plan, designed by noted golf course architect and golf writer Seymour Dunn. Landscaping throughout the

³³ "The Propaganda for Reform," *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 82, (March 1924).

³⁴ Eugene Christian, *The Story of Silver Springs: The Fabled Fountain of Eternal Youth*, (n.p., 1925), 4-5.

development would be led by the well-known landscape architect Charles Wellford Leavitt, a principal force in the City Beautiful movement of the era.³⁵

In all, the plans essentially would have created a new resort community around the springs, with its own water works, business centers and road system. As for Silver Springs and the Silver River, Fankhauser told the *Banner* that “we are preserving the river bank with its luxuriant tropical growth [and] making a great park which will not even be marred by the sound or smoke of the automobiles,” and that “we shall work with and not against nature, leaving all the natural beauty possible and adding only such man-made things as may accentuate the marvelous charm now there.”³⁶ He was right about leaving nature alone, but not for the reasons he had given. Silver Springs would not flourish as an all-out resort, but rather as a slightly off the beaten path destination in which artifice attempted to complement nature. The expected interest among buyers did not materialize and the bubble collapsed. Meanwhile, Ray and Davidson proved to be hard-nosed businessmen. In January, 1927, when Fankhauser requested an extension on \$50,000 owed to the two, they refused. Instead, they took back the lease with Carmichael and, with it, operation of the springhead. By then they had pocketed an unknown—but likely six-figure—sum in payments already collected from Fankhauser and his partners. Locals and tourists alike continued to visit the springs during this time, but there was no longer a hotel to accommodate them near the springs and other than perhaps the glass-bottom boat rentals and the sawmill that were in operation at the springhead in the early 1910s, there is little evidence of any other activity at the

³⁵ “The Gem of Florida; Mecca of the World,” *Ocala Weekly Banner*, 11 December 1925.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

springhead. Nor is there evidence that Fankhauser's group attempted to market it as a tourist destination during this time, focusing in vain instead on developing it and selling lots there. It appears that the property simply languished until the late 1920s, when Ray and Davidson ramped up their development and promotion of the springs.

Even after forcing Fankhauser's group out of the picture, Ray and Davidson were not the only local parties with an interest—or land holdings—at the springs. In 1928, “local capitalist” M. R. Porter began work on a self-financed park less than half a mile downstream from the springhead, on part of several hundred acres he owned along the shoreline. Porter did not plan for a resort, but rather a \$75,000 re-landscaping project to add three canals, several pools and an island, with “groves and horticultural developments” a short distance from the river. Porter envisioned a park and gardens on par with Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in Charleston, South Carolina, that might become a tourist destination in its own right. Moreover, Porter planned to offer his own glass-bottom boat rides up the river to the springhead, undercutting Ray and Davidson's corner on the market.³⁷

Porter's proposed project stirred up Ray and Davidson's competitive fires, beginning with a legal dispute over access to the headsprings and Porter's right to advertise access to Silver Springs. Even as Ray and Davidson continued to develop and improve the facilities at the springhead and rapidly increase visitation there, they jealously guarded their rights all the way down the river. Their suit against Porter would wend its way to U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which in 1931 ruled that Silver River was

³⁷ "Pools, Canals, Islands, Costing \$75,000, Planned for Springs," *Ocala Banner*, 23 November 1928; David Cook, "M. R. Porter Details Plan for New Paradise Park," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 11 February 1996.

a navigable waterway and, hence, open to all.³⁸ (Decades later, a fence blocking access to the Wakulla River headsprings would be ruled legal when that waterway was determined to be non-navigable, denying public river access to Silver Springs's closest rival in size.)³⁹ Ray and Davidson even pursued legal action against Marion County itself, when the county built a road through their property to Porter's privately owned, yet publicly accessible beach and park, which he had named "Silver Springs Paradise." The legal wrangling continued after Porter in 1932 sold out to a Jacksonville group that built a cabin and operated glass-bottom boats. Ultimately, in 1935, Ray and Davidson simply bought the new owners out and, nearly fifteen years later, opened it as "Paradise Park," a segregated beach for African Americans.⁴⁰

In 1929, though, facing this new potential competition, Ray and Davidson announced extensive plans for building a new pavilion, dance hall, bath house, and boardwalk at the springhead. No longer was there talk of multiple golf courses, platted communities, or grand resort hotels. If there was any question about whether Ray and Davidson would take a new tack in promoting the springs, the name of their new company answered it. Fankhauser's company had been called Silver Springs Development Corporation; Ray and Davidson's was called Silver Springs Amusement Company. By the mid 1930s, postcards show that the dilapidated buildings of 1924 had been replaced by large, red-roofed structures, docks and diving platforms with white-

³⁸ *Silver Springs Paradise Co. v. Ray*, 50 F. 2d 356 (5th Cir. 1931).

³⁹ See Revels, *Watery Eden*, 53, 60-70.

⁴⁰ "Paradise Park to Be Sold to Ray and Davidson," *Ocala Banner*, 14 June 1935; Ott and Chazal, *Ocala Country*, 194-95.

washed rails had been installed, and the land around the springhead was landscaped and park-like in appearance.⁴¹

The Silver Springs Development Company had articulated the most grandiose of dreams for Silver Springs during the Roaring Twenties and, like many dreams of the period, they were in ruins by the end of the decade. A series of events derailed the 1920s Florida land boom starting in 1925, when a Danish ship intended to be turned into a floating hotel sank in Miami Harbor and blocked the port. As shipping rates went up and supplies backed up, investors began to have second thoughts. Devastating hurricanes in South Florida in 1926 and 1928 sealed the deal, followed by an infestation of the Mediterranean fruit fly in spring 1929 that crippled the citrus industry. The Stock Market Crash of 1929 dried up any remaining investment capital, and planned subdivisions on the coast of South Florida and around interior communities such as Ocala and Silver Springs sat incomplete and left to decay.⁴²

Despite all this, however, Silver Springs itself continued to grow in popularity until it became by 1935 again the leading attraction in the state. Several factors contributed to this, not least of which was the business acumen of Ray and Davidson. The two had profited from the Fankhauser group's failed efforts, having been compensated handsomely for brokering the original land purchase, and they were not afraid to reinvest. Their original strategy was to put almost every dime they earned back into the business. The only money they agreed to take from the business was for tobacco and

⁴¹ For example, see "Silver Springs Florida 1930s Old Antique Vintage Postcards," *Moodys Vintage Collectible Postcards*, <http://www.moodyscollectibles.com/postcard-news/?p=491>, accessed March 12, 2011. Note: Some postcards do not appear to be photographs and likely were airbrushed or otherwise altered, but all those seen by the author indicate a clean and well-kept facility.

⁴² Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, 385-95.

gasoline.⁴³ (It did not hurt that Ray's father had made a "fortune" in the turpentine industry. His company had owned as much as 400,000 acres in northeast Florida and he would eventually help his son's enterprise purchase thousands of acres around Silver Springs and the Silver River.)⁴⁴

Ray and Davidson also had no intention to compete with the resort market on the coasts, but rather they focused on the assets of their attraction and in finding niche markets. Grand hotels and golf courses were not the future of the springhead, but rather gimmicks, sideshows, and, of course, the spring itself. The two had learned lessons from the successes and failures of the advertising blitz and ballyhoo of the 1920s, finding novel and creative ways to broadcast their message to the nation without relying on conventional advertising. "Advertise when no one else does and use those mediums not used by others," was their operating philosophy. They poured money into advertising, sending trucks carrying Silver Springs dioramas around the country, posting Silver Springs-branded safety reminders at busy intersections, and even simply nailing signs to trees along the highways.⁴⁵

The extent and nature of their advertising gimmickry is largely unknown due to a lack of surviving examples of their advertising or corporate records. That the marketing campaign was novel, however, is evidenced by the solicitation of Ray and Davidson for ideas by Garnet Carter, whose iconic "See Rock City" campaign of painted roadside barns was inspired by a visit to the two at Silver Springs by Carter seeking advice about

⁴³ Gary Monroe, *Silver Springs: The Underwater Photography of Bruce Mozert*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2008), 19.

⁴⁴ Toni James, "5 Great Ocala Families," *Ocala Magazine*, 5 March 2008, 8.

⁴⁵ Tim Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails: Florida's Tourist Springs*, 1st ed., (Mechanicsburg, Pa., 2006), 10; Martin, *Eternal Spring*, 159.

non-traditional advertising.⁴⁶ Florida roadside tourism and advertising expert Tim Hollis says Ray and Davidson largely capitalized on the growing popularity of Florida in general and the “legendary” status of Silver Springs that was resurrected in the national media during the period to draw people to the area on their way to other Florida locations. (This phenomenon will be further discussed below.) “Silver Springs never thought of itself as a destination,” Hollis said, and there is no indication that the owners ever advertised in northern newspapers. Instead, Ray and Davidson at first sought to funnel visitors to Florida through Silver Springs, advertising heavily on roadways with everything from the signage noted above to simple silver arrows and “See Silver Springs” signs on the side of the road hoping to both tempt drivers to follow the sign or, at least, to plant the seed in their mind when they passed by again.⁴⁷

In doing so, Silver Springs and other Florida roadside attractions were establishing themselves in a manner that would be emulated in the American West and Midwest, at places like the Gateway Arch in St. Louis. The arch, conceived initially as a way to revive St. Louis’s economy, was later framed in a larger narrative of American expansion and exploration. St. Louis, for its part, attempted to play the role of “gateway to the West,” a nickname also used by Fargo, Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne, and Omaha. It recast a trip through the city as part of the process of discovering the West and became, to travelers through that region, an iconic symbol of passage. As interior locales, none of the aforementioned places evokes the idea of a preferred leisure or resort travel destination. They are part of the interior—the plain but sturdy fabric; not the edge—the

⁴⁶ Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*, 36. Also, see David Nelson, “Florida Crackers and Yankee Tourists: The Civilian Conservation Corps, the Florida Park Service and the Emergence of Modern Florida Tourism,” (Ph.D. Diss., Florida State University, 2008).

⁴⁷ Interview with Tim Hollis by Tom Berson via telephone, 5 October 2010.

stylish and luxurious fringe increasingly associated with California in the West. Yet, as touchstones in a larger imagined American journey, they resound. As Marguerite Shaffer writes,

Despite the expansion of leisure and recreation after World War II . . . the Midwest has consistently lagged behind other regions as a noted national vacation spot and tourist destination. However, what it lacks in dramatic tourist spectacle and renowned vacation retreats, it makes up for in symbolic presence. Known for its agricultural landscapes and small-town main streets, the Midwest is widely celebrated as the nation's heartland. Tourists and vacationers, whether elite nineteenth-century travelers or the masses of twentieth-century automobile tourists, have long been attracted by this elusive quality.⁴⁸

Similarly, when Florida's interior attractions—particularly Silver Springs and later Cypress Gardens—found themselves eclipsed by less natural but, to travelers, more spectacular destinations to along the coasts, they nevertheless found ways to make themselves indispensable cultural markers on the larger journey toward fun, leisure and adventure at Florida's coastal fringes.

As Silver Springs grew in popularity and name recognition, they began to print brochures en masse—by mid-century a single press run could contain up to three million brochures sent to motels, gas stations, restaurants, travel centers, travel agents, and everywhere else they might be dispersed to the traveling masses.⁴⁹ If Silver Springs was not already a recognized name in every household throughout the eastern and central parts of the nation, it was not from the lack of trying by Ray and Davidson. One might be surprised that the rapid return to prominence of Silver Springs came in large part during the Depression, but while tourism did flag in many places during the period,

⁴⁸ Marguerite Shaffer, "Vacationing and Tourism," in *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*, Christian K. Zacher Richard Sisson, Andrew Robert Lee Cayton, ed., (Bloomington, Ind., 2007), 929.

⁴⁹ Interview with Tim Hollis by Tom Berson via telephone, 5 October 2010.

it would be a mistake to assume people simply stopped travelling. In fact, tourism was on a spectacular upward arc in America from 1909 to 1935, with a notable dip only in the early Depression years. Niagara Falls recorded a 50% drop in visitors from 1929 to 1932, while Yellowstone and Grand Canyon tourism dropped by about 40% in that period, but even these numbers are not as large as one might assume when considering that unemployment spiked from 3.3% in 1929 to almost 25% in 1933. In 1935, consumer spending on vacations had increased five-fold from 1909 and now represented more than half of all recreational spending.⁵⁰ And while resort travel suffered, this by no means meant that people had stopped taking vacations or, if unemployed, simply getting in their cars and traveling.

For one thing, leaps in automobile ownership and highway construction had rewritten the rules of travel. In addition to the state, county, and federal road-building projects of the late 1920s, automobile ownership nearly tripled in the 1920s, from eight million to 23 million registered vehicles and continued to grow, albeit at a much slower pace, through the Depression. As automobiles became common and the road network expanded, travelers were freed from the routes and timetables of the railroad and steamship companies to discover their own versions of Florida. These new versions of discovery were even more of an individual experience than the “heart of darkness” voyages of the post-Civil War era. As travel historian Warren Belasco has written, motor tourism, especially when combined with camping, was like a “revival of the family solidarity of the pioneer homestead” and represented a return to a different age

⁵⁰ Cindy Sondik Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States*, (New York, 1999), 238-42. Patricia Mooney-Melvin, "Harnessing the Romance of the Past: Preservation, Tourism, and History," *The Public Historian* 13, (Spring 1991): 37; Robert Van Giezen and Albert Schwenk, "Compensation from before World War I through the Great Depression," *Compensation and Working Conditions* Fall 2001), <http://www.bls.gov/opub/cwc/cm20030124ar03p1.htm>, accessed March 1, 2011.

compared with the “ruthlessly efficient” structured and scheduled systems of trains and hotels. Silver Springs was quickly successful in capturing this new tourist trade. In 1927, Silver Springs in one day had visitors from thirteen states and four foreign countries. In 1932, Carmichael’s “tourist camp” accommodations near the spring—hardly comparable in comfort with even the hotels of Ocala—in one five-day period claimed visitors from such diverse locations as New York, New Jersey, Michigan, Wyoming, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Illinois, Louisiana, Georgia, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania.”⁵¹

Florida had during the 1910s and early 1920s become an affordable destination for automobile travelers seeking warmer climes. The construction of state and county roads in the middle of the 1920s had put Silver Springs back squarely in the center of the northern Florida transportation network. By 1937, nearly 70% of tourists nationally travelled by car, three times the number who traveled by train. Tourists looking for economy in their annual escape could find it off the beaten path in the interior of Florida, which was being redefined on maps and in guidebooks that now included these areas previously overlooked by the railroad companies. *Florida In The Making* christened the interior peninsula above the Everglades as “the Florida Midlands,” and juxtaposed its qualities against those of the coast:

A land of level plains alternating with the rolling hills sprinkled with fresh-water lakes, covered for the greater part with pine forests and citrus groves, liberally dotted with charming and rapidly growing towns and agricultural developments, criss-crossed by railroads and motor highways, and furnishing winter homes and playgrounds for a multitude of people for whom the seacoast has no irresistible lure.⁵²

⁵¹ “Silver Springs Attracts from Afar,” *Ocala Banner*, 20 May 1927; “Business Better at Silver Springs Court This Year,” *Ocala Banner*, 16 December 1932.

⁵² Stockbridge and Perry, *Florida in the Making*, 239.

Silver Springs was also ideally located, as Ray and Davidson shrewdly noted, for travelers who were not heading there as a final destination. According to travel historian John Jakle, there are two kinds of travel destinations, “intermediate” and “terminal,” with the former being a welcome, if brief, relief from long stints confined in an automobile. Intermediate destinations, which Silver Springs “exemplified,” offered “some of the most playful settings, for they were not required to sustain long-term entertainment. Motorists happened onto them, stopped for at most a day, and accepted them as playful diversion, as if they were not staged reality,” Jakle wrote. Silver Springs may have been the most popular attraction in Florida, but it was also simply a place where travelers “paused briefly . . . while on longer journeys to Florida.”⁵³ As noted above, Ray and Davidson capitalized upon this fact, caring little about the Florida traveler’s ultimate destination as long as it brought them past--and to--their much ballyhooed attraction. Indeed, while local hoteliers tried to draw people to the area for extended stays, Ray and Davidson would in 1947 advertise to potential customers that Silver Springs was a largely a stopover en route to a final Florida destination or, at most, a “one day or weekend objective.” Further, they informed customers, “Silver Springs and its indescribable underwater life can be seen and enjoyed in a minimum of 90 minutes [and] all of its varied wonders can be covered in a maximum of four hours.”⁵⁴

Regardless of whether travelers were coming to or through the interior, a budding tourist industry throughout the region welcomed them. During the late 1920s and 1930s, Americans continued to travel, but spending on automobile travel dropped only slightly

⁵³ John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, *Motoring: The Highway Experience in America*, (Athens, Ga., 2008), 115-16.

⁵⁴ Hollis, *Dixie before Disney*, 147.

(and rebounded to a new high by 1935) while spending on food, hotels, and other parts of their vacation experience all fell.⁵⁵ In other words, people were still going, they were just doing it more frugally. One way of travelling on a budget was “tin can tourism” (car camping, it might be called today), in which people simply bedded down at night on the roadside, either in a recognized campground or, often, wherever they happened to be. In his 1985 history of American travel, *The Tourist*, Jakle summarized a number of fellow travel historians’ ideas that travel camping was a rejuvenating return to nature. The traveler wanted to “get off the road somewhere at the end of things, near the ‘jumping off place.’ . . . A return to primitive conditions was a return to the beginnings.” These travelers did not seek a hard-core back-to-nature wilderness experience, but rather they “embraced a ‘soft primitivism.’ Its model was not the Spartan camp, but rather the garden of Eden.”⁵⁶ Although this phenomenon would play out in the late 1930s and 1940s at other natural-ish attractions such as Cypress Gardens in Winter Haven and Rock City Gardens at Lookout Mountain in Georgia, Silver Springs was ahead of the curve, in no small part due to the tenacity and creativity of Ray and Davidson in marketing their attraction.

Ray and Davidson also were unafraid to tap into this vision of a restorative journey. They invoked nineteenth-century ideas of nature to capitalize on the notion of a rejuvenating natural experience during a time of national distress. One Depression-era Silver Springs brochure read:

Here is a scene that intrigues the imagination—more fascinating than anything you have seen, more beautiful than dreams can imagine, for Silver

⁵⁵ Aron, *Working at Play*, 240-41.

⁵⁶ John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America*, (Lincoln, Neb., 1985), 152-55.

Springs is in truth the Elysian Fields of America. They who enter here leave all cares behind them. Individual worries become petite and insignificant when one is communing with Nature at her loveliest.⁵⁷

As art historian Wendy Adams King has noted, this text evoked a “Romantic and transcendentalist desire to escape from civilization into the rejuvenating arms of sublime nature.”⁵⁸ The idea of the springs as Elysium was on one hand disingenuous, in that everything around the springs was essentially artifice by this point. As noted, the springhead area had been built up and re-landscaped several times and the streets lined with non-native palms to create a tourist-friendly effect. Historian David Nelson has pointed out that, despite all the artifice around the springhead, “the main attraction—the spring—was left untouched. And the site’s ‘jungle’ tour was nothing more than a river cruise down the untouched Silver River,” much like the jungle cruises that entertained the likes of Harriet Stowe and Sidney Lanier in the late nineteenth century. Yet even this was not true for very long. The operator of the jungle cruise, Colonel Tooey (whose first name was, in fact, Colonel) began running boats down the Silver River at an unknown date in the 1930s. When he did, Tooey placed rhesus monkeys on a small island along the Silver River, hoping to enhance the experience and unaware that monkeys can, in fact, swim. The shores of the Silver River, which could hardly be considered completely untouched anyway after the wanton and profligate hunting from steamships in the 1870s and 1880s and the cypress logging of the turn of the century, were now even less

⁵⁷ Wendy Adams King, “Through the Looking Glass of Silver Springs: Tourism and the Politics of Vision,” *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture* 3, (2004), http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/spring_2004/king.htm, accessed February 1, 2001.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, accessed February 1, 2001.

so. Colonies of rhesus monkeys descended from that group still inhabit the shores of the Silver River and the Ocklawaha River as far north as Rodman Dam.⁵⁹

But the idea of Elysium could also be a relative one, as this was a time when humans were re-sculpting nature on a wholesale level in Florida, and such minor adulterations and perversions were often considered trifles (if considered at all). Workers in the 1930s were building the Hoover Dike along the shores of Lake Okeechobee and, closer to home, construction was beginning on the massive Cross Florida Barge Canal project, meant to link the east and west coasts of Florida via an inland waterway, including the Ocklawaha River. The project was so vast that *The New York Times* went as far as to suggest in 1935, even as Silver Springs was establishing itself as the leading permanent attraction in Florida, that the springs were not even the primary reason people were visiting Ocala that year, but rather the work on the canal was. (The article did caution, however, that “no tourist warned in advanced dares” to return home without visiting the springs as well.)⁶⁰

Plans for the canal had raised concerns about how such a major diversion and reengineering of the Ocklawaha River basin would impact Silver River (and the Floridan Aquifer as a whole) but these concerns were generally dismissed as the hollow warnings of railroad interests and South Florida ports who would see their business undercut by the canal. Locals, meanwhile, saw in the canal project only a boon to their economy. The plan was discussed, the *Banner* wrote, “while Ocalans wait[ed] on Santa

⁵⁹ Nelson, “Florida Crackers and Yankee Tourists: The Civilian Conservation Corps, the Florida Park Service and the Emergence of Modern Florida Tourism,” 221; Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*, 15-16.

⁶⁰ Steven Noll and David Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams: The Cross Florida Barge Canal and the Struggle for Florida's Future*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2009), 80-90; Grunwald, *The Swamp*, 197-99; Harris G. Sims, “Florida Expects a Big Winter,” *The New York Times*, 27 October 1935.

Claus.” The canal was a project that “everyone admits would bring untold blessings” to the area and, for a brief period, it did. As historian B.F. Rogers described it, “Hotels and restaurants were jammed. Inquiries regarding investments poured into the Chamber of Commerce. Stores stayed open at night. . . .At one county commission meeting, there were ten applications to open bars.” All told, 6,000 people were put to work on the project and untold more went to Ocala seeking work there before the project lost funding less than a year later.⁶¹

As the Silver Springs area and Florida as a whole began to be reshaped and redefined on a grand level, it also was a time of reinvention for the individual communities of the Florida interior with each challenged to recreate itself to cater to the American tourist’s wanderlust and desire for entertainment and distraction. Many did so by trying to capitalize on existing natural features to create attractions that would draw in these new Florida explorers. According to Florida historic preservationist Margot Ammidown, these attractions “address the human longing for the mystical.” This is a phenomenon that continues to play out today. “In our secular culture, where taking to the highway in some way serves as a pop surrogate for a more complex journey, the mythic quest as pseudo-experience for tin-can pilgrims is still available via the small attraction.”⁶²

By 1935, the now-thriving Silver Springs was hardly a small attraction, nor was it a single attraction. In 1930, aspiring herpetologist Ross Allen approached Ray and

⁶¹ “Canal District Authority Is Asked in Tallahassee,” *Ocala Banner*, 26 April 1935; Benjamin F. Rogers, “The Florida Ship Canal Project,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 36, (July 1957): 15-16; Alexander R. Stoesen, “Claude Pepper and the Florida Canal Controversy, 1939-1943,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 50, (January 1972): 235.

⁶² Ammidown, “Edens, Underworlds, and Shrines,” 259.

Davidson with “about \$7.50 and a carload of snakes,” and asked to open a reptile attraction on their property. They obliged and the Ross Allen Reptile Institute, which would become a fixture at Silver Springs for decades, soon garnered attention from Robert Ripley who featured it in his popular “Believe It or Not!” newspaper columns, radio show, and newsreels. In 1930, Ray and Davidson added a gift shop and an antique shop, along with enlarging the boat area. In 1932, they replaced the old internal-combustion glass-bottom boats with quieter electric ones. In the middle of the decade, a replica Seminole village was erected on the site, with actual Seminoles such as Chief Charlie Cypress carving canoes or wrestling alligators.⁶³ A woodcraft novelty shop and citrus stand also appeared, while Ray and Davidson continued beautification of the grounds and roadside, installing rock gardens, benches, picnic shelters, and new landscaping. The attraction’s groundskeepers maintained that “so far as possible native trees, shrubs, palms, and flowers will be utilized,” the *Banner* reported. (The same article stated that they had just landscaped the driveways with washingtonia palms, the reporter apparently being unaware or unconcerned that such palms are not actually native to Florida or even North America.)⁶⁴

The *Banner* continued to help trumpet news of Silver Springs whenever possible. The newspaper adopted a practice from the resort communities of the coast and never failed to report on the visit of anyone of note, from leading engineers and educators to luminaries such as Calvin Coolidge and Winston Churchill. While Silver Springs benefitted from local, state, and, increasingly, national press, it also gained critical

⁶³ Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*, 11-12; “Lost Fla. Landmarks,” *Florida Trend*, 1 September 2008.

⁶⁴ “Landscape Work at Silver Springs Is Continued,” *Ocala Banner*, 17 November 1930.

attention—and operating income—during this time from Hollywood. Davidson himself would later call the motion picture industry's interest in Silver Springs the most important factor in the spring's success as an attraction, saying that "not until the movies discovered the possibilities that lay under our crystal clear waters did Silver Springs mean much outside Florida. Until then, Silver Springs was a sort of glorified picnic park and swim beach."⁶⁵

Ocala and the Florida interior would never rival the West Coast in movie making, but the springs had become a favored locale for exotic locale films as far back as the filming of the 1917 film *Seven Swans* there and, after retired Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller filmed the short movie *Crystal Champion* at the springs in 1929, "every important movie concern in the country" rushed to Silver Springs in the next few years. The producer of *Crystal Champion*, Grantland Rice, returned to film an entire short film underwater in 1937, garnering national attention for the springs in *Life Magazine*. This film, *An Underwater Romance*, would be followed by several more underwater films, each one adding to Silver Springs's renown, and Silver Springs would be a preferred location for underwater and jungle scenes for decades to come.⁶⁶ "Mermaids," bathing suit-clad young women posing for underwater photography, would also become both a motion picture staple and a marketing phenomenon at Silver Springs and other springs in Florida.

By the late 1930s, though, Silver Springs once again had budding competition in its own backyard and beyond. In 1937, Juliette Blue Springs in Dunnellon was renamed

⁶⁵ "Early Movies of Springs Helped Spread Its Fame."

⁶⁶ Ibid; Gene M. Burnett, *Florida's Past: People and Events That Shaped the State, Volume 3*, (Englewood, Fla., 1986), 215; Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*, 14-16; Martin, *Eternal Spring*, 160-62; "Speaking of Pictures. . ." *Life*, 26 April 1937; Monroe, *Silver Springs*, 9.

Rainbow Springs and the proprietors of the new springhead attraction there tried to upstage Ray and Davidson's glass bottom boats by adding boats in which the passengers sat below the waterline and looked out at the view through portholes. A lodge and tourist cabins also sprang up at Rainbow Springs, along with the first of several man-made waterfalls to be built at the springs, one of which remains today. The same year, Ed Ball opened a tourist lodge at Wakulla Springs near Tallahassee and the site received lavish praise in the media. Also in 1937, Everglades Wonder Gardens opened at Bonita Springs on the Tamiami Trail. In 1940, David Newell would open "Nature's Giant Fishbowl" at Homosassa Springs.⁶⁷ By late 1935, the Civilian Conservation Corps had built and opened up access to the 80-acre Juniper Springs Recreation Area in the Ocala National Forest about 20 miles to the east.⁶⁸ About ten miles northeast of that, a local couple opened a native American exhibit and recreation center at Silver Glen Springs off Lake George in 1932 and, ten miles north of that, was Salt Springs. Although both sites were accessible from the St. Johns River, they would have to await the completion of State Road 19, a north-south highway from Clermont to Palatka—with the first bridge over the Ocklawaha River in that area—in 1960 before they would become easily reached by motor tourists. A 1938 visitor described the area as "hidden at the end of miles of rutted roads, through endless thickets of scrub oaks . . . utterly still, utterly wild."⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*, 75-78, 120-21, 141-42; Revels, *Watery Eden*, 43.

⁶⁸ Jerrell H. Shofner, "Roosevelt's "Tree Army": The Civilian Conservation Corps in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 65, (April 1987): 442.

⁶⁹ "Ponce De Leon's Trail," *The New York Times*, 9 January 1938.

Other tourist attractions popped up seemingly everywhere in Florida throughout the period, including along the coast where tourists did not have to be diverted to encounter them. Tarpon Springs, named for leaping fish rather than any spring in its vicinity, promoted its sponge-diving industry. Sarasota had its Reptile Farm and Zoo while Tampa had the more intriguingly named End's Rattlesnake Cannery and Reptilorum, St. Augustine promoted its Fountain of Youth Park, while Marine Studios (later Marineland) opened to the south of the city in Flagler County. Circus promoter Clyde Beatty opened his Jungle Zoo in Fort Lauderdale, while McKee's Jungle Gardens opened in Vero Beach. Miami had Monkey Jungle *and* Parrot Jungle. Just as interior communities had sought to emulate the development and boosterism of coastal areas in the 1920s, the coastal areas, while still dependent on beaches and resorts, in the 1930s began co-opting and assimilating the imagined Florida of the interior into their identities as well.

But unlike coastal attractions, which benefitted from their location in established destinations where they were simply another diversion, interior attractions had to create themselves as destinations in their own rights in the minds of travelers. In doing so, they largely re-created the very identity of the interior in American minds as well. Silver Springs led the way in this regard, but soon others joined in. In 1936, Dick and Julie Pope opened Cypress Gardens near Winter Haven as a botanical park and it would soon become one of the quintessential contrived "natural" exhibits of Florida. As one historian writes: "From his countless flowers and trees to his Florida-shaped swimming pool to his sensual water skiers, Dick Pope always tried to sell the public on his

dreamland down South. He saw that the image of his park was forever tied to a romanticized image of Florida.”⁷⁰

Pope was not alone. Everywhere around the state, nature and artifice were being combined to create attractions that their promoters hoped would be more than a sum of those two incongruous parts. As Ammidown explains:

In part a response to the popular mythic image of Florida, [these attractions] were frequently based on the native environment—the springs, the forests, the wildlife—and they were often intertwined with a narrative extrapolated from Florida history. Small attractions naively attempted to create what the tourist or prospective resident surely must have felt lacking: a glimpse of the extraordinary.⁷¹

Ammidown further contends that attractions tended to fall into three categories, each of which was aimed at evoking bygone perceptions of Florida. These were:

“Florida as a magical source, or shrine (the springs); Florida as Eden (the garden attractions); [and] Florida as the underworld (the alligator and reptile attractions).”⁷²

The extensively landscaped Silver Springs then, with Ross Allen’s Reptile Institute, represented all three images. Moreover, Ray and Davidson had added yet another aspect of mythic Florida, the Seminole village. Of course, while it employed real Seminoles, the Seminole attraction hardly reflected actual Seminole experiences in Florida. Like similar exhibits in Miami and St. Petersburg, the village featured totem poles, mock weddings, and alligator wrestling, among other inauthentic practices. The Seminole Village at Silver Spring was reportedly “well run and clean” and there is evidence that many Seminoles “did not feel demeaned or overly exploited, and many

⁷⁰ Stephen E. Branch, “The Salesman and His Swamp: Dick Pope’s Cypress Gardens,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 80, (Spring 2002): 484.

⁷¹ Ammidown, “Edens, Underworlds, and Shrines,” 239.

⁷² *Ibid.*: 243.

seemed to prefer this means of earning a living rather than relocating to the Seminole Agency.”⁷³ As historian Mark David Spence explains, the National Park Service removed natives from their historic homes on what was to become park property in order to create a “natural” landscape that was uninhabited. This “virgin” terrain thus appealed to “old fantasies about a continent awaiting ‘discovery.’” Moreover, Spence points out, at the same time as western Indians were being denied use of their former lands, they also were being exploited as tourist attractions in their own right. The Blackfeet, for example, were presented at Glacier National Park as “living museum specimens.” At Yosemite National Park, the Yosemite Indians at first tried to adjust to their changing world by finding work related to the tourist industry, but park officials soon grew concerned about “native people who did not look appropriately ‘Indian,’” and sought to create “an ‘authentic’ village for tourism.” Similar issues played out at other parks as Native Americans were caught in a catch-22 where their economic survival seemed to depend on appearing “Indian,” but not *too* “Indian.”⁷⁴ The notion of “authenticity,” in this light seems absurd. Still, this was yet another example of the promoters’ efforts to exploit actual Florida recast in a version that would resonate with visitors’ expectations of a Florida interior ideal, typically a semi-tamed, or second-nature version—the wild and exotic tropics, simultaneously alluring and repelling.

By the end of the 1930s, the tourist experience in Florida had completely changed, as reflected in the Federal Writers Project’s guidebook, *Florida: A Guide to the*

⁷³ Harry A. Kersey, Jr., “The Florida Seminoles in the Depression and New Deal, 1933-1942: An Indian Perspective,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 65, (October 1986): 182; West, *The Enduring Seminoles*, 24, 56.

⁷⁴ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*, (New York, 1999), 5, 71, 112. See also Robert H. Keller and Michael F. Turek, *American Indians & National Parks*, (Tucson, Ariz., 1998), 134-51.

Southernmost State. The coastal resorts still beckoned, strung around the periphery of the state like “a bejeweled necklace that sparkles on the bosom of a voluptuous sea; all is glamour and superficiality.” But this was hardly all there was by the late 1930s. “Ten thousand miles of roads that crisscross the state have streaked it with what might be described as a roadside culture and commerce, with each section revealing a characteristic quality.” The traveler bold enough to venture away from the coast “may detour inland to discover the hidden winter vegetable kingdom . . . or farther north he may swing inland by way of Orlando. . . then up to Ocala where he can look through the glass bottoms of boats at water life in the depths of crystal-clear springs.”⁷⁵

World War II would cut dramatically into visitation at Silver Springs, as gas rationing and other austerity measures limited tourism and travel by Americans, yet Ray and Davidson still managed to make the most of things. By becoming the first private attraction to cut prices for servicemen and women during the war years and running an advertising campaign that garnered an award for “finest job of wartime publicity and advertising” in Florida, Silver Springs became the destination for more than 200,000 visitors—mostly armed forces personnel—during the period between 1941 and 1946. When the war was over, attendance rebounded and then some, as many wartime visitors returned, “this time with wives, parents, relatives, or new old ‘buddies.’”⁷⁶

By 1950, Silver Springs was averaging 800,000 visitors a year and that number was still rising. Direct mail advertising supplemented road signs and other promotions for “Florida’s Underwater Fairyland,” including doormats and mileage meters donated

⁷⁵ Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration for the State of Florida, *Florida; a Guide to the Southernmost State*, (New York, 1946), 4-7.

⁷⁶ “While Strolling through the Park,” *The Billboard*, 9 February 1946; “War Years Found Springs Visited by over 200,000,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 23 February 1950.

free to hotels, motels, restaurants, banks, chambers of commerce, and every other conceivable venue throughout Florida and beyond, along with traveling shows and films and movies circulated throughout the region, float entries in selected fairs and parades, and radio advertising. Florida itself was booming in ways reminiscent of the Roaring 20s, with growing numbers of immigrants and visitors pouring in. As Gary Mormino wrote, “A 1950 dream list included a house, a car, and a vacation. The Sunshine State thus intersected with the American Dream.”⁷⁷ The glory days had, again, returned to Silver Springs and the future seemed to hold nothing but even greater things.

The 1950s would indeed see continued growth at the springs, but the landscape was beginning to change. The next generation would see new innovations in transportation would again bring dramatic changes in the fortunes of Silver Springs and other interior destinations. Roadside attractions, having hedged their bets between nature and artifice, would find themselves marginalized in the face of an increasingly constructed environment and new expectations of Florida on the part of visitors. The “Disney-fication” of Florida in the late 1960s and 1970s, seen by some as the critical turning point for the fates of Florida’s roadside attractions, was instead the culmination of a series of changes in both the reality and perceptions of the Florida landscape in which the image of the coastal beaches would come to be synonymous with Florida and the interior would once again be left searching for an identity.

⁷⁷ Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 11.

CHAPTER 8

PARADISE REVISITED: THE POSTWAR YEARS

In 1946, the motion picture version of Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings's *The Yearling*, set along the St. Johns River but filmed at Silver Springs and other sites around Marion County, was released. It reestablished Silver Springs and the Florida interior as the scenic heart of the state, as well as the destination for film-makers seeking an exotic and picturesque waterside locale. The film was nominated for seven Academy Awards, and won three, including two for cinematography and color art, which further called attention to the scenic interior Florida backdrop of the story. The film opened with a narrative voice-over from star Gregory Peck, who explained that his character had gone to Florida after the Civil War and had travelled "back into the wilderness, away from civilization." Travelling upriver, the land "got wilder as I got deeper into the woods," where "the vegetation was denser [and] the trees had to struggle for a breath of air. Even wilder here as I got back closer to the sources, to the beginning of things. "¹

Thanks to the magic of Hollywood, the Florida interior could be imagined in 1946 as the wild frontier of eight decades prior, a place where the voyage up the wild Ocklawaha River would take one to a magical "source"—Silver Springs. In a sense, there was still enough wild and unknown remaining in the region to justify that image. But just as the end of the Civil War marked the beginning of an era of exploration and discovery in Florida, so too did the end of World War II. This time, however, it would not be rugged individualists and hardy pioneers attempting to carve an existence out of a wild land, but rather swarms of immigrants and tourists imprinting the designs and

¹ *The Yearling*, DVD, directed by Clarence Brown (1946; U.S.A.: Warner Home Video, 2002).

visions of developers and promoters upon a conquered and rapidly transforming landscape.

The rapidity and complexity of the development of Florida after World War II has been well documented and continues to be a subject of intense scrutiny. To be sure, the population expanded as former soldiers, millions of whom had trained in Florida during the war, returned to visit or began new lives, bringing family and friends with them. Mortgage loan provisions in the G.I. Bill dovetailed with a glut of new and affordable housing in Florida to make the dream of waterfront property available to a wide swath of the American working class. Post-war prosperity also allowed many to afford family vacations to warmer climes. The aerospace industry fueled rapid growth in Brevard County and its surroundings while retirement communities thrived up and down the coasts. Air conditioning and mosquito control “allowed Floridians to domesticate nature,” creating a level of comfort unimagined just a few years earlier.²

One early upshot of this remarkable growth was a proliferation of new attractions that purported to encapsulate the “natural” identity of Florida. Many of these followed the model defined by Florida historian Margot Ammidown, fitting into one of three categories: “Florida as a magical source, or shrine (the springs); Florida as Eden (the garden attractions); [and] Florida as the underworld (the alligator and reptile attractions).”³ No less than fourteen new attractions between 1946 and 1963 incorporated the word “Garden” into their monikers. Another dozen included the word “jungle,” alligator,” serpent,” “frog,” or “reptile.” Only one new spring attraction opened at

² Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 5.

³ Ammidown, “Edens, Underworlds, and Shrines,” 243.

Warm Mineral Springs in Venice, one of just two hot springs in all of Florida (along with nearby Little Salt Spring).⁴ In the consumption-driven post-war years, Florida's nature, or the *idea* of Florida's nature, was becoming hopelessly intertwined with the act of commerce. As John Rothchild writes, "Flora, fauna, literature, and architecture were all part of Florida's continuous advertisement of itself, the advertisement and the product being one." That phenomenon was even more acute in cities such as St. Petersburg that had become "less place than merchandise."⁵ In the next few decades, as competition mounted between the corporate owners of the next generation of attractions, the modern theme parks, that product would become increasingly artificial.

The second half of the twentieth century also came with a new set of assumptions and desires on the parts of Americans who had lived through the Depression and World War II. There was a "developing consensus by the late 1940s that a vital mass consumption-oriented economy provided the most promising route to post-war prosperity," writes historian Lizabeth Cohen. This extended not only to buying homes and appliances, but also to travel. While some historians such as Elaine Tyler May have argued that the 1950s were a time when Americans turned to domesticity and home-life in growing suburban for "a source of meaning and security in a world run amok," the growth of tourism in sheer numbers suggests a different dynamic at work, one in which Americans also found some measure of comfort and meaning through domestic travel. Family travel, in the confines of an automobile, "allows us to resolve this apparent paradox of domestic containment," writes historian Susan Sessions Rugh. There also is

⁴ Ken Breslauer, *Roadside Paradise: The Golden Age of Florida's Tourist Attractions, 1929-1971*, (St. Petersburg, Fla., 2000), 83-5.

⁵ John Rothchild, *Up for Grabs: A Trip through Time and Space in the Sunshine State*, (New York, 1985), 70.

another component, though. Americans in the post-war era were engaging in a patriotic ritual, like those of Americans in the post-Civil War years, of finding national identity and meaning through travel. Whereas in the nineteenth century it had been a journey to “discover” the nation’s different landscapes and reconcile its cultures, the journey now was one of consumption. As Cohen writes, “the good purchaser . . . the good citizen.”⁶ The proliferation of increasingly artificial and contrived attractions in the Florida interior allowed for Americans to “explore” Florida, but also to have their expectations met and their notions of identity reaffirmed.

It was a different world, though, in the latter half of the 1940s, when Florida was still in its antediluvian stage. While many attractions had shuttered themselves, some permanently, during World War II, Silver Springs had survived and had actually maintained a decent visitation rate of between 50,000 per year (which was the annual visitation rate in the nineteenth century) through effective in-state marketing and by catering to the millions of servicemen and women who came through Florida during their military training. After the war, visitation at Silver Springs skyrocketed, to 800,000 visitors in 1949, and more than a million by 1953. Looking ahead, that year, Ray and Davidson saw nothing but sunshine. Anticipating growth throughout Florida, Davidson called Silver Springs “a baby in the cradle.”⁷

Ray and Davidson’s business plan had remained as it had been for more than two decades, to eschew the room-and-board business and use the springs as the central

⁶ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, 1st ed., (New York, 2003), 119; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York, 1988), 16-18; Susan Sessions Rugh, *Are We There Yet?: The Golden Age of American Family Vacations*, (Lawrence, Kans., 2008), 4-5.

⁷ “War Years Found Springs Visited by over 200,000.”; Harris Powers, “It Attracts Millions,” *Suntime*, 27 June 1953.

attraction for a series of ancillary exhibits and shops aimed at both in-state visitors on day trips and out-of-state tourists on their way to other destinations. Admission to the spring remained free; everything else cost money. And there was now a lot more on which to spend money. Not only were there new buildings around the springhead, but Silver Springs offered thirteen different concessions, including a photo shop, wood shop, soda shop, pottery shop, and other assorted mini-businesses selling trinkets, mementos, gifts, and food. Ray and Davidson continued to lease out the concessions, keeping direct control over only the glass-bottom boat fleet, which by now had grown from three to nineteen (it would later grow to twenty-one), and the main gift shop.

The growth, from just two or three concessions in the early 1940s, was followed by an increase in exhibits around the central attraction at the springhead. During the 1950s, Silver Springs added the Prince of Peace Memorial, a series of seven hand-carved scenes depicting the life of Christ and each in its own chapel, and Tommy Bartlett's Deer Ranch, a zoo featuring not only more than 150 varieties of deer, but also "drumming ducks, fortune-telling chickens, [and] kissing bunnies" among other animals. (Sam and Vernon Jarvis, owners of the Illinois-based Jarvis Oil Company, opened a transportation museum called "Carriage Cavalcade," across the street in 1953.) Nor had Ray and Davidson lost their flair for dramatic publicity stunts, including the 1955 screening of the Jane Russell movie *Underwater*, with the audience, supplied with aqualungs and swimsuits, watching the movie in the actual spring in an underwater amphitheater on anchored-down benches.⁸

⁸ Lu Vickers and Sara Dionne, *Weeki Wachee, City of Mermaids: A History of One of Florida's Oldest Roadside Attractions*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2007), 125; Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*, 22, 41; "The "Prince of Peace," In Seven Scenes, Depicts Life of Christ," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 19 May 1957; "Animals from 18 Countries an Outstanding Attraction," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 19 May 1957.

In 1949, on Emancipation Day, Ray and Davidson also finally opened Paradise Park, about a mile to the south of the spring, as a park for African Americans. Silver Springs had long employed African Americans as boat captains and in other positions, but never allowed them entrance as patrons. In the post-war years, the owners yielded to a growing and potentially lucrative demand for access by African Americans to the springs and developed the former M. L. Porter property they had purchased in 1935 to stave off competition there. They built a swimming beach, dock, pavilion, parking area, and bathhouse on the newly landscaped grounds, and offered glass bottom boat tours from the park, while Ross Allen put on reptile shows at the park. They also placed a local African American, Eddie Vereen, in charge as manager, and the park quickly became a popular destination, drawing in excess of 100,000 visitors per year. The *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* noted in 1956 that while other communities around Florida had made only “token efforts to provide equal recreational opportunities,” Silver Springs represented an “example of what can be done with cooperative effort and modest investment.”⁹ Still, Ocala, like many other communities across Florida and the south, struggled with racial issues for decades to come. In 1963, for example, the Florida Advisor Committee to United States Commission on Civil Rights held a public meeting on racial issues in Ocala and almost all elected local officials declined to attend. The committee, citing the lack of communication, deemed Ocala “a serious point of danger” for racial conflagration while Robert Saunders, field secretary for the National

⁹ “Paradise Park Open to Negroes,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 20 May 1949; Stan Windhorn, “Ocala Takes Lead in Providing Recreational Facilities for Negroes,” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, 4 September 1956.

Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said that “there appears to be a conspiracy to deny the Negro his rights in Ocala and Marion County.”¹⁰

Meanwhile, Ray and Davidson—joined in the early 1950s by Ray’s elder son, W.C. Ray, Jr., or “Buck”—continued to let other businesses cater to overnight customers, a practice that sometimes led to conflicts when they overplayed the ease of visiting Silver Springs in just a single day. But the policy was as benign as it was shrewd, according to William Ray, Carl Ray’s younger son, who was public relations director for Silver Springs in the 1950s. “We didn’t want to be in competition with the people [motel and hotel owners] who were sending us business,” he explained. Instead they continued to market to the automobile tourist, erecting roadside billboards and sending Silver Springs welcome mats, framed pictures, “mileage meters” (devices indicating to travelers the distance to Silver Springs from wherever the meter was located), and untold millions of brochures to travel agents, motels, roadside restaurants, and anywhere else they might find their way into a traveler’s gaze. Between 1948 and 1950, Silver Springs distributed 20,000 welcome mats, 2,000 mileage meters, and roughly half a million “blotter reproductions of billboards” as part of its advertising. In the 1950s, advertising increased even further. “You have no idea the scale of what we did,” William Ray explained, noting that he once had ordered up to 7.5 million brochures printed in a single order.¹¹

The marketing was also not just about spending money, which Ray and Davidson did to the tune of \$379,000 in 1949, the only year for which figures were available, but

¹⁰ “Few Officials Plan to Attend Ocala Rights Hearing Monday,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 19 September 1963; “Civil Rights Commission Issues Ocala Racial Report,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 20 October 1963.

¹¹ “25 Years of Progress.”; Interview with William Ray by Tom Berson in Ocala, Florida, 15 January 2011.

also to find every conceivable way to get the name Silver Springs into the consciousness of travelers. While Silver Springs already had a director of advertising, William Ray took the title of director of public relations—a job aimed at garnering free publicity for Silver Springs. Countless photographs and miles of film were shot at the park, to be sold to patrons or disseminated to the press. When movies were filmed or celebrities arrived at Silver Springs, promotional material was instantly sent to every available media outlet, and untold filler photos in newspapers and magazines and movie shorts at theaters reminded Americans of the name Silver Springs. Underwater photography pioneer Bruce Mozert also had come to work at Silver Springs in 1942, and many of his photographs found their way into national publications. In 1946, Ray and Davidson opened a separate concession for Mozert that became wildly popular as people sought to buy his prints, many of which were photographs of people in seemingly everyday activities such as mowing the lawn and clipping hedges—only the pictures were shot underwater.¹² Many episodes of the television show *Sea Hunt* were shot at Silver Springs and William Ray engineered a deal with Mercury Outboard Motors to film its commercials and advertising footage there. While ninety-four different films of varying lengths were shot at the springs between June, 1958 and June, 1959, fifty-two of those were episodes of *Sea Hunt* and twenty-four more were advertising films for Mercury. In March 1961, Mercury even sponsored a half-hour NBC television special at

¹² Monroe, *Silver Springs*, 27-29.

the springs, the same day as Columbia Pictures filmed a movie short for release in theaters.¹³

Meanwhile, several studies of tourist behavior and statistics during the 1950s confirmed the trend Ray and Davidson had successfully banked on by focusing on “in transit” customers, coastal visitors passing through Silver Springs on their way to or from other destinations. This strategy continued to work in the late 1940s and 1950s just as it had before the war. Tourism continued to boom, with nearly four times as many people visiting Florida by 1957 as had in 1937, and fully three-quarters of those more than eight million Florida visitors were now travelling by car. As one tourism report explained:

Nearly twice as many tourists came to Florida in 1957 as ten years [earlier]. . . . Before the 1920s, Florida was a rich man’s vacation land. The popularization of the automobile changed this, and the luxury of a generation ago has a mass market today. As leisure time continues to increase, it is reasonable to suppose the volume of tourists will grow further.¹⁴

It did not matter yet that those travelers also overwhelmingly and increasingly sought coastal Florida as their terminal destination, and that Silver Springs remained merely a stopping point. For the time being, it simply meant that more people were travelling through the interior, and in the 1950s that likely meant through Ocala. While the town could hardly be mistaken for Florida’s Rome, to many travelers it might have seemed that all roads led there. U.S. 441 and U.S. 301 passed through the city, and after completion of U.S. 27 in 1951, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported, “Ocala now

¹³ “Silver Springs Is Movie Capitol of the State with 94 Films Shot,” *Ocala Star Banner*, 21 June 1959; “Telecast from Silver Springs Set by Network,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 26 January 1961.; Interview with William Ray by Tom Berson in Ocala, Florida, January 15, 2011.

¹⁴ *Business Information Leaflet No. 4*, (Tallahassee, 1958), 2.

has become the hub for much of the inland Florida motor traffic as three major highways now converge here and go their separate ways.” Along with those three major federal highways, another four state roads intersected Ocala, creating a nexus for interior Florida travel. At the time, Ocala “probably serve[d] more overnight visitors in its many motels than any other city in the state,” *The New York Times* estimated.¹⁵

This was both good thing, for it meant traffic through the area was high, but it also did not necessarily bode well for the future because it indicated that most travelers to Ocala were transient ones—overnight most often meant *only* overnight. Of 104 Marion County visitors surveyed in 1952 and 1953, the average stay in Florida was two weeks, but only nine indicated non-coastal terminal destinations, meaning less than 10% intended to stay anywhere off the coast, let alone Marion County. A 1958 survey of more than 19,000 guests to Florida found only 7% who indicated final destinations in Central or North Florida, while sixty-three of the 74% who indicated a final destination listed either a coastal area or the Florida Keys. Meanwhile, the growth of the hospitality industry in Marion County was evidenced by the four-fold growth in the number of motor courts between 1941 and 1952, from eleven to forty-four. Nevertheless, as late as 1958 the county still offered only 3,538 rentable rooms of any type, a figure less than even neighboring Lake County (4,619) and paling against many coastal counties.¹⁶ With an estimated 75% of visitors to Marion County coming from out of state and Silver Springs claiming about a million visitors per year, it would appear that most traffic through the area was just that, *through*.

¹⁵ "Three Main Highways to Florida Touch Ocala," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 11 December 1951; Richard Fay Warner, "Motel Stop En Route South," *The New York Times*, 16 November 1952.

¹⁶ *Tourism Studies in Florida: 1958*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1959), 38; Robert B. Marcus, "Tourism in Marion County, Florida: A Geographic Study," (M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 1953), 54-81.

As traffic volume through the center of the state grew during the 1950s, observers offered three possible reasons. Local residents suggested, unsurprisingly, that “more and more visitors are discovering central Florida, which contains some of the prettiest scenery in the state,” *The New York Times* reported. Another possibility was the proliferation of attractions that “appeal to the leisurely driver.” Finally, the *Times* noted, “there are other motorists who want to get to the lower east coast or lower west coast in a hurry,” and these roads were less crowded than coastal routes.¹⁷ In the 1960s, the desire for faster travel to coastal destinations would contribute to the demise of many attractions. For the time being, though, all three phenomena lent themselves to a burgeoning roadside tourism business and, during this golden age for the roadside-attraction industry, more than thirty “significant” attractions opened between 1946 and 1954 alone, according to author Ken Breslauer, who cataloged many of these in *Roadside Paradise: the Golden Age of Florida’s Tourist Attractions, 1929-1972*.¹⁸ Untold dozens of other smaller ones sprang up, though most were fleeting and increasingly dismissed as just so many more tourist traps. Attractions even appeared in remote locales such as White Springs, Brooksville, and Clewiston. Silver Springs, although it did not experience as dramatic a spike in visitation and immigration as the state overall experienced, saw repeated record crowds, even while it was forced to share in the spoils with major new competitors both along the interior highways and along the coasts.

¹⁷ C. E. Wright, “The Middle Way,” *The New York Times*, 12 April 1959.

¹⁸ Breslauer, *Roadside Paradise*, 83-85.

Three attractions in particular would rise to prominence alongside Silver Springs during the 1950s. To the east, Marine Studios (later renamed Marineland) grew in popularity despite its location slightly off the beaten path fifteen miles south of St. Augustine. Opened in 1938 as a laboratory and studio for underwater photography, it expanded into other marine entertainment exhibits, including offering the first trained porpoise show in 1951. (Silver Springs also had a short-lived experiment keeping rare Amazonian bufeo, or pink, porpoises at the springs. Ross Allen, Bill Blue Ray, and a team of others from Silver Springs led the 1956 expedition to Colombia to capture two of the rare mammals.) Weeki Wachee opened in 1947 on the west coast of Florida less than half the distance as Silver Springs from the popular destination of Tampa. Moreover, it was led by one of Ray and Davidson's earliest protégés, Newton Perry, and the proprietors were not shy about "borrowing" ideas from Silver Springs. To the south, meanwhile, promoter extraordinaire Dick Pope's Cypress Gardens in Winter Haven already was on its way to becoming a leading attraction in the nation, thanks in no small part to its proximity to the already popular and iconic Bok Tower Gardens in Lake Wales, not to mention Pope's prolific use of flirtatious southern belles in hoop skirts. Bok Tower, a 205-foot sculpted marble and coquina structure with a 57-bell carillon, was built by Edward Bok, a Dutch immigrant and author whose 1920 autobiography, *The Americanization of Edward Bok*, won the Pulitzer Prize, as a "gift" to his adopted country. Together, Bok Tower and Cypress Gardens would supplant Silver Springs in the decade following World War II as the leading tourist attraction in Florida. Yet, as the rising tide lifted all boats, Silver Springs continued to grow.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ibid., 37-38, 58; Vickers and Dionne, *Weeki Wachee, City of Mermaids*, 2; Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*, 105; Gerald Sho, "Ever See a Pink Whale?," *All Florida Weekly Magazine*, 8 July 1956;

Silver Springs suffered what likely should have been a major setback in June, 1955, when an overnight fire caused at least \$250,000 in damages, destroying the ticket, business, and publicity offices as well as several shops and restaurants. However, because only minor damage was done to the docks and bath house, Silver Springs was able to reopen that same weekend. Although the *Ocala Star-Banner* (the *Ocala Banner* had merged with *Ocala Evening Star* in 1943) called the fire a “holocaust,” it also reported that the attraction nevertheless set a Fourth of July attendance record just two weeks later. The fire, which remained unsolved (Ray’s house was mysteriously “ransacked” the same night while he was at the site of the blaze) had destroyed the buildings reportedly built just five years earlier to usher in the new era of Silver Springs, but rebuilding began immediately and new structures were completed by 1957.²⁰

The new buildings, designed by noted architect Victor Lundy, received acclaim from the design community, winning a Citation Award from *Progressive Architecture* for its steel frame buildings arced around the springhead with “floating ceilings,” extended canopies, and tile and terrazzo floors.²¹ Large glass windows and plastic skylights provided light and a panoramic view of the extensively re-landscaped springhead area for diners in the new restaurant and banquet hall, which together could hold 750 people.

Edward William Bok, *The Americanization of Edward Bok: The Autobiography of a Dutch Boy Fifty Years After*, (New York, 1920).

²⁰ "Fire of Undetermined Origins Rages through Principal Buildings," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 17 June 1955; "Silver Springs Back in Full-Time Operation," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 18 June 1955; "Silver Springs Recovers from Fire," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 13 July 1955.

²¹ "Tourist Center," *Progressive Architecture* 39, (April 1958).

These buildings, called at the time “as near fireproof as man can build,”²² would prove the most enduring structures at the springhead and last into the present day. While they may have been heralded at the time, art historian Deirdre Hardy found them in hindsight to be emblematic of the increasing clash between the built and “natural” environments (the new landscaping included many exotic species, including Asian fan palms and banana trees). Hardy, then an undergraduate, wrote in 1977,

The “International Look” style of the buildings, while typical of the architectural attitude of its time . . . certainly did not fit unobtrusively into its natural setting nor act as a “frame” for nature’s wonderworks. Instead, it brought the technology of the steel world to compete with its surroundings.²³

In many ways, this was just the starkest representation of what had been taking place at the springs since the earliest development and commercial ventures there. Nature had to be not only “framed,” but also crafted, altered, or even re-created to fit the desires of the tourist consumer. Silver Springs, along with other attractions in Florida and across the nation, often were “as much deliberate human constructions as they were natural phenomena.”²⁴ *The New York Times* in 1953 described the proliferation of attractions along state highways, particularly on U.S. 1 near the coast, as “thick forests of attractions; wherever nature or history has shortchanged an area, promoters have developed man-made sites instead.”²⁵ Now, even if a locale offered nothing particularly interesting or exotic of its own accord, promoters would create a historical narrative—often involving Ponce de Leon—or simply erect a zoo or aquarium to market to

²² “Beautiful Buildings Have Replaced Those Destroyed by Flames,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 19 May 1957.

²³ Deirdre Hardy, *Silver Springs: From Sacred Shrine to Wild Waters* (Gainesville: University of Florida, 1977), 14.

²⁴ Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 90.

²⁵ Norman D. Ford, “The Sights for Sale Along Florida’s Highways,” *The New York Times*, 12 April 1953.

travelers. Hence, not only did Silver Springs have to compete with other “natural” attractions, of which there were plenty, but now there was a whole host of increasingly artificial creations with which to contend. Moreover, proprietors of existing attractions were wary of less honest newcomers to the trade who might tarnish Florida’s image, while for travelers, it meant a glut of potential charlatans out to fleece them. For example, where the young Rothchild saw intrigue in the local color of juice counters and gift shops, his father saw only “tourist traps.”²⁶ As more attractions of all kinds sprung up, there also was more of a need to separate oneself from the pack, to stand out in the growing sea of postcards, posters, billboards, bumper stickers, place mats and other gimmicks advertising for various “Gardens,” “Jungles,” and “Springs.”²⁷ The latter included not only privately run attractions such as Rainbow, Homosassa, and Weeki Wachee, but also other springs on both public and private lands such as Juniper, Silver Glen, and Alexander Springs to the east of Silver Springs in the Ocala National Forest.

Despite the proliferation of attractions in the 1950s, there remained a sense of camaraderie among many of the attractions’ owners (or, at least, a sense of enlightened mutual self-interest) since they believed the same forces that brought one off the coast to one attraction might further propel them up or down the middle of the state toward the other, so long as each fulfilled the expectations of their customers. Immediately after the Silver Springs fire, Pope used 8,000 of his own promotional mailings to announce to motels, travel agents, and others in the tourism business that operations were still going on as usual for his colleagues to the north. “Believe me, it would not be Florida without

²⁶ Rothchild, *Up for Grabs*, 3.

²⁷ For a sense of the variety and volume of such advertising, see Tim Hollis, *Selling the Sunshine State: A Celebration of Florida Tourism Advertising*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2008).

Silver Springs operating and I trust you will send them visitors just as you have in the past,” Pope wrote in the mass mailing.²⁸ It was not surprising that other attractions assisted Silver Springs, as it had long been the mindset of many Florida promoters that what was good for one was good for all, a notion that had its seeds at least as far back as the boosterism of the 1920s. The desire to “provide a united front in the effort to promote tourism in Florida,” led Davidson, Pope, and others in 1938 to create the Florida Association of Publicity Directors. That group changed its name in 1941 to the Florida Public Relations Association, an organization that remains to this day. In the 1940s, meanwhile, attraction owners also created the Florida Attractions Association, aimed at maintaining standards among the attractions and addressing collective issues. (That group also exists to this day.)²⁹ During the 1940s and 1950s, many attractions were owned by individuals and families, with personal ties to each other through the Association and other prior contacts. From the early years, the idea had been simply to get people to come to Florida, explained William Ray. “If our advertising was [done] out of state to bring people in state, everybody would benefit.” At first, he said, members of the Florida press were wary of their motives for not spending advertising dollars in-state, he said, but “they gradually thought it was a good idea . . . and they never expected us to advertise.”³⁰

²⁸ “Courtesy of Dick Pope,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 21 June 1955.

²⁹ *Promotion & Protection of Florida's Natural Tourism Resources: 1995 Interim Project*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1995); Florida Attractions Association, “Florida Attractions Association: History and Overview,” <http://www.floridaattractions.org/history/>, accessed January 10, 2011. Note: The FAA’s website indicates the group was formed in 1949, but mention of the Association appears at least as early as the November 3, 1946 issue of the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*.

³⁰ Interview with William Ray by Tom Berson in Ocala, Florida, 15 January 2011.

Indeed, when the new buildings opened in 1957, private and public officials from Ocala and around the state feted Ray and Davidson with “Silver Springs Appreciation Week.” The *Star-Banner* dedicated more than thirty pages to articles and profiles about Silver Springs, filled out with dozens of advertisements of appreciation and congratulations from local merchants and business. The “Florida Newspaper News and Radio Digest,” the trade publication for media in Florida, commented that “Thirty-three years of Community Relations Pays Off.” They might not have spent money in Florida, but they brought money in. As for a plaque presented to them, “It will be a reminder to millions that these men . . . are with honor in their own country.”³¹ The keynote speaker at a Rotary Club dinner for the festivities mused:

I have often wondered what would have happened had the springs not been controlled by local people. Outsiders, of course, more than likely would have been interested only in the gate receipts and would have spent as little money as possible for improvements. The Rays and Shorty Davidson, however, have their roots here and repeatedly have demonstrated their conviction that it is a community rather than a personal asset.³²

Just five years later, Ocalans would find out just what would happen if the springs were not “controlled by local people.” Meanwhile, though, the state continued its own three-pronged effort to promote Florida for agriculture, industry, and tourism, and during the 1950s, a steady stream of press chronicled the success of these efforts on all fronts. *Time* magazine couched a 1955 cover story about Florida growth within the framework of a look at newly elected Governor LeRoy Collins who, the article stated, was “aware of the danger of resting the state's economy too heavily on a vacationland. . . . Today, so

³¹ “Silver Springs Appreciation Week,” *Florida Newspaper News and Radio Digest* 38, (June 1957): 2-3.

³² “Silver Springs Worth Army of Publicity Men to Ocala, Marion County,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 20 May 1957.

much else is going on in Florida that the peril of overemphasizing the playgrounds seems to be passing."³³ *Newsweek* magazine ran cover stories in January of 1955, 1957, and 1959 touting Florida's growth in these three areas. While the first focused on growth in the southeastern corner of the state, from Hobe Sound to the Keys, the 1957 edition examined agricultural and industrial potential throughout the state. The article began:

From the piney woods of its western panhandle, down through its lake and citrus country to Miami, Florida is astir. Some of the bustle centers on the palm-fringed beaches that have made tourists the state's No. 1 cash crop. But all down Florida's 447-mile length, hundreds of brand-new industrial plants are humming, with hundreds more arriving every year.³⁴

The article "Florida: A Playground Goes to Work" was clearly designed to focus attention on the non-tourist and non-recreational aspects of the state. An accompanying sketched map of Florida had labels indicating cattle and citrus in the interior of the state, but all along the coastline were labels showing industries ranging from garment manufacture to missiles and jet engines. Miami alone was labeled as a "resort capital." This map stands in stark contrast to one accompanying a set of articles in *Look* magazine the following year. In an illustration entitled "Crazy Quilt," (offered as an answer to the section's title question of "What is Florida?"), the map shows cattle, trees, and alligators in the center of the state, but the entire coast is littered with images of baseball, swimming, snorkeling, sunbathing, and other recreational activities. A drawing apparently intended to illustrate Silver Springs ambiguously shows what appears to be a white couple peering down from a rowboat oared by a black person. While the

³³ "Florida: A Place in the Sun," *Time*, 19 December 1955.

³⁴ John A. Conway, "Florida: A Playground Goes to Work," *Newsweek*, 7 January 1957, 59.

Newsweek map showed a contrast between industry along the coast and agriculture in the interior, the *Look* map seemed to show one of fun and activity on the coast and monotony in the interior.³⁵

Cosmopolitan magazine in 1957 devoted the better part of an entire issue—more than ninety pages—to Florida. The main article, “Fabulous Florida,” celebrated the state in terms of pure fun. It was “America’s most famous, most desired playground, the world’s greatest amusement park. . . . Nowhere else in North America will you find such carefree, frost-free good living, such uninhibited gaiety and pampered comfort.” A visitor to Florida would become “the world’s most pampered mammal.” While the magazine looked at the growing sectors of industry and agriculture (the latter being “Florida’s old reliable economic giant”), it could not escape the fact that tourism was “Florida’s substitute for uranium,” a cash cow worth \$1.2 billion per year. The article further noted that Florida has “a great variety of sites—some natural, some contrived to catch the last tourist dollar,” but the natural ones took a back seat to the latter. Florida was a place where “palmetto and palm succumb to bulldozer blade” and one could choose to wander “through man-made jungles or visit a genuine forest primeval.” Even Silver Springs was seen by the writer as a fountain of youth not for its natural beauty, but rather “for here disport the prettiest, most shapely water babies I’ve ever seen, performing underwater ballets and acrobatic stunts on skis.”³⁶

The interior got a fair amount of attention, though, especially in major newspapers seeking a different angle than the standard fare of beach and resort stories, of which

³⁵ “Crazy Quilt,” *Look*, 20 March 1956, 33.

³⁶ Bill Ballantine, “Fabulous Florida,” *Cosmopolitan*, April 1957.

there were plenty in those papers as well. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reminded readers in 1951 that “springs constitute one of Florida’s less widely known but worthwhile tourist attractions,” and listed and described a “top ten” list of them. In 1959, the paper mapped out a travel route to “most of the outstanding cities, historical spots, and attractions” in Florida that traversed the west coast and the interior, and all but ignored the east coast. The *Christian Science Monitor* in 1955 balanced coastal destinations with descriptions of inland fishing, natural interior attractions, and, instead of singling out the usual standard resorts, announced that “nearly every small community will have a stopover worth making.” *The New York Times*, which wrote frequently about interior Florida (at least several times a year, on average), even offered the region as a preferable alternative to the coast for some: “Central Florida, with its thousands of lakes, many picturesque rivers, rolling hills, and outstanding private attractions, offers a different type of spring or summer vacation to those who prefer sight-seeing, boating, and fishing to lolling on a beach.”³⁷

Meanwhile, other media also were both reflecting and impacting the way many people visited Florida. While Pope was cashing in on feminine beauty—he saw the belles as “wholesome,” not exploitive or salacious³⁸—a different kind of sexuality was selling the coast to a younger generation who looked to the future with new aspirations and new ideas of leisure and recreation in which the journey was de-emphasized in favor of the destination. The idea of “spring break,” bolstered by media images, word of

³⁷ Max Hunn, “Springs among Florida’s Best Tourist Lures,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 25 November 1951; Bob Becker, “Here’s Straight Line on a Circle Tour of Florida,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 5 April 1959; “Sunshine State Expects to Welcome More Tourists,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 December 1955; C. E. Wright, “Central Florida,” *The New York Times*, 23 March 1958.

³⁸ Branch, “The Salesman and His Swamp,” 493-95.

mouth, and movies spurred college students from around the country to make epic journeys to the Florida beaches—often virtually non-stop. A 1959 article in the education section of *Time* magazine titled “Beer and the Beach” told of epic journeys to Fort Lauderdale, and “new driving endurance records —26 hours from Ohio State, 27 from Carlisle, Pa.’s Dickinson College.” When one woman was asked why she made the trip, she “answered with a statement that needs no analysis: ‘This is where the boys are.’”³⁹ The following year, a movie was released entitled “Where the Boys Are,” which explored the perils of premarital sex in the context of Spring Break at Fort Lauderdale. The movie itself contained some strange, mixed moral messages about gender dynamics, but the film’s advertising poster featured four young couples, three of whom were in beach attire in various stages of intimacy. From this perspective, the message seems clearer: youth plus beach equals sex. The beach movie genre exploded in the 1960s, based on “an elementary formula of young love, raucous rock and roll, and squadrons of bikini-clad starlets dancing with wild abandon at the drop of a strap.”⁴⁰

By the dawn of the 1960s, the state-wide growth of the previous fifteen years had allowed some interior communities to develop or solidify distinct identities in contrast with the coastal areas. *The New York Times* had announced that Central Florida, which it defined as the region from roughly Orlando to the Lake Wales, was the “golf and lake area” of the state, while boating and fishing had turned Mount Dora into “the gateway to Florida’s most beautiful chain of lakes.”⁴¹ Marion County, the subject of an almost-

³⁹ “Beer and the Beach,” *Time*, 13 April 1959.

⁴⁰ *Where the Boys Are*, DVD, directed by Henry Levin (1960; U.S.A.: Warner Home Video, 2004); Lencek and Bosker, *The Beach*, 262-63.

⁴¹ C. E. Wright, “Regatta Country,” *The New York Times*, 14 February 1960.

derisive 1955 *Times* article entitled "Florida Cowtown" about a beard-growing contest in preparation for a livestock show, was becoming known by the end of the decade quite seriously for its horse industry.⁴² By 1963, the Ocala-Marion County Chamber of Commerce was producing a tourist map to the twenty horse farms (of sixty-two total) that were open to the public, and in 1965, when the total number of horse farms reached eighty, the *Times* called the equine industry "a major" lure for the area, behind only Silver and Rainbow Springs.⁴³

The springs and the growing horse industry were not the only things the Ocala area had going for it at the turn of the decade. Its location along the popular U.S. highway system also continued to help. A 1962 article in *The New York Times* extolled the virtues of U.S. 27 and the many highlights of the drive down this highway, through the heart of Florida. "Because of the scenic beauty along much of the Florida segment of this route, plus the lure of bass-filled lakes and such attractions as Silver Springs and Cypress Gardens," the road was becoming increasingly popular, to the point that officials had decided to expand it from two to four lanes, the *Times* reported. U.S. 301, which entered the interior on the eastern side of the state, would also be expanded to four lanes.⁴⁴ For Ocala, through which both roads (among others) passed, the news could not have been better, it seemed.

The 1950s also ended with a series of events that were harbingers of a more uncertain future for the roadside attraction business generally, but with particular

⁴² ———, "Florida Cowtown," *The New York Times*, 20 February 1955.

⁴³ "An on-the-Hoof Attraction in Central Florida," *The New York Times*, 27 October 1963; C. E. Wright, "Safe Bet in Ocala," *The New York Times*, 24 October 1965.

⁴⁴ "Following U.S. 27 Down the Center of Florida," *The New York Times*, 14 January 1962.

implications for the much of the Florida interior. The Sunshine Skyway Bridge, spanning Tampa Bay, had opened in 1954, and with it a great deal of traffic along the Gulf side of the peninsula was redirected from U.S. 92 to U.S. 19. Within three years, two of three major attractions along U.S. 92 near St. Petersburg—Earl Gresh Wood Parade and the Florida Wild Animal Ranch—had closed and, in 1959, Busch Gardens opened nearby in Tampa, marking the arrival of “the first of Florida’s modern-era theme parks.”⁴⁵ The ramifications were two-fold. First, the evolving road system in Florida would cater to faster moving travel on more direct and, soon, limited-access highways. Off-the-beaten-path destinations, or even those along slower and lazier “blue highways,” would suffer the consequences. Second, the days of a Dick Pope using his marketing clout to bolster a wounded competitor were coming to an end. Within just a few years, Florida would be well on the road to corporatization of some parks, and the subsequent demise of many others. Consequently, images of the Florida interior as represented in the garden, spring, and jungle attractions would fade from the American imagination, to be replaced with that of either the beach or Disney and Orlando.

⁴⁵ Breslauer, *Roadside Paradise*, 29, 40.

CHAPTER 9 PARADISE CONSTRUCTED: 1960-80

As Florida historian Gary Mormino writes in his comprehensive study of post-World War II growth in Florida, “The transformation of leisure into consumption signaled the rise of modern Florida tourism.” In his book, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Florida*, Mormino divides twentieth-century Florida tourism into “B. D. (Before Disney)” and “A. D. (after Disney)” and describes the opening of Walt Disney World in 1971 as “the equivalent of a ten-point earthquake” that wrought “massive dislocation and disintegration in the tourist industry” and “doomed the old world of roadside attractions.” But while the arrival of the “Mouse that Roared” was a signal event, it was as much a culmination of forces as an unleashing of them. “In truth, many smaller establishments . . . had closed” by 1971.¹ New ones that opened in the 1960s and 1970s simply could not compete with Disney’s corporate might and national popularity, but at the same time many of the processes that Disney capitalized on, or even accelerated, already were taking place.

The “transformation of leisure into consumption” of the post-war years continued and accelerated in the 1960s out across America. It manifested itself most clearly in the emergence of shopping centers, self-contained commercial venues that catered to the automobile culture. Historian Lizabeth Cohen posits that the shopping center was “the ‘new city’ that afforded developers “a unique opportunity to re-imagine community life with their private projects at its heart.”² In the case of Disney, a destination for a national

¹ Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 77, 105-6.

² Lizabeth Cohen, “From Town Center to Shopping Center: The Reconfiguration of Community Marketplaces in Postwar America,” *The American Historical Review* 101, (October 1996): 1052-53.

consumer, it was a chance to re-imagine not just community life but the entire local, national, and even international experience through exhibits such as “Main Street U.S.A.,” “Frontierland,” and “It’s a Small World.” To post-modern scholars, the Disney theme parks are a mother lode of material for discussion of artificial environments and people’s inability to distinguish fantasy and reality. Umberto Eco writes that Disney was able to build “a fantasy world more real than reality,” but Disney’s parks were merely the archetypes, the “chief examples” of artificial and reimagined entertainment venues such as Six Gun Territory, an “Old West” attraction that opened down the street from Silver Springs in 1963.³ As if by “magic,” Walt Disney World can “juxtapose a wide range of fake worlds within a single geographic area,” writes sociologist George Ritzer.⁴ During the middle of the century, Florida’s attractions had increasingly added artifice to enhance and exploit the “natural” scenery surrounding them. Silver Springs, for example, added ancillary attractions that increasingly turned the attention of visitors away from the natural aspect of the springs and toward artificial entertainments and diversions. Disney merely took that trend to its (un-) natural conclusion.

For Ritzer, Disney was also the product of an increasing trend toward efficiency and predictability, something that was playing out on roadsides across America. Post-war tourists, as mentioned, increasingly sought the familiar along roadsides as opposed to the exotic. Better automobiles, roads, and the interstate system, followed later by the increasing popularity of air-travel, went hand-in-hand with the new urgency of getting from point A to point B with as few surprises or detours as possible. The

³ Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper Reality: Essays*, 1st ed., (San Diego, Calif., 1986), 40, 45; Stephen M. Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves: Walt Disney World and America*, (Boulder, Colo., 1992), 400-401.

⁴ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, Rev. New Century ed., (Thousand Oaks, Calif., 2004), 201.

homogenization of motels and roadside eateries, which began to take place in Florida in earnest in the 1960s, catered to this desire for security and sameness along high-speed routes where chain hospitality-establishments at highway interchanges supplanted now off-the-beaten-path excursions to places like Silver Springs. Although the phenomenon played out more slowly in Florida, “[t]hroughout the 1950s, large corporations mostly took over the motel and restaurant business, just as they had long dominated gasoline retailing.”⁵ Speed was also the order of the day, with travelers driving faster cars on newer roads, stopping at the rapidly growing number of fast-food franchises.⁶ For a large segment of the population, camping and roadside cooking gave way to creature comforts, some of which were better than travelers had in their own homes. By the end of the 1950s, “many motel guests would receive their first exposure to wall-to-wall carpets, vinyl upholstery, sliding glass doors, television, Scandinavian furniture, and air conditioning.”⁷ While a growing segment of the traveling public would eschew such comforts and seek a return to nature in the 1960s, the experience of most visitors in Florida was rapidly becoming less a trip into the exotic and unknown, and increasingly a sanitized and, perhaps comfortably, familiar one. Corporatization and consolidation also took hold in the amusement park business itself as smaller independent parks yielded to large corporate ones. In 1963, there were 997 amusement parks nationally, of which 458 were owned by individuals or partnerships. By 1982, there were 446 such parks of

⁵ Jakle, *The Tourist*, 195. Note: While corporatization had taken place in Florida’s gas stations, Florida in the 1950s was still “largely devoid of national franchised motels and restaurants.” That would occur in the 1960s. Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 81.

⁶ William Kaszynski, *The American Highway: The History and Culture of Roads in the United States*, (Jefferson, N.C., 2000), 180.

⁷ Belasco, *Americans on the Road*, 164.

which only 83 were so owned.⁸ Between 1960 and 1972, thirty-three of the seventy-six “significant” roadside attractions—defined in part by their location along the major pre-interstate roads and highways—closed in Florida while twenty-two opened.⁹ (Of the twenty-two, six were among those that closed in the same period.) From 1972 to 1980, due in part to the economy and the energy crisis, twenty-five roadside attractions closed in Florida, while not a single one opened. Meanwhile, the majority of the two dozen major theme parks in operation nationwide as of 1990 were built and opened in this period, often at costs of more than \$40 million and all located with interstate access as a major consideration. All through this new era of major corporate theme parks, Walt Disney World and its Orlando neighbors continued to grow and redefine the tourist and amusement experience in the Florida interior.¹⁰

By the early 1980s, tourism had become an all-but-forgotten dream for many interior communities. There were, in most American traveler’s minds, two imagined Floridas. As always, there were the coasts, with their beaches and resorts. But whereas in the first half of the twentieth century the “Vanity Fair” of the beachside resorts had been the bastions of the privileged, the post-war economic boom brought the “good life” of coastal Florida within reach to a wide swath of Americans who, having endured the

⁸ Judith A. Adams, *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills*, (Boston, 1991), 165-67.

⁹ Ken Breslauer, *Roadside Paradise: The Golden Age of Florida’s Tourist Attractions, 1929-1972*, (St. Petersburg, Fla., 2000), 83-85. Note: Breslauer’s criteria for “significant” attractions also included, generally, that they intended as tourist attractions (eliminating historical and other sites that became attractions), that they charged admission (Silver Springs being an exception prior to the 1970s), that they were privately owned and operated for profit, that they utilized an aspect of Florida’s flora and fauna as a central theme, and that they actively marketed themselves through signage, mailings, souvenirs and other methods. Attractions such as “Wild West” shows and chimpanzee exhibits are also included, indicating that he made exceptions when an attraction achieved a certain level of prominence.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 83-85, definitions explained 9-10 ; Adams, *The American Amusement Park Industry*, 108-9.

privations of the Depression and World War II, were now eager to enjoy their newfound opportunities. By the 1980s, coastal Florida was no longer juxtaposed with the interior, but rather against a single part of the interior, a part that reflected virtually nothing of the “natural” charms the roadside attractions had sought to cash in on. In the American imagination, the Florida interior now meant, simply, Orlando. The rest of the interior had become a third Florida, no longer in most Americans’ minds: the all-but-forgotten Florida.

While a growing segment sought out the state’s less developed areas for recreation and to enjoy nature without the ballyhoo, to many visitors, the non-Orlando interior eventually evaporated into the American subconscious as a place of agricultural blandness. With the advent of high-speed travel and homogenized and familiar amenities in the form of national franchises, many of the distinct charms and features of the interior landscape and its communities were moved largely out of sight to visitors while the idea of Disney and subsequent attractions in Orlando overshadowed everything else. By the same token, the motivations of visitors was quickly changing—those who did not actively seek the interior wanted to get to their destination, be it Orlando or the beach, with as little inconvenience and as few “surprises” as possible. No longer would Florida be a place for exploration or discovery as it had been for centuries.

Florida officials in the early post-war years had tried to balance their promotion of Florida between industry, agriculture, and tourism, but it was quickly evident what would drive the growth and where it would occur. “Despite the influx of new businesses, neither smokestack nor defense industries proved the greatest factors in Florida’s

postwar growth,” writes Florida historian Evan P. Bennett. “Instead, tourism, once again created the greatest economic opportunities. . . . In the 1950s and 1960s, most of Florida's growth clustered in the state's southern and coastal counties.”¹¹ People passed through northern and interior Florida, but they did not stay. Eventually, with the rise of air travel and interstate travel, they would zip around or leapfrog altogether many venerated attractions that traditionally had greeted travelers. The interior by and large would eventually fade into a dull background for Florida's glitzy new hotels, resorts, and developments.

Florida was hardly alone in experiencing this phenomenon. Throughout the 1960s, attractions and entire communities around the country declined and even disappeared while others emerged and grew as the interstate highway system rerouted travelers away from older highways and byways. Perhaps the starkest example is that of Route 66, which turned into a strip of ghost towns after the interstates were built, leading to the road being decommissioned altogether in 1985. (The plight of those rural towns and destinations bypassed and left to wither was immortalized in the 2006 Pixar animated movie *Cars*.¹²) Now, faster than ever before, ground travelers could whisk through the continental interior and be burdened by only the occasional stop for food, gasoline, and, if they desired, overnight lodging. The roadside attraction had less opportunity to attract.

To the average and undiscerning highway traveler, the interior of Florida may appear no more than a patchwork of pine forests, cattle pastures, and farms—hardly anything exotic for the American traveler no matter what his or her home. The pine

¹¹ Evan P. Bennett, “Highways to Heaven or Roads to Ruin? The Interstate Highway System and the Fate of Starke, Florida,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 78, (Spring 2000): 454.

¹² *Cars*, DVD, directed by John Lasseter (2006; U.S.A.: Walt Disney Video, 2006).

forests especially, once magically desolate barrens with their tall canopies and low palmetto understories, no longer inspired intrigue. Throughout great swaths of the peninsula, timber farmers had replaced majestic long leaf pines with faster-growing but far less picturesque slash pines, primarily for the pulp industry, while state-sponsored fire suppression since the late 1920s had held back one of Florida's most critical ecological components—fire itself—and allowed dense hardwood thickets to crowd out the once park-like barrens. Mixed in with this were great cleared fields of sod and hay farms, and cattle and (increasingly in Marion County) horse pastures. From the window of a fast-moving automobile heading to the glorious beaches portrayed in color magazines, the interior of Florida may have seemed drab at best. As author John Rothchild describes a 1950s childhood car trip to Florida with his family, parts of “the North Florida landscape seemed anemic and somehow depressing, like the pencil sketches on the covers of ragtime piano sheet music.”¹³ And that was *before* the interstates.

The diversions of the Florida interior eventually became, to many, simply potential and unwanted delays on their way to their ultimate destinations that, thanks in no small part to media promotion, became equated with Florida's coastal beaches. Meanwhile, the increasing number of roadside attractions crowding the rural landscape became a turnoff or afterthought to many travelers, while the simultaneous corporatization of the American roadside around interstate cloverleaves allowed for travelers and migrants to maintain the familiar and the comfortable en route to their destinations. As travel historian John Jakle explains, “Formerly, the old roads serve to tie travelers and

¹³ Rothchild, *Up for Grabs*, 3.

localities . . . The high-speed road was not only an interconnection, but it was a division.” Moreover, the terrain surrounding highway interchanges was increasingly homogenized and commercialized. “The small businessman, who had dominated roadside commerce before World War II, now competed with large corporations that not only controlled gasoline retailing, but controlled the new roadside motels and restaurants.” This would, in time, create “sameness,” a “standardized world thousands of miles long.”¹⁴ On the interstates, travelers to the shores of Florida could get there faster and more conveniently, bypassing interior communities, often without even knowing they were there.

However, this was not the only road construction taking place. The exact route of Interstate 75, which would pass through the region on its way from Lake City to Tampa, was being hammered out, as was that of the Florida Turnpike, the toll road planned to run from South Florida to at least Orlando. Gov. C. Farris Bryant, an Ocala native himself, was looking at alternative routes for the new highway system to not only link together, but also to tie in better with existing road systems and destinations in the northern interior. Among Bryant’s papers is an unsigned and undated proposal to reroute the planned Interstate 75 four miles east of Ocala. The proposal noted how “so obviously beneficial” an eastern route would be for Silver Springs and its surrounding businesses. The report, which bears extended quotation for its prescience about the major implications of moving a highway route just a few miles, concluded that if the proposed relocation were approved,

The convenience in service to Silver Springs would unquestionably substantially increase the amount of traffic that would avail themselves to

¹⁴ Jakle, *The Tourist*, 190-92.

this attraction as compared to a trip in excess of seven miles including routing through the central business district of Ocala to reach the springs . . . Many [travelers] using Interstate 75 [who] would be disposed to make the one mile side trip to visit the spring would pass up the opportunity when faced with the additional travel length and congestion that would be occasioned on a trip through the city.

The move would not only benefit Silver Springs, the report went, on, but Ocala as well.

From the present westerly approach, there is a two-mile trip through a highly congested slum area. From the interchange on the east side of Ocala at the proposed relocation, there is a four mile trip along newly improved Silver Springs Boulevard which passes through an attractive residential area and a major motel area. From the point of view of the interstate motorist utilizing Interstate 75, the motel row on the east side of Ocala will be one of the principal missions such traffic would have in leaving the Interstate for a destination in the city.¹⁵

The proposal also would have moved Interstate 75 east of Gainesville (35 miles north of Ocala), intersecting U.S. 301 and U.S. 441 between Gainesville and Ocala, as well potentially tying in to several state highways running east from Gainesville. John E. Evans, Bryant's press secretary, recalled that the plan had been developed in conjunction with transportation experts and some local interests to protect Silver Springs and the Ocala area from a loss of tourist traffic after it had become clear that the new interstate system would adversely affect such tourist stalwarts as Cypress Gardens and Bok Tower to the south. "You could see they were going to get aced out and there was a lot of concern that that not happen to Silver Springs," Evans said.¹⁶

Ocala business owners, however, fought the proposal, believing the eastern route would keep traffic out of Ocala altogether. An Ocala-Marion County Chamber of

¹⁵ Study on Relocation of Interstate 75, n.d., Papers of Gov. C. Farris Bryant, Subseries 4c, Box 16, University of Florida Libraries (Gainesville, Fla.).

¹⁶ Interview with John E. Evans by Tom Berson via telephone, 31 January 2011.

Commerce resolution against the proposal claimed it would not only “not be in the interest of the traveling public, “ but that it would also hurt local businesses. Bryant was surprised at the opposition and stung when the *Ocala Star-Banner* stated that the proposal had “become embarrassing to the governor and to some of his most loyal friends and supporters in Ocala.” Within a week of the initial rumblings of discontent, Bryant abandoned the plan.¹⁷

No sooner had that plan been scrapped than several members of the Ocala-Silver Springs Motel Association began a push to have the interstate run through the city limits instead of several miles to the west, with the association’s president saying “Our entire future depends on the I-75 location.” (Oddly, however, the chamber of commerce opposed the association’s proposal despite an endorsement by the chamber’s own tourism committee.) A representative of the Silver Springs Businessmen’s Association warned that the western route would harm traffic to Silver Springs, which “would leave quite a hollow spot in our economy.”¹⁸ Running the highway through the city would have had its own negative consequences, and it certainly would be cheaper to build in the less financially and politically powerful western areas of the city. Still, if there were concerns about cost, fears of the highway splitting established communities on the east side, or a desire to spur development west of the city, they were not articulated in news accounts of the debate. Ultimately, the chamber endorsed the western route.

¹⁷ "Concern Expressed over Plan by Bryant to Shift Road Route," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 18 July 1961; "Chamber Directors in Strong Opposition to Shifting I-75," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 21 July 1961; "Bryant's Plan to Shift Route Puzzles Ocalans," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 24 July 1961; "Pike Routing Controversy," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 24 July 1961; "Governor Drops Plan for Road to Go on East," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 25 July 1961.

¹⁸ "Council Committee to Contact Bryant on Rerouting of Interstate 75," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 7 February 1962; "Highway Unit Rejects Plea to Endorse New Alignment for I-75," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 6 February 1962; "Directors of Chamber Voice Strong Support to Present Route of I-75 " *Ocala Star-Banner*, 16 February 1962; "Drive Continues on I-75 Routing," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 12 February 1962.

That endorsement was a significant one in that it indicated a decided shift in the priorities of the chamber from a few decades earlier, when the area had pinned most of its tourism hopes on Silver Springs. As the Interstate tug-of-war indicated, a disconnect was emerging between Ocala and Silver Springs in which local boosters no longer conflated the two. Marion County had grown from 38,000 to more than 50,000 residents between 1950 and 1960, the livestock and agriculture businesses there were flourishing, and “the income of Marion County climbed to an unprecedented height.” The invention of frozen concentrated orange juice had given a shot in the arm to Ocala’s citrus groves and canned-food giant Libby’s bought a large packing plant in Ocala, its first in Florida, and began operations there. Swift and Company expanded its meat business in the county, spurring traffic at Ocala’s stockyards. Mechanization and migrant labor meant more efficient production, but also the beginning of the end for many family and subsistence farms.¹⁹

Former *Ocala Star-Banner* editor David Cook recalled that the period also was the very beginning of the demise of the tourism and hospitality industry’s dominance of the chamber, especially after development just to the south and west of downtown Ocala began to redirect commercial development (and ultimately the paths of the U.S. highways through town) to that area in the early and mid-1950s. Cook left the paper in 1967 and returned in 1979 by which time, he said, the hospitality industry “was no longer a driving force” in chamber or local politics.²⁰

¹⁹ Ott and Chazal, *Ocala Country*, 208-20.

²⁰ Interview with David Cook by Tom Berson in Ocala, Florida, 20 January 2011

When the *Ocala Star-Banner* announced the finalized route in May 1962, a compromise of sorts had been reached with the Motel Association by adding an interchange on State Road 40, about two miles due west of downtown Ocala. The previous plan's interchanges both had been slightly farther from the city center, along S.R. 27 to the north and S.R. 200 to the south of the city. Nevertheless, the western route still boded poorly for businesses on the east side of town. Whereas a traveler in the 1950s may have stopped along the slower moving, lazy old U.S. highways at a "Mom and Pop" diner, or a locally owned motor court, and been diverted by a friendly resident to travel a few miles to the east for a stop at the springs—what were a few extra hours, after all?—the automobile traveler of the late 1960s and beyond would have a different experience.

Outside the Bryant administration, most people lacked any knowledge about the potential effects of a limited-access highway, and many were convinced that the new highways not only would not hurt their communities, but would ultimately help them. There was no frame of reference on how such highways would redirect the culture and economics of travel. "Few residents seemed to comprehend the effect these roads would have on tourism and development both in Florida and nationwide," writes historian Evan Bennett. By 1965, however, the effects already were evident. *Florida Trend Magazine* reported that year that the new highway system was 'divert[ing] traffic away from former arteries of travel, drain[ing] the life's blood from established firms which are situated on the old highways, and leav[ing] them to die.'²¹ David Cook, an assistant editor at the *Ocala Star-Banner* from 1953 to 1967, recalled that "there was a

²¹ Bennett, "Highways to Heaven or Roads to Ruin?," 454, 463. 466.

total lack of awareness” of what the impact would be or that the opening of competing chain restaurants and hotels around the interchanges near Ocala would occur “overnight.”²²

When the Interstate opened in Ocala in 1965, it skirted the west sides of both Ocala and Gainesville, traversing mostly unpopulated countryside from Lake City south and whisking travelers through a mostly repetitive and monotonous blur of farmlands and pine forests. “Where the previous system of national roads, like US Highway 301, offered travelers a scenic route, the new interstates almost magically passed people through the surrounding countryside. For Florida, this change was especially pronounced,” Bennett writes. In 1966, the *Fodor Shell Travel Guide* described how highway travelers would experience the ride through Marion County: “Ocala is in the middle of what used to be called rural Florida, but now it’s pastoral.”²³ It was a serene landscape of rolling hills, perhaps, but visually monotonous and hardly exciting and anything but tropically exotic.

Many local interests at the time continued to hold out hope that travelers would either opt for the familiar, older highways to avail themselves of the interior’s scenery and travel amenities, or at least grow weary of the interstate highways’ monotony during return or repeat trips. Instead, during the 1960s, speed and power became the rule of the road along with “efficiency and homogeneity” as faster cars and higher speed limits—uninterrupted on a limited-access road—dovetailed perfectly with the fast food culture flourishing at interstate interchanges. “Increasingly, families ignore[d] the

²² Interview with David Cook by Tom Berson in Ocala, Florida, 20 January 2011.

²³ Eugene Fodor, *Southeast: Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi*, (Litchfield, Conn., 1966), 141.

treasured roads of the 1930s and 1940s, speeding past fading and once-revered tourist attractions.”²⁴ By 1965, although the interstate was still far from complete along several long stretches in Florida, five hotels already had been built at Ocala interchanges. While corporate chains sometimes staked out locations near Silver Springs, they also hedged their bets along the interstate. Holiday Inn, for example, in 1961 purchased the Shalimar Motor Court across from the entrance to Silver Springs. By June of 1967, however, the company had built a new hotel at the interchange of S.R. 40 and I-75.²⁵

Indeed, by the fall of that year, the impact of Interstate 75 on communities throughout the Florida interior was evident. The *St. Petersburg Times* ran a feature in its Sunday magazine looking at how the creation of “a multi-million dollar empire of plush motels, big modern service stations, and attractive restaurants” at interstate interchanges had impacted the traditional interior arteries. What it found was tourist traffic on four major interior roads—U.S. 19, 27, 441, and 41—had dropped 24, 34, 38, and 77% respectively between 1963 and 1966, with additional decreases expected. The impact on 301 and other roads was believed to be similar. Communities from Jasper, near the Georgia border, all the way to Homosassa Springs were visibly suffering. Gas stations and motels had closed. Roadside attractions such as Fanning Springs were now all but abandoned. “In Florida, as is the case nationally, the battle for the automobile traveler is being won by the interstates,” the article stated. The Florida Attractions Association, meanwhile, with no attractions along the interstate, represented the new highway only faintly on the map it published in its pamphlet “Florida Attractions,

²⁴ Bennett, “Highways to Heaven or Roads to Ruin?,” 462-63; Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams*, 250; Kaszynski, *The American Highway*, 180.

²⁵ Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*, 39; Harriett Daniels, “Holiday Inn West Celebrates 30th with a New Look,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 7 October 1997.

Official Guide,” while the other highways were shown in bold colors. Also, the map did not include the portion of Interstate 75 from its junction with the Florida Turnpike to Tampa, creating the impression that the turnpike ended at the small and remote community of Wildwood. To the neophyte Florida traveler, it would appear from the map that the best route to southern and coastal destinations was still on the old U.S. highways, through the heart of Ocala.²⁶

Among the home-grown, locally owned landmarks edged out in the interstate landscape were roadside attractions. The new road system unfurling across the state paved the way for the theme-park era. When Interstate 75, Interstate 4, and Florida’s Turnpike were under construction, they were shaping plans for a major new theme park. In 1959, Walt Disney commissioned Economic Research Associates (ERA) to study possible locations for an “eastern Disneyland” in Florida, and Ocala was “an early favorite.” ERA made several studies over the next five years that reflect how the new highways moved Florida’s “epicenter” to the south. In 1962, it concluded, “the Ocala area was the optimum geographic location for such a project because of the large number of out-of-state visitors . . . [who] passed through or near the city annually.” However, by 1964, it was clear that Orlando, at the intersection of Interstate 4 and the Florida Turnpike, would “offer greater potentials.”²⁷ Had the routes been different, or had the highways not been built for another few years, Disney might have located closer to or even in Marion County. One can only imagine the impact on the region.

²⁶ Stan Witwer, “Starvation Junction,” *The Floridian*, 17 September 1967, 4-7.

²⁷ Economics Research Associates, “Preliminary Investigation of Available Acreage for Project Winter” (16 January 1964), cited in Chad D. Emerson, “Merging Public and Private Governance: How Disney’s Reedy Creek Improvement District “Re-Imagined” the Traditional Division of Local Regulatory Powers,” *Florida State University Law Review* 36, (Winter 2009): 184; Richard E. Foglesong, *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando*, (New Haven, Conn., 2001), 14-15.

Even before Disney made his monumental decision, the future of local, family ownership of Florida's major attractions had come into question. After Busch Gardens opened in Tampa in 1959, ABC-Paramount Corporation purchased Weeki Wachee Springs in Spring Hill. ABC-Paramount, which was involved in the Disneyland project in California, apparently was envisioning its own opportunities in Florida.²⁸ After initial rumblings of a deal in late spring, Ray and Davidson announced in October 1962 the sale of their Silver Springs lease to ABC-Paramount for a reported \$7.5 million. With the sale, they turned over the springhead lease from Carmichael, which they had renewed in 1956 until 2073, thousands of acres they owned around the area and along the Silver River, and all the buildings and operations around the springhead. By this time, according to ABC-Paramount, visitation had reached about 1.75 million people per year, which, if true, would represent a doubling from 1950.²⁹

The *Ocala Star-Banner*, noting the numerous private donations of land and resources by Davidson and the Rays to help bolster the community around and access to Silver Springs, celebrated them in an editorial the following day. Their contributions, the newspaper wrote, "to the economy of Central Florida, because they have developed a family scenic attraction without compare in all Florida, are so great that it is impossible to touch on them in this short comment."³⁰ While William "Buck" Ray, Jr. would stay on to provide continuity, the days of Silver Springs as community-based and locally owned family business were over.

²⁸ Vickers and Dionne, *Weeki Wachee, City of Mermaids*, 132-33.

²⁹ Jim Moorehead, "Sale of Silver Springs Is Confirmed," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 29 October 1962.

³⁰ "A.B.C.-Paramount Buys Resort Area in Florida," *The New York Times*, 5 November 1962; Moorehead, "Sale of Silver Springs Is Confirmed."; "They Developed the Springs," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 30 October 1962.

Indeed, Cook recalled, ABC-Paramount, which operated the attraction through a subsidiary, Silver Springs Inc., very quickly alienated a large segment of the local by quickly discarding many employees with long-standing ties to both Ocala and Silver Springs. The company “immediately set out, in a high-handed manner, to take complete control of all elements,” he later wrote, and the sense of a prized community resource evaporated almost overnight. In addition to cancelling as many contracts as it could from the outset, the company also soon bought out some of the ancillary attractions at the site, including Tommy Bartlett’s Deer Ranch (then renamed the International Deer Ranch, since Bartlett was a well-known figure on competitor network CBS) and Ross Allen’s Reptile Institute.³¹ The Bartlett buyout was particularly upsetting to locals because it came only after Bartlett filed suit claiming the company was forcing him out.³² Both Cook and Leon Cheatom, who began working at Silver Springs as a teenager in 1951 and remained there for more than fifty-five years, recalled that the new operators also later antagonized local residents by charging them, either for parking or, eventually, admission to the springhead area, although it is unclear when either occurred and it is likely that neither happened until the early 1970s.³³

³¹ David Cook, “Looking Back: Ross Allen Sells Reptile Institute to Silver Springs Attraction,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 28 January 2007; “Silver Springs Buys Ross Allen Reptile Institute,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 2 July 1965.

³² “Deer Ranch Suit,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 25 July 1963; “Silver Springs Purchases Tommy Bartlett’s Deer Ranch,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 9 April 1965.

³³ Interview with David Cook by Tom Berson in Ocala, Florida, 20 January 2011; Interview with Leon Cheatom by Tom Berson in Ocala, Florida, 23 January 2011. Note: Newspaper articles from the time are unclear about parking and admission fees, although it seems relatively clear that the park did not start charging a blanket admission fee until at least the late 1960s and probably later. Automobile Association of America guidebooks reflect no parking charge until the 1970s, but also do not reflect any changes in ride prices during that time, suggesting that they were not updated properly.

Reflecting fondly that before ABC-Paramount arrived, Cheatom said the staff at Silver Springs was “like a family” where “everyone looked out for each other,” (Ray and Davidson had fostered that ideal by encouraging relatives of attraction employees to apply for jobs, he said) but the culture started to change from one in which the operation was aimed at constantly promoting and improving the attraction to one more concerned with the bottom line and instilling a uniform, corporate environment. For example, he said, speaking coaches were brought in to help fine-tune the tour narratives the captains had spent decades crafting and honing—a captain’s individual rapport with passengers, creativity, and tale-telling style all were crucial components to filling each boat’s all-important tip jar. “People wanted folklore, and we gave it to them,” he said. Under Ray and Davidson, they had been given very loose, basic parameters for how they spun their yarns. Silver Springs Inc. strictly limited them, he recalled, even changing the names of the individual springs, hence forcing captains to offer awkward explanations to returning customers and first-time patron companions. Moreover, he lamented, Silver Springs, Inc. never marketed Silver Springs as energetically, creatively, or efficiently as the Rays and Davidson had done.³⁴

The opening of Walt Disney World as a competitor was still nearly a decade away, but Silver Springs got two important new neighbors in the next few years, both well-funded but neither with roots in the community. First, R. B. Coburn and Russell Pearson, who had developed Ghost Town in the Sky in North Carolina (Pearson also had been the driving force in creating Silver Dollar City, near Branson, Missouri) in 1962 announced their plans to open a 200+ acre, \$1 million attraction just a few miles west of

³⁴ Interview with Leon Cheatom by Tom Berson in Ocala, Florida, 23 January 2011.

Silver Springs. Driven by the popularity of Old West themed television programming in the 1960s, such ventures proliferated and thrived even in such unlikely venues as Florida. The sprawling attraction that came to be known as Six Gun Territory opened in 1963 and would come to feature more than forty buildings and myriad daily shows and reenactments, as well as a litany of TV stars making celebrity appearances. By the end of the decade, when it was sold to an Atlanta company, Beaver Creek Industries, a gondola sky-ride was added, along with a movie theatre and “Indian village.” The attraction had “beg[u]n to resemble an amusement park.”³⁵

Down U.S. 41, at Rainbow Springs in Dunnellon, Walter Beinecke, Jr., the heir to the Sperry and Hutchison Green Stamp fortune and best known for his “frankly elitist” historic preservation and development efforts on Nantucket, Massachusetts, purchased the controlling interest at the springhead in 1967. Under Beinecke, Rainbow Springs expanded greatly, even as it suffered from greatly diminished traffic on U.S. 41. Among its additions were giant fountains at the entrance and the “Forest Flite” ride, in which visitors rode in leaf-shaped cars suspended from a cable (again, a budding staple among amusement parks). With plans to add Seminole chief Osceola’s remains, recently disinterred from Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, Beinecke also began efforts to build a horse farm, an amphitheater, and a hotel. In 1970, the hospitality giant Holiday Inn Corporation purchased a 50% interest from Beinecke. However, the attraction, which unlike most in Florida was closed not only one but two days a week, and was

³⁵ Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*, 46-55; Breslauer, *Roadside Paradise*, 74. Note: Figures on the size of the park range from 200-250 acres in various accounts.

twenty minutes at best from Interstate 75, would soon be one of the first direct victims of the opening of Walt Disney World, closing its doors in March 1974.³⁶

According to Tim Hollis, while the late 1960s and 1970s took their toll on much of the Florida attraction industry, "Silver Springs remained hale and hearty [and] people kept coming."³⁷ Although ABC did not release visitation figures for either of its new parks, it is clear that the late 1960s and 1970s offered an array of new challenges to the new owners. Concerns about the impact of Interstate 75 on Weeki Wachee had prompted officials there to seek and obtain a charter from the state incorporating the park in 1966, amid fears that the new highway would "siphon motorists off [U.S.] 19 and blind them to the charms of Weeki Wachee."³⁸ Marion County's state representative, William O'Neill, proposed similar legislation for Silver Springs in 1965, but the county's state senator, T. K. Edwards, refused to support it because there had been no evidence of community support and it appeared designed solely to help Silver Springs.³⁹

In addition to the impact of Interstate 75, other factors were significantly affecting the development of Florida. The maturation of the space program along the Atlantic coast, the increasing popularity of air travel, the demise of the proposed Cross Florida Barge Canal, and the growth of the state park system all would take their tolls on Silver Springs and the future of the interior, even before the arrival of Disney.

³⁶ Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*; Douglas Martin, "Walter Beinecke Jr., 86, a Savior of Old Nantucket, Dies," *The New York Times*, 25 May 2004.

³⁷ Hollis, *Glass Bottom Boats & Mermaid Tails*, 33.

³⁸ Vickers and Dionne, *Weeki Wachee, City of Mermaids*, 169.

³⁹ "Edwards Frowns on Silver Springs Bill," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 7 May 1965.

The growth of the “Space Coast,” as the area around Cape Canaveral came to be known, marked one of the greatest population booms in American history. The population of Brevard County nearly quadrupled in the 1950s, from less than 24,000 to more than 111,000, and then doubled again in the 1960s, to 230,000. In addition to the population spike, the space program also helped steer tourists back to the east coast on their way to south Florida destinations. While the population growth in Brevard slowed in the 1970s to a mere 19%—still above the national average—the space center was now drawing visitors in droves. As late as 1963, wives of senior officials could not even tour the site, but soon officials relented to the demand for visitation. On the first Sunday tour of in 1965, nearly 2,000 people passed through the gates. Plans were made for a permanent visitor center and tourism skyrocketed, with an estimated attendance in the millions by 1967.⁴⁰ A tourist could stand atop the 220-foot Citrus Tower in Clermont and look at orange groves, or “they could witness the space age unfold” along the coast. The tower had opened to “much fanfare” in 1956, Breslauer writes, with its restaurant, lounge, multiple observation levels, and other amenities. As the 1960s progressed, though, it “paled in comparison to the sight of a spacecraft propelled into orbit by a thundering booster rocket.”⁴¹ The space industry was also, increasingly, a tourism draw. (The popular TV show *I Dream of Jeannie* was supposedly set in Titusville, but a Florida viewer likely would have been surprised to see mountains in the background.)

Air travel, meanwhile, allowed tourists to jump over the interior altogether on their way to the beach or, increasingly in the 1970s, to Orlando (which at the time was

⁴⁰ William Barnaby Faherty, *Florida's Space Coast: The Impact of NASA on the Sunshine State*, (Gainesville, Fla., 2002), 51-52, 115-16, 142.

⁴¹ Breslauer, *Roadside Paradise*, 16.

building a new international airport to replace its regional facility). As early as the late 1950s, five airlines provided domestic service in and out of Florida, with one offering 200 flights per day to and from Miami during the winter season. Air travel was not cheap then, and air fares did not decrease greatly in relative price during the 1960s as price controls were in effect under the Civil Aeronautics Board. To compensate for the higher prices, airlines and tour companies offered package deals with week-long hotel stays thrown in or other perks such as free steak and champagne on flights. In 1962, 1.8 million people travelled to Florida by air. By 1967, that figure had eclipsed 3.2 million. That figure doubled again by 1973 and topped 8.5 million by 1977. Whereas air travelers had represented 12% of Florida visitors in 1962, in 1977 they accounted for almost 30% of all visitors. Nine of the top ten destinations for those travelers were coastal counties. The exception was the Orlando area, which ranked second overall.⁴²

The Cross-Florida Barge Canal had given residents of the interior hope that the waterways of the state would once again guide growth as they did in the days of riverboats and nature tourism. Now, however, people would dictate where that water went, in the form of a long-sought canal connecting the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico. Several *New York Times* articles in 1959 gently reminded readers traveling to and within Florida by boat of the once well-traveled rivers of Florida's interior. The articles offered boaters an alternative to the Intracoastal Waterway, but in the case of the Ocklawaha, served mostly to underscore how remote and forgotten that river had become. This "paradise wilderness" was "off the beaten track" and was not even

⁴² *Florida 1977 Tourist Study*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1977); *An Executive Summary of the Florida Tourist Study*, (Tallahassee, 1974); Florida Division of Tourism, *Florida Tourist Study*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1967); Florida Division of Tourism, *Florida's Tourist Study*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1962).

charted by the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, precursor to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.⁴³

This would all change dramatically, according to project boosters when the Cross-Florida Barge Canal project, begun and aborted in the 1930s, was resurrected in the early 1960s and restarted in 1964. State agencies tied to the program announced that it would be a boon to recreation as “several hundred miles of waterfront property will be created by the Canal—thousands of acres of beautiful crystal clear lakes will surge into being.” *The New York Times* weighed in with similar sentiments. In an article boldly titled, “Ocala’s Future Linked to a Canal,” the paper reported that “although highly favored” by tourists already, the canal would elevate the north Florida interior to “one of the greatest outdoor recreation areas in the state.” The *Washington Post* noted in 1969 the impact the canal could have for the northern interior, which it described as having a “sense of isolation relieved occasionally.” Several months later, however, the *Post*, which like other newspapers had previously bought into the propaganda of canal boosters, acknowledged concerns of Florida environmentalists that the project’s result was a “doomed” Ocklawaha River. “It would kill a free-flowing river [and] an outstanding natural area abounding in rare and beautiful wildlife will be destroyed.”⁴⁴

Marjorie Harris Carr emerged as the leading voice of the movement to stop the project, which used both scientific argument as well as Romantic sentiments of Florida’s

⁴³ Clarence E. Lovejoy, “Waterways in East Florida Offer Adventures in Cruising,” *The New York Times*, 11 October 1959; Clarence E. Lovejoy, “Cruising through Florida Jungle Forests Awaits Pleasure Boatmen,” *The New York Times*, 18 October 1959.

⁴⁴ Noll and Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams*; C. E. Wright, “Ocala’s Future Linked to a Canal,” *The New York Times*, 18 December 1966; Morris David Rosenberg, “Cross-Florida Barge Canal Feature Built-in Tourist Angle,” *The Washington Post*, 7 April 1968; Irston R. Barnes, “Drowning Threatens a Wild River,” *The Washington Post*, 6 October 1968.

hauntingly beautiful interior in an appeal to the spirit of the recently passed 1964 Wilderness Protection Act. Carr's 1965 article in *Florida Naturalist*, called by historians Steven Noll and David Tegeder "a paean to the virtues of wilderness," began a series of writings in which she extolled the value of preserving natural areas for their intrinsic value and celebrating the wild and undeveloped state of the Ocklawaha River. Attorney Victor Yannacone, of the newly formed Environmental Defense Fund in New York, sued the Army Corps of Engineers in 1969 demanding a stoppage to the project. In his suit, he "drew from two centuries of naturalist imagery" and wrote in "terms more reminiscent of Sidney Lanier than Clarence Darrow."⁴⁵

In doing so, Carr and other members of the cresting environmental wave were atavistically engaging in a value-laden appreciation of the "wild" landscape as inherent goods that also serve as symbolic touchstones for an endangered or lost sense of national heritage, unity, and identity. In the nineteenth century, part of that experience had been an exploration of the Florida interior where nature itself, and not mankind's stone and steel constructions, presented the gauntlets to reaching a redemptive spring and garden. By the early twentieth century, that journey had been all but forgotten, replaced by the class-conscious "Vanity Fair" experience of Pullman cars and coastal resorts. It returned in the late 1920s and 1930s as Americans, their confidence in the American dream shattered by the Depression, tried to recapture their forefathers' spirit of exploration and conquest. In the post-war years of the 1940s and 1950s, that experience began to dissolve into one of consumptive "discovery," in which national pride was reaffirmed through increasingly artificial and commercial transactions. At the

⁴⁵ Noll and Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams*, 226-27.

same time, these transactions increasingly required that the expectations of the traveler be confirmed and the “social fiction” of the tourist experience be verified.⁴⁶

In 1969, the Florida Defenders of the Environment (FDE) was formed to help weigh in with scientific, ecological arguments against the canal. Riding the crest of the new wave of environmental concern (the first Earth Day was held in 1970, and *Time* magazine declared the environment 1970’s “issue of the year”), FDE was ultimately able to derail the project, but the construction of Rodman Dam and the flooding of the river behind it by this time had already been completed in 1968. The new lake inundated more than twenty artesian springs and “pristine hardwood forest” and effectively isolated the upper Ocklawaha River from its natural outlet, preventing not only boat traffic, but also manatee and migratory fish such as mullet, striped bass, and blue channel catfish, from reaching Silver Springs and other upriver sites. A major sector of untrammelled interior Florida was gone. Just as the interior of the great West lost marveled canyons to dam reservoirs built by the Bureau of Reclamation, Florida was at risk of losing more prose-inspiring freshwater springs to a project built by the Army Corps of Engineers. Silver Springs Inc., for its part, voiced concern about the environmental impact of the project only at the very end of the decade in a move that proponents of the canal called both disingenuous and a case of sour grapes. Negotiators from Silver Springs Inc. had sought concessions from the Army Corps of Engineers to ban boat traffic on the Silver River and to maintain lower water levels in Eureka Lake to protect the clarity of Silver

⁴⁶ This term appears in Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Berkeley, Calif., 1999). While this dissertation does not purport to be a post-modernist or semiotic analysis, it does accept certain aspects of those interpretations pertaining to signification and meaning in the tourist experience. Although most of the leading books on the subject relate to travel abroad, helpful insights and overview of various themes can be found in the text and notes of *The Tourist* and also in Arthur Asa Berger, *Deconstructing Travel: Cultural Perspectives on Tourism*, (Walnut Creek, Calif., 2004).

Springs in 1969. Only when they lost on the former and settled for a compromise on the latter in 1970 did they begin to publicly question the impact of the project on the Floridan Aquifer, the all-important aqua underbelly of the interior. Canal Authority chairman L. C. Ringhaver, noting that Silver Springs Inc. had been forced to surrender 520 acres of land near the confluence of the Silver and Ocklawaha Rivers for the project, called the newly voiced concerns “obviously financially motivated.”⁴⁷

When it became clear the project had stalled, promoters of the canal soon retrenched behind the notion of keeping the new 900-acre lake as an emerging ecosystem worth protecting in its own right, although, in reality, the primary benefit of the newly formed lake was as a bass-fishing destination. Immediately following the stoppage of the project by President Richard Nixon in 1971, opponents of the canal began a campaign to begin lowering the level of Rodman Reservoir with the proximate goal of saving hundreds of acres of trees that had been submerged and the ultimate goal of killing the project once and for all. The new reservoir quickly found favor among bass fisherman who rallied along with the Cross Florida Canal Counties Association (of six counties that might benefit from the canal, including Marion) and other canal proponents to leave the reservoir intact. The *Ocala Star-Banner* sided with the reservoir’s defenders, writing that “thousands of people each year are taking advantage of the fishing opportunities in the reservoir” and that opponents were either “ignoring or at least downgrading the recreational benefits” there.⁴⁸ While the reservoir may have

⁴⁷ “Silver Springs Opposition to Canal Is Financially Motivated: Ringhaver,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 13 October 1970.

⁴⁸ “Campaign to Drain Rodman Pool Doesn’t Hold Water,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 23 May 1972. Note: The other counties were Duval, Clay, Putnam, Citrus, and Levy. Also, the paper failed to note that the river was regionally well-known for its bass fishing before the dam was built and that the Welaka National Fish

offered a boon to the interior as a recreational destination, the dam's defenders were conveniently overlooking that the new "natural" area was, in fact, largely a constructed one. In an increasingly artificial and man-made Florida, this was a relatively more "natural" environment, but it was hardly the Ocklawaha that Lanier and Stowe had encountered. Later, the dam's defenders would make an even bolder argument that the dam had been in place long enough to have become its own "viable and complex ecosystem that supports a wide variety of native plants and wildlife," thus raising even further questions about what constitutes a "natural" environment and what can be described as a "second nature."⁴⁹

The canal ultimately was de-authorized in 1990, and much of the land that was on the canal route was turned into the 110-mile Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway, state-protected land designated for recreational purposes, but the dam was never removed nor the river restored.⁵⁰ Not only did the river traffic envisioned from the canal never materialize, but now *no* boats could travel down the dammed river to the area from Palatka or anywhere else downriver. The debate over the merits of retaining the dam or restoring the river continues to this day.

Hatchery, which supplied sport-fishing stock for the entire state, had been located across the St. Johns River from the mouth of the Ocklawaha since the 1920s.

⁴⁹ The phrase occurs on numerous websites devoted to keeping the reservoir intact. William Cronon examines the idea of "first nature" and "second nature," i.e. the pre-human versus post-human landscape, ideas he attributes to both Georg Hegel and Karl Marx, in William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, 1st ed., (New York and London, 1991), esp. xix., 56-7.

⁵⁰ Lee Irby, "'The Big Ditch': The Rise and Fall of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal," in *Paradise Lost?: The Environmental History of Florida*, Jack E. Davis and Raymond Arsenault, ed., (Gainesville, Fla., 2005), 376; Cynthia R. Taylor, *A Survey of Florida Springs to Determine Accessibility to Florida Manatees (Trichechus Manatus Latiostris): Developing a Sustainable Thermal Network*, (St. Petersburg, Fla., 2006), 20; Howard T. Odum, Elisabeth C. Odum, and Mark T. Brown, *Environment and Society in Florida*, (Boca Raton, Fla., 1998), 180-83; Noll and Tegeder, *Ditch of Dreams*, 315-329.

Although the economic and environmental impacts of maintaining the reservoir remain a source of disagreement, the increased use of the reservoir as a recreation destination was part of a larger trend in which Americans increasingly sought outdoor activities and they increasingly did so on public lands. By the late 1960s, state parks and other public facilities in Florida had emerged to compete with Silver Springs and other “natural” attractions, putting even more economic pressure on those attractions. The state park service in Florida originated during the Great Depression. With the Civilian Conservation Corps offering a ready labor force for public and conservation projects, the Florida Park Service was created as part of the Florida Board of Forestry and Parks in 1935. In 1949, the legislature recognized that the purpose of forestry, the “conservation, development, and protection” of forests was “so divergent from the purpose for which the Florida Park Service was created,” that the park service should become its own agency. The legislature thus created the Board of Parks and Historic Memorials, with the mission to “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein . . . for the enjoyment of future generations.” Further, the new agency was to “acquire typical portions of the original domain of the state . . . of such character as to emblemize the state’s natural values [and to] conserve these natural values for all time.”⁵¹ That year, the state began buying up land around Manatee Springs for what would open in 1955 as the first state park on a major spring site.

In 1957, Congress noted the “spiritual, cultural, and physical benefits” of outdoor recreation when it created the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission to

⁵¹ “An Act Creating a State Agency,” Laws Of Florida, (S2, Ch. 25353), 1949.

look at obtaining and protecting public lands for recreation, “including but not limited to such pursuits as hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, skiing, mountain climbing, pack tripping, nature photography, scenic appreciation, boating, canoeing, and other water activities.” The commission led to the federal Outdoor Recreation Act, which Florida followed that year with its own Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Act. The state act, which acknowledged the “intangible, social, aesthetic, and scientific benefits of outdoor recreation,” created a new council to oversee outdoor recreation, but also provided a new mechanism for purchasing lands through a “Land Acquisition Trust Fund.”⁵²

The desire to obtain “natural” lands for public recreation reflected a growing public concern and interest in not only the health of the physical environment but also the ability to interact with that environment. While Robert Gottlieb has posited that Earth Day 1970 was a “culmination of an era of protest,” with its roots as far back as the Progressive Era, he also notes that the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 launched a “new decade of rebellion and protest” over environmental issues. While these issues were playing out in courthouses and legislative chambers, however, they were also being played out on the ground as more people became engaged in the very activities considered in the 1963 federal and state legislation. Between 1960 and 1965, for example, the number of people camping nationally increased from 13 million to 16 million (46%), and between 1960 and 1970, membership in the outdoor equipment co-operative Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI), which did not carry hunting equipment, increased ten-fold, to 160,000.⁵³ In Florida, campers in the nineteen state

⁵² “An Act Relating to Outdoor Recreation,” Laws of Florida, (S1, Ch. 63-36), 1963

⁵³ Clayne R. Jensen and Steven Guthrie, *Outdoor Recreation in America*, 6th ed., (Champaign, Ill., 2006), 33-34.

parks that offered overnight camping increased 30% from the first four months of 1963 to the same period the following year. By 1967, more than one million people were camping annually at state parks and an unknown number of others were patronizing forest sites and the growing number of private campgrounds.⁵⁴

In 1963, there were a total of fifty-five parks in the system, of which most were along the northern periphery of the state, and Manatee Springs remained the only one on an actual spring site. By 1969, when the park service and the recreation council were merged into the new Department of Natural Resources as the Division of Parks and Recreation, the agency had added another thirteen properties, including the soon-to-open Wekiwa Springs and Ichetucknee Springs state parks, in the heart of the north-central Florida interior.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Alexander Springs and Juniper Springs all were open and provided amenities to visitors within the Ocala National Forest. (Silver Glen Springs and Salt Springs were open to the public but remained privately owned until the 1970s. The latter in 1969 offered the largest campground public or private—350 sites, all with water and electrical hookups—and plans were underway to expand it to as many as 4,000 sites during the next two decades. The owners of Salt Springs were none other than the Ray family.⁵⁶) While the beaches were places to relax—to simply *be*—the interior was becoming for a growing segment of visitors a place to *do*, a place for roughing it with nature. Meanwhile, for those very same Florida visitors who sought a less consumer-driven experience and a more natural one in the interior, the state parks

⁵⁴ "Florida Beckons Visitors Who Enjoy Camping, Outdoor Fun," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 January 1968; C. E. Wright, "Camping on the Rise in Florida State Parks," *The New York Times*, 26 April 1964.

⁵⁵ *Biennial Report 1969-70*, (Tallahassee, 1971), 6-7.

⁵⁶ Don Clark, "'Lots' of Value at Salt Springs," *The Evening Independent*, (St. Petersburg, Fla.), 21 March 1969.

and forest recreation areas must have seemed far more practical and inviting than the glitzed-up theme park on urban edges.

In addition to camping, those parks and recreation areas also offered a critical amenity that Silver Springs no longer did: swimming. At some point in the late 1960s (there is no newspaper record from the time and recollections of people involved in the park are sketchy) increasing boat traffic, and possibly even the threat of liability against the attraction, led the proprietors, most likely Silver Springs, Inc., to close the beach next to the boat docks. Other than the petting zoo, Silver Springs had become a place where nature, such as it was, could only be observed, but not interacted with.

The factor most associated with the decline of the Florida interior is, ironically, an attraction in the interior of Florida—Walt Disney World. However, it is clear that the effects of a modernized Florida, complete with corporatization, homogenization, and technological development, were already conspiring to deprive the Florida interior of the disparate unique and individual identities as travel destinations that so many areas had sought to exploit. Residents in myriad communities had tried to capitalize on their particular assets as they sought to frame the “natural” as the centerpiece for a consumer experience. By the 1970s, not only could travelers easily bypass many of those now “out of sight and out of mind” interior destinations, but also those who chose to seek an interior destination often had a particular idea of how they wanted to experience natural Florida. They were no longer passive consumers at the mercy of roadside purveyors of ideas about Florida, but rather active agents in deciding how to define Florida for themselves. The choices were now three-fold, there was the leisure and artificiality (sunsets and rises notwithstanding), even decadence, of the beaches

and coastal communities, there were the parks, forests, and recreational areas of the interior known to those who sought them (and less and less so to everyone else), and there was Orlando. The obvious outlier, the Everglades, is such a singular and, for the most part, undeveloped and barely habitable place, an interior unto itself, as to defy inclusion in this equation.

As much as Walt Disney World and its future neighbors would assume the mantle for Orlando as *the* non-coastal Florida destination into the future, what Walt Disney World did in 1971 was to add an exclamation point to the process in terms of creating a singular destination and identity within the interior that trumped all others. Tourist traffic nearly tripled in 1971 when Disney opened, from 3.5 million to 10 million, but construction and anticipation of the project already had vaulted Orlando into the top ten fastest growing areas in the country.⁵⁷ Government largesse also helped the pre-Disney growth of Orlando in the form of residential spillover from Cape Canaveral, the creation of a Naval Training Center, and the construction and opening of Florida Technological University (now the University of Central Florida) in the final years of the decade.

In the 1970s and 1980s, even as the energy crisis added one more nail to the coffin of many fading tourist destinations, Disney continued to add to its artificial environment. The Magic Kingdom, which opened with thirty-five attractions, added an average of one per year during the 1970s while a similar number of major additions opened at other locations on their property.⁵⁸ Outside Disney, Sea World opened in 1973 followed by Circus World in 1974, Six Flags Stars Hall of Fame Wax Museum in

⁵⁷ Foglesong, *Married to the Mouse*, 3, 86.

⁵⁸ Fjellman, *Vinyl Leaves*, 135-36.

1975, Mystery Fun House in 1976, and Wet 'N Wild in 1977. By 1978, even hotel chains were getting involved, as the new Orlando Marriott promised to be “a miniature theme park in itself.” As the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that year, “It used to be said that the best thing about Orlando is that it is surrounded by Florida; now, and not without justification, it is being suggested that the best thing about Florida is that it has Orlando at its heart.”⁵⁹

For the most part, though the beach still dominated Americans knowledge and perceptions of Florida. Tourism studies throughout the 1970s and 1980s showed that the beaches were the overwhelming reason people came to Florida, ranking only behind “rest and relaxation” as a reason stated for visiting and followed by “Florida Attractions.” Increasingly, those attractions likely meant either those in Orlando, or Busch Gardens in St. Petersburg. In 1982, one survey found that “Many visitors and non-visitors lack information about the many faces of Florida” and that although Florida offered many different types of attractions as well as “attractive and varied natural scenery. . . [t]hese are not recognized by many vacationers.” In 1990, the ten top counties visited, eight were coastal and the other two were Osceola and Orange—the Orlando area. A 1995 report found that “Beaches are a significant, if not overwhelming, part of Florida’s landscape and identity.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Peter Tonge, “Disney’s Biggest Piece of ‘Imagineering’ Yet,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 12 December 1978.

⁶⁰ *An Executive Summary of the Florida Tourist Study; The Image of Florida among Vacation Travelers: Market Research among Visitors and Non-Visitors*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 1982), viii; *Promotion & Protection of Florida’s Natural Tourism Resources: 1995 Interim Project*, 1.

CHAPTER 10

AN UNDEFINED FUTURE, 1980 TO THE PRESENT

In 2007, fans of Cypress Gardens became worried for the future of the park when it was sold at auction, for a “fire sale price,” to Land South Adventures, a company “known for buying and selling land across the Southeast, often by buying low, dividing property and selling high.” The previous owners of the park had run up debt of at least \$14 million, and total liabilities of up to nearly \$40 million, and its insurance company refused to pay for nearly \$25 million in damages from the hurricanes of 2004. Less than three years later, their fears were realized when Land South announced that it had “explored numerous management frameworks and exhausted every possible approach to keep the park running in its traditional form.” The company sold the park to Merlin Entertainment Group in January, 2010, and that company quickly announced that it would turn the park into a Legoland theme park. In terms of creating an artificial environment, Merlin may put even Disney to shame. The company’s California Legoland attraction’s “Enchanted Walk” offers “life-like LEGO® models of animals native to our area.”¹ As a whole, the attraction is essentially, and unashamedly, plastic.

In January, 2011, Marion County officials unveiled a plan that would take Silver Springs in an entirely different direction—the county itself would take over the attraction and retool it to become an “eco-tourism destination.” “Silver Springs is already a natural wonder that no amount of money can recreate. Its current business model is antiquated and must be refocused to take advantage of this world-class natural wonder,” Marion

¹ Michael Sasso, “Some Fear Cypress Gardens’ Closing,” *Tampa Tribune*, 27 September 2007; Ted Jackovics, “Legoland Florida to Replace Cypress Gardens in October 2011,” *Tampa Tribune*, 21 January 2010; “Legoland California: Enchanted Walk,” *Merlin Entertainment Group*, http://california.legoland.com/explore/rides_and_attractions/castle_hill/enchanted_walk/, accessed February 10, 2011.

County Board of Commissioners chairman Stan McClain wrote in an open letter to his constituents in the *Ocala Star-Banner*. “The state has fulfilled its role in securing the land in perpetuity. It is now local government's responsibility to manage the utilization of this unique natural resource to the maximum benefit of our residents.”² Indeed, it may be the best chance toward not only reviving interest in the springs but also toward creating a new and lasting identity for the interior's future, an identity based on both its ancient and its not -so-distant past.

The estimated \$6.3 million deal is currently in limbo as the county pursues its due diligence in negotiating the acquisition, but the possibility that Silver Springs will become a publicly managed community resource is exciting and, to those worried about a Cypress Gardens-type outcome for the springs, a welcome relief. At first blush, the proposal seems to bode well for a remarriage between the local community and its number-one natural resource in which Silver Springs would once again be embraced as a primary aspect of the region's identity. The *Star-Banner* called Silver Springs “the linch-pin” of the area's natural attractions and reminded readers that while Marion County may pride itself on being horse country, Silver Springs is the

font from which Marion County has grown. . . . If we are lucky, we the people will have another chance to swim and revel in the beauty and refreshing coolness that make Florida's springs—especially the grandest of them all—so special. The County Commission should take the plunge and embrace this rare opportunity to return Silver Springs to the people.³

While Marion County residents appear divided over whether or not the county should run Silver Springs, the public consensus appears to be that the current

² Stan McClain, “Other Voices: Sealing the Deal,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 13 February 2011.

³ “Take the Plunge,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 19 January 2011.

operator's business plan and track record at the springs leaves something to be desired. Today, the springhead attraction is a carnival-like array of exhibits and shops. For an adult ticket starting at \$29.99, one can pass through the gates into the park. To the right, walkways take visitors past snake and reptile and other animal exhibits including both native species and exotic ones such as the capybara, the world's largest rodent. To the left, visitors pass the glass-bottom boat dock and the "springside mall," complete with food and souvenir shops. Wrapping further around to the right, near the periphery of the springhead, one can feed giraffes, wander through the floral gardens, or ride the carousel. A "wings of the springs" show allows visitors to see various birds either in flight or, at least, up close. A petting zoo for the children is a short side trip from the wilderness trail to the "World of Bears," where a handful of black bears might be seen dozing in a large caged habitat. There are other exhibits and rides, including the "Lighthouse Observation Tower," an 80-foot vertically telescoping ride of minimal "whee!" factor that does provide a nice view of the springs, and the main stage for concert performances (the park puts on an annual series of shows, often by performers with a country style or with a 1950s or 1960s nostalgia value). Across the parking lot, which has an open-air kennel for travelers with pets, is Wild Waters, a seasonally open collection of pools, flumes, and water slides where, unlike at the springs, visitors can still hop in the water and cool off. Joint-access tickets to both Silver Springs (year-long) and Wild Waters (weekends only from April to mid-June and late July to mid-August, daily during the intervening period) are available for as low as \$45.99, on sale. State Senator Evelyn Lynn, who represents eastern Marion County, visited the park in 2010 at the request of constituents who complained about the deteriorating condition of the

attraction. While there, she observed “an unbelievable lack of care and a lack of maintenance.”⁴

Under the tentative plan for county operation of the springs, visitors would be charged a “reasonable user fee.” What that fee would be is unknown, but the projected annual revenue from admission is only slightly more than \$1 million and parking revenue another \$250,000 or so. The famed glass-bottom boats would remain, but would be run by a private contractor. Private concessions would also offer kayaking and canoeing, scuba diving, swimming and guided snorkeling tours, upper canopy zip line rides, bicycle and Segway rentals, and houseboat camping. The zoo exhibits and midway rides would be removed, while the site would be made available for various research activities for regional and local scientists and scholars in fields such as aquatic ecosystems, herpetology, hydroponics, medical herbology, and aquaculture.⁵

One business consultant in Ocala with experience in public-private recreational partnerships warns that there is a fine line to balance, and the park should neither become “a passive park for eco-tourism nor should it be turned into a Disney-esque fantasy world.” Instead, the new proprietors must learn from the past. “We must solicit the input of local people who understand the history of the Silver Springs attraction and remember the community involvement in the numerous businesses once scattered throughout the park.”⁶ What becomes problematic, then, is that Silver Springs was, in its twentieth-century heyday, just that: “a Disney-esque fantasy world” before Walt Disney

⁴ Bill Thompson, “Some Welcome Marion Managing Silver Springs,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 20 January 2011.

⁵ ———, “What Would a County-Run Silver Springs Look Like?,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 20 January 2011.

⁶ Rock Gibboney, “Other Voices: Public/Private Partnership Key to Revitalizing Silver Springs,” *Ocala Star-Banner*, 23 January 2011.

World came to Florida, just to a lesser degree. Like many other interior attractions of the mid-century, its operators offered visitors not just what was there to see, but added what they believed visitors wanted to see (i.e., Florida as the garden, Florida as the jungle, and Florida as the spring). It was by no means a pure natural site for observation or contemplation as it may have largely been to nineteenth-century visitors such as Sidney Lanier or Harriett Beecher Stowe. With the damming of the Ocklawaha River, as well as the ease of travel to and from Silver Springs, it seems unlikely that a new attraction could ever begin to replicate the late nineteenth-century steamship experience of exploration and discovery, ecotourism before ecotourism in name was born.

Moreover, the Silver Springs of the mid-twentieth century was one of extensive national marketing and hoopla. The Ray and Davidson years were characterized not only by fastidious upkeep of the park, but also by endless solicitation of various media, decidedly non-native exhibits such as the pink porpoise, and the ceaseless cultivation of a reputation as a must-visit destination. In this light, Silver Springs' history offers little guidance for its future stewardship.

A great deal of excellent scholarship and literature has been written explaining the forces that guided development of Florida locally, regionally, and as a whole. What this work has attempted to do is explain how areas of Florida, the coastal and the interior, have interacted to both reflect and create another critical dynamic that has influenced how Florida entered the American imagination, how it has changed and grown, and how it has been perceived. Florida is, in many ways, neither a singular entity nor a collection of disparate local or regional parts, but instead a sort of microcosm of America itself in which the identities of various regions constantly engage with one another to create a

sum greater than its parts. America has its heartland, Florida its interior. Successive generations have both reinvented and reimagined the Florida interior, guided by their evolving views of nature, as well as other cultural forces.

While it is evident from McClain's idea of an active (almost hyperactive, it seems) site of eco-tourism and Gibboney's characterization of such an eco-tourism park as "passive," the term's definition remains elusive. Florida convened an advisory committee in 1997 to address the potential of ecotourism and heritage tourism and adopted a definition of "responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people while providing a quality experience that connects the visitor to nature." As of 2000, ecotourism, as understood in that definition, represented the fastest growing segment of Florida's tourist industry. The *Encyclopedia of Ecotourism*, warns that, in Florida's definition, "virtually any type of outdoor activity is ecotourism." This "shotgun approach" often fails to distinguish between activities that harm the natural environment and those that seek to sustain it, but "given the massive extent to which conventional tourism has infiltrated the state of Florida, such a broad approach may be appropriate."⁷ In other words, anything is better than Florida's current approach to tourism.

A 2004 overview of ecotourism in Florida released by a collaboration of state agencies and reviewed by the Department of Environmental Protection defines ecotourism as "recreational and educational experience that encourages greater understanding of the natural and cultural resources of an area," and goes on to note that "more and more [tourism money] is being spent by people who want to experience

⁷ David B. Weaver, *The Encyclopedia of Ecotourism*, (New York, 2001), 471.

the natural thrills of the interior of our state, 'the real Florida,' just as most Florida tourists did a century ago."⁸ Again, this is misleading in that the Florida of a century ago does not exist anymore, but also is indicative of the desire to rediscover a more natural interior Florida as opposed to the developed coasts or Orlando. Here is where Silver Springs's history can be informative for future operation of the park and the creation of a new identity for the region. The "three core ten[et]s" proposed by the county include to "protect and enhance the natural environment," to "respect the local, historical and cultural values Silver Springs has created for the greater Ocala/Marion County community and beyond," and to "enhance the educational, cultural, and recreational value for the visitor." It is within the second tenet that the most potential may lay—Silver Springs as an idea and as a focal point of a regional identity that appears to have been lost. For all the commercialism that surrounded the park under Ray and Davidson, it seems unarguable that it was during their tenure both a community resource and a defining element for the area.

Still, if the idea is to generate tourism, that notion often comes with a different set of values than protecting and respecting a natural environment. A 2003 study of ecotourism potential in Florida explored the possibility of finding common ground between county tourism officials and land managers and, unsurprisingly, found instead "different priorities and visions for ecotourism in Florida." However, the study also noted favorable conditions for the pursuit of "nature-based tourism," a term it differentiates from ecotourism in that ecotourism has a broad and value-laden meaning while nature

⁸ Becca Hassell, "Florida Ecotourism," *Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, University of Florida, and the Invasive Plant Management Section of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission*, <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/guide/ecotouri.html>, accessed February 11, 2011.

tourism can be applied to any use of natural or near-natural areas for recreation and tourism. The study was not prescriptive—it recommended further studies—but it also noted that Florida residents themselves were beginning to rediscover the “natural” interior:

Although Florida might be more closely associated with its sunny beaches and theme parks than its abundant natural areas and aesthetic landscapes, nature-based recreation is an important part of many Florida residents' lives and is beginning to play a major role in the economic development of rural communities throughout the state.⁹

There appears in all this, then, a budding awareness that although Florida remains largely a tourism-dependent state, a national audience, although welcome, is no longer necessary to sustain Silver Springs. (And, realistically, Silver Springs's days of attracting a national audience already have long since come and gone for the second time.) The Marion County proposal for Silver Springs itself recognizes its potential as a regional destination. “Working within a 100 mile radius and our regional population of several million residents, this venue is strategically positioned as an environmental, adventure recreation, entrepreneurial incubator, and research destination.”¹⁰ Instead of looking outward, at how to draw people from other places to the attraction, area residents and their public servants can begin to orient their perspectives inward, toward the heart of Florida's interior. As a communal resource and focal point, Silver Springs

⁹ Taylor V. Stein, Julie K. Clark, and Jason I. Rickards, “Assessing Nature's Role in Ecotourism Development in Florida: Perspectives of Tourism Professionals and Government Decision-Makers,” *Journal of Ecotourism* 2, (2003), http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:UiMN7GyFTE8J:www.sfrc.ufl.edu/faculty/stein/Publications%2520for%2520Website/Naturesroleinecotourism.pdf+ECOTOURISM+HERITAGE+ADVISORY+FLORIDA&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESiA-OAmZ8mIVInjjAzBGWU0WLqS5jnnQW5xpXjwZmqooVy6mOp2_qYPEgF71zV3nR9Pb6aZ5mpszUS4NjlYwpyw-wYiwzXILE3w56PhFMs-HxIhFLzOmzxGV1GmIPsUgugQIP7&sig=AHIEtbQX2tQ6vf9MS-pdETGrUtgUqpxHkw, accessed February 15, 2011.

¹⁰ Marion County, Florida, *Operational Plan for Silver Springs - a Marion County Vision*, (Ocala, Fla., 2010), 8.

could provide the seed kernel of a new identity for the interior, the grandest of its springs bubbling up from the heart of the region. The growth in the southern part of Marion County, around areas like the Villages, may be choking the roads around Orlando as suburban sprawl metastasizes outward from that city, but it also represents an immense potential audience. Marion County alone now has more than 325,000 residents while neighboring Lake County has more than 312,000 residents sprawled across its confines. To the north, Alachua County adds another quarter million residents to the regional population.¹¹

Also, the dismissal of a “passive” destination may be misguided. Returning to McClain’s notion of natural lands as an “economic driver,” it is important to remember that, for the most part, the rediscovery of a “natural” interior Florida has largely played out on public lands where profits have never been a consideration and mere break-even performances are sometimes considered victories. Under Florida state law, all fees and proceeds from state parks must be returned into the park system, not the General Revenue Fund.¹² The state did adopt a “Real Florida” marketing campaign to advertise its park system nationally and abroad in the late 1990s, but for the most part, the park system has existed passively, as something to be sought out by visitors. The proposed ecotourism attraction would, on paper at least, follow a similar path of regional marketing and reinvestment, as its mission would be to “create an opportunity to subsidize the operational costs of the park while generating cash flow for additional capital investment.”¹³

¹¹ "State and County QuickFacts," accessed March 15, 2011.

¹² Florida Statutes, 258.014, (2010)

¹³ Marion County, *Operational Plan for Silver Springs - a Marion County Vision*, 10.

At several spring-based state parks, officials have even instituted limits on total daily attendance. At Ichetucknee Springs State Park, in rural Columbia County and Suwannee County, camping is no longer allowed and river usage is capped at 3,000 persons per day at the upper and middle launches.¹⁴ Attendance at the park, which is seasonal and revolves largely around tubing, swimming, and snorkeling along the spring run, grew from less than 135,000 in 1992 to nearly 189,000 in 2002 with essentially no advertising. Silver River State Park itself, which requires a half-mile walk (a somewhat daunting portage for boaters) to a point on the Silver River more than a mile from the springhead, attracts nearly 230,000 visitors annually. Even if those visitors reached the springhead by boat, they are not allowed to land without paying the park's admission. Very generously assuming that every one of the fifty-five or so guest camp sites that are available to the public at any given time were used every night of the year by four people apiece whose only purpose for entering the park was for lodging to visit the theme park, it would still mean that nearly 150,000 people already visit Silver Springs essentially as a "passive" park, absent the amenities of the attraction or ready access to the springhead.¹⁵

However, given the economic climate of 2011, and with newly elected Governor Rick Scott committed to cutting departmental budgets, it does not appear that the state will step in to incorporate the attraction into a state park as it did with Weeki Wachee Springs in 2007. In that case, Hernando County officials also had considered taking

¹⁴ Florida Department of Environmental Protection, *Ichetucknee Springs State Park Unit Management Plan*, 17.

¹⁵ Mark A. Bonn and Frederick W. Bell, *Economic Impact of Selected Florida Springs on Surrounding Local Areas*, (Tallahassee, 2003), 4-10; Eric Draper, "Press Release: The Top 25 Most-Visited Florida State Parks in 2010 Are...." *Audubon of Florida*, http://audubonoffloridanews.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Audubon_ParkAttendance_PressRelease.pdf, accessed February 15, 2011..

over the attraction themselves, but were nixed by the Southwest Florida Water Management District, which held the lease on Weeki Wachee and felt negotiations were too far along with the state to bring the county to the negotiating table. Instead, Florida's Department of Environmental Protection acquired it in 2008 and turned it into a state park while maintaining several of the themed attractions there.

Since the late-1960s, the fates of many springs and other defining features of the Florida interior have become state property and often those places have been made accessible to the public as state parks, albeit low-impact and conventional ones, unlike Weeki Wachee. Although acquisition of the attraction is not an outcome that state officials envision for Silver Springs, due to budget concerns, it might happen anyway if Palace simply walks away from the lease. In the meantime, the state has indicated a willingness to help Marion County work out a deal with Palace.¹⁶ As it stands, the state has been acquiring much of the land around and including the springhead since the mid-1980s.

In 1983, Jim Buckner, an environmental educator for the Marion County School Board at the time, was stunned to see for sale signs go up for property around the springs. He had simply assumed that either the attraction or the state owned the land and that it would be protected from development. Buckner became then, for the next several years, the point man for a small cadre of concerned citizens who lobbied the state to buy the 1,175 acres through the Conservation and Recreation Lands, or CARL, program. According to Buckner, it was a deal that came distressingly close to not happening. After the state apprised him of the annual meeting for CARL consideration

¹⁶ Bill Thompson, "State Not Interested in Running Silver Springs," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 9 February 2011.

the same day the meeting was taking place, Buckner had to write to Governor Bob Graham to get the Silver Springs proposal before the CARL program's governing board at a separate meeting. Even then, the proposal only received three of the six votes, the bare minimum for further consideration. Had the application not been approved, Buckner feared, the land may well have been sold into private hands before he could reapply the next year. (The DuPont Nemours Foundation, a charity that acquired the land from Ed Ball after his death in 1981, had indicated it would readily sell to developers. Ball, who owned the Wakulla Springs property for many years, was the charity's founder's brother-in-law.) Later in the year, he said, the proposal received unanimous approval, although it was barely ranked in the top twenty of other approved state land acquisitions. (In 1992, a plan to buy the springhead property ranked only forty-seventh among CARL proposals.) Finally, in 1986, with the renewed threat of sale into private hands, a \$5.67 million deal was reached for the state to buy the land.¹⁷ (A deal was reached the same year for the state to buy Wakulla Springs.) However, the state's CARL funding already had been allotted until the following year. Instead, the St Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) stepped in and purchased the land, then sold the bulk of it to the Department of Natural Resources the following year.¹⁸

In the process of lobbying for the purchase, Buckner also had been stunned to discover that the land around the springhead was not protected either. The Carmichael family, which had owned that property since the early part of the twentieth century, in

¹⁷ "Silver River Area Bought to Block Development," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 7 May 1986. Interview with Jim Buckner by Tom Berson in Ocala, 10 February 2011.

¹⁸ Lucy Beebe, "State Ponders Buying Silver Springs," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 8 July 1992; Mark Green, "Deal Set on Silver River Land Purchase," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 5 September 1985. Also, see Marion County Land Records, 1985; Book 1315, Page 1090.

1980 had deeded fifty-seven acres (much of it underwater) of the springhead along with about 1,000 feet of the river itself and some adjoining lands to the University of Florida Foundation. Buckner had wrongly assumed that the foundation was a state entity and, when he learned otherwise, began another campaign to acquire that property. Buckner and his allies in the venture were part of the leading edge of local residents, officials, and non-profit organizations that spurred Florida into becoming a leader in land purchases and conservation, often through joint negotiations and payments from both public and non-profit entities. Nevertheless, the acquisition of the springhead itself, discussed below, would take the better part of the next decade to achieve.

Since the original state acquisition in 1986, numerous other parcels have been purchased, and the Silver River State Park, was officially designated in 1987. For the next eight years, though, the park was open only on a limited basis to school-children for day trips to the Silver River Museum and Education Center, which opened on the property 1990. In 1995, the park finally opened to the public with limited amenities and, over the years, has grown to a 4,000+ acre park, with ten cabins, trails, more than fifty campsites with electric and water, canoe rentals, picnic pavilions, and more. Much of that land was acquired through Preservation 2000, an ambitious 1990 Florida initiative to raise \$3 billion over ten years to purchase environmentally sensitive lands. The program, which ultimately resulted in the acquisition and protection of about 1.25 million acres across the state, was succeeded in 2001 by a similar program, Florida Forever. Marion County in late 1993 also approved its own purchase of 220 acres in 1994 for \$1.32 million through its own funds and a grant from the Florida Community Trust. That land was then leased to the state for management as part of the park. (The county also

leases a building on the site from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection for its Environmental Education Center and Museum.) Private entities have also stepped in to help acquire lands around the park. Most recently, the Nature Conservancy in January 2011 purchased 400 acres along the south side of the Silver River State Park at a cost of \$1.12 million.¹⁹

Indeed, the county, state, and private entities have all taken enormous measures to protect the land not only directly around the spring, but also in the larger spring-shed. In 1985, the state had authorized the Coral Gables-based developer Avatar Holdings, Inc. to move ahead with development of a 5,000-acre property about a mile north of Silver Springs. Ocala Springs, as it was to be known, would potentially include between 11,000 and 12,000 homes, three shopping centers, with up to 1.5 million square feet of shopping and office space, at least three schools, and a golf course.²⁰ Avatar did not move forward for the next fifteen years, but when the company indicated it would go ahead with its plans in the early part of the 2000s, state, county, and local officials teamed up to purchase the land from them. An agreement eluded the parties until 2006, when the Sierra Club and other groups joined the push to stop the development project. In December, Avatar announced it would sell to a partnership between The Nature Conservancy, Florida's Internal Improvement Trust Fund, and Marion County.²¹

¹⁹ Florida Department of Environmental Protection, *Silver River State Park Unit Management Plan*, (Tallahassee, Fla., 2010), 1, A1 1-4; Bill Thompson, "Silver River State Park Adds 400 Acres," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 12 January 2011; Tom McNiff, "County Adds More Acreage to Park Lands," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 15 December 1993.

²⁰ Tom Saul, "Old Ocala Springs Plat Revived," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 22 October 1984; Lloyd Dunkelberger, "Large Land Developments 'on Paper' Cause Consternation," *Lakeland Ledger*, 22 July 1984; Ryan Conley, "State Working to Make New Offer for Ocala Springs Land," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 15 July 2006; "Once Again, Silver Springs Is Endangered," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 19 March 2006.

²¹ "Save the Springs Goes Statewide," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 25 June 2006; Lloyd Dunkelberger, "State to Pay Millions to Save Land near Ocala," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, 15 November 2006.

Development around Silver Springs has led to chemicals seeping into the portion of the Aquifer that feeds it—the spring-shed. Those chemicals include the insecticide DEET, myriad pharmaceuticals, and, especially, nitrogen from fertilizer and waste water. The latter has had adverse impacts on the clarity of the water and fostered the growth of algae in the springhead and spring run. The entire spring-shed extends over about 1,200 square miles, but the areas closest to the springs are the most critical. Of the roughly 33,000 acres in the immediate spring-shed, urban land use and land cover have increased from less than 150 acres in the 1940s to more than 7,000 acres in 2005. By 2006, Ocala itself had grown to more than 50,000 residents, while Florida’s population had eclipsed 18 million. Meanwhile, agricultural use of land in the springshed increased in that period by about 50%, from 6,060 acres to 9,130 acres. That has largely contributed to a five-fold increase in nitrogen concentrations in the spring water in that time, a figure some fear could double again by 2055 if the spring-shed is not protected. It is those fears that have largely driven the movement to acquire the lands around the spring and prevent more development.²²

Amid the seeming frenzy of land acquisitions, meanwhile, the attraction itself also has changed hands numerous times in the past three decades. ABC-Paramount, which added the Wild Waters water-park next door in 1978, sold the lease for both to a group of Ocala residents and former ABC-Paramount executives in 1984 for \$25 million. The new operators, Florida Leisure Attractions, brought with them a renewed commitment to keeping up the natural beauty of the park, according to a number of local residents

²² St. Johns River Water Management District (Fla.), Wetland Solutions Inc., and Florida Department of Environmental Protection, *Fifty-Year Retrospective Study of the Ecology of Silver Springs, Florida*, (Palatka, Fla., 2007), ES vi-viii.

interviewed informally, but the company's tenure lasted only five years. In December 1988, the group sold the attraction to Florida Leisure Acquisition Corp., a company run by two Holiday Inn executives from Tennessee. Officials at Florida Leisure Attractions said at the time that, while the park was profitable, it had not grown as expected and attendance had stagnated at about one million guests per year. The deal also brought concerns about the new owners' plans for selling off 1,700 acres of "surplus property" near the attraction.²³

In 1993, Florida Leisure Acquisition Corp. sold the remaining property it owned at the site—about 430 acres—along with the buildings around the springhead to the state of Florida's Internal Improvement Trust Fund, which paid \$21.5 million through CARL funding. Under the terms of the sale, a 15-year lease agreement was reached between the state and Florida Leisure Acquisition Corp. starting at \$925,000 per year and escalating over time. The deal also included an agreement for the state to purchase an adjacent 400-acre property, which Florida Leisure Acquisition Corp. had planned to develop as the Village at Silver Spring, for \$4.8 million.²⁴

In 1996, Florida Leisure Acquisition Corp. sold the lease to Ogden Entertainment of Florida, Inc., part of a multi-national energy and aviation conglomerate. Ogden subsequently began a massive expansion at Silver Springs, including adding bear and alligator exhibits, a replica nineteenth-century steamboat children's attraction with Ferris

²³ Elaine Hamaker, "Silver Springs Preservation a Concern," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 31 December 1988; Kristina Martell and Rima Firrone, "Silver Springs Gets New Ownership," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 31 December 1988.

²⁴ Lucy Beebe, "Silver Springs Bought by State," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 15 December 1993.

wheel and slides, and new rides at Wild Waters.²⁵ In 1998, Ogden extended the lease to 2029 under an agreement in which Ogden would purchase the original Carmichael property around the springhead in from the University of Florida Foundation and donate it to the Internal Improvement Trust. It did so in 1999 but, later that same year, Ogden announced their expansion had not increased attendance as hoped and that the company was getting out of the attractions business altogether.

In 2000, Ogden sold the lease to Silver Springs and Wild Waters, along with the company's other fifteen theme parks, to Alfa SmartParks, a Jacksonville-based subsidiary of a Greek holding company for about \$148 million.²⁶ Two years later, Alfa asked for an extension on the annual lease payment, now at \$1.2 million, indicating that another change was imminent. In July, 2002, the *Ocala Star-Banner* announced under the headline "Sold Again" that Alfa had sold the lease to California-based Palace Entertainment. Palace at the time was a relative new-comer to the theme park business, but it was growing quickly, expanding from two to twenty-eight parks since its inception in 1998.²⁷ Palace also was the sixth company to run the attraction in just eighteen years, and the fourth in six years.

If Palace turns out to be the last private entity to manage the park, it likely will be the end of Silver Springs's self-promotion as "Nature's Theme Park." It is unclear when Silver Springs picked up that slogan, which it has used in advertising since at least 2000, but likely no earlier than the late 1990s. (Interestingly, a 1986 newspaper article

²⁵ Joe Callahan, "Adding On," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 16 November 1996; Joe Callahan, "Lease for Silver Springs, Expansion and All, Expires in 12 Years," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 16 November 1996.

²⁶ Janine Young Sikes, "New Management," *Gainesville Sun*, 28 March 2000.

²⁷ Harriet Daniels, "Sold Again," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 10 July 2002.

described Walt Disney World's Discovery Island as "nature's theme park."²⁸) In 1995, Florida's Citrus County adopted the slogan "Mother Nature's Theme Park" as part of a national advertising campaign. Kathy Sayadoff, vice-president of Crowley and Co., the company that developed the campaign, said Silver Springs was not using the slogan at the time and a 1996 *Ocala Star-Banner* article about the Citrus County campaign makes no mention of Silver Springs.²⁹ In Citrus County's case, the slogan was meant to reference the purely natural features of the county, and not the overlaying of any artifices or other attractions. That, it appears, is the new plan for Silver Springs, to create and market "a highly desirable natural resource destination that will be attractive to visitors who are interested in seeing real treasures of nature in their natural state rather than 'manufactured attractions' such as are available at the major theme parks." Although the proposal appears to erroneously equate Silver Springs's former "mission" as being a "resort destination," there is a tacit recognition that "nature" and "theme park" are, in their current applications toward the operation of Silver Springs, incompatible and unsustainable.³⁰

By breaking this tie and accepting that Silver Springs can not and, more important, *should not* try to define itself against or compete with Orlando as a new opportunity has emerged to create a new identity and image for the Florida interior. With the metastasis of the Orlando metropolitan area across central Florida, it is critical that other interior areas look in other directions toward protecting their natural assets. One need only look

²⁸ Anita Chisholm, "Walt Disney World - a Vacation Community," *Merced Sun-Star*, 20 June 1986.

²⁹ Arturo Gonzalez, "'Nature's Theme Park' Highlights Florida's Gulf Coast," *Ocala Star-Banner*, 3 March 1996.

³⁰ Marion County, *Operational Plan for Silver Springs - a Marion County Vision*, 4.

from the Citrus Tower in Clermont for evidence of the spread of Orlando's bedroom communities as new houses and screened-in pools are taking over the landscape. The remaining natural interior of Florida is still viable, but only if nature becomes the defining feature for the region, something to be guarded rather than packaged and sold.

Florida's efforts on the state and local levels to acquire lands to protect them and prevent development is an admirable one that is often overlooked as new developments seem to simply appear out of nowhere on a daily basis. Even McClain, who has led the efforts acquire the Silver Springs lease, notes that keeping land out of private hands can be an enormous impediment to economic development. "[It] virtually locks out and cripples the private sector from using these publicly owned lands to create jobs and to open access to these properties for our community's benefit and enjoyment," he wrote in the *Ocala Star-Banner*. "The current economic crisis has caused leaders at all levels of government to reconsider the way that public lands are managed and to explore the opportunities that can exist when these lands are used as economic drivers rather than being set aside in preservation."³¹ However, this is misleading, as most public land is not "set aside in preservation," including even Florida's preserves. Florida has twenty-one state and federal preserves overall, of which two are aquatic preserves. All are accessible for public visitation and use, and more than 25 million people visit those preserves each year, a figure that continues to grow.³² (The Nature Conservancy, meanwhile, the largest private land preservation organization in Florida, owns and

³¹ McClain, "Other Voices: Sealing the Deal."

³² "Florida: The Places We Protect," *The Nature Conservancy*, <http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/florida/preserves/>, accessed February 25, 2011; Erma Slager, "Florida Performs," *Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection*, <http://www.floridaperforms.com/MeasData.aspx?mcode=ep012&graph=bar&dataset=off>, accessed February 25, 2011.

manages about 63,000 acres as preserves in the state, but more than half of that acreage is open and accessible to the public. (In all, private non-profits account for slightly more than 185,000 of the nearly 15 million acres of conservation lands in Florida.³³) In other words, public lands are not only often economic drivers themselves, they are *highly sought* economic drivers.

Indeed, Marion County can not generate tax revenue from a great deal of its land, as the Ocala National Forest alone represents at least 274,000 acres.³⁴ At the same time, however, the forest offers eight campgrounds, eleven hiking trails totaling nearly 100 miles, another 222 miles of trails for off highway vehicles, and eight designated recreation areas, not to mention the abundant hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation opportunities available at non-designated sites. It seems indisputable then that public stewardship of Florida lands provides a critical counter-balance, however tenuous, for growth and development.

In 1929, John Kunkel Small lamented the loss of much of Florida's natural wonder to that date.

Here is a unique El Dorado, mainly a tongue of land, extending hundreds of miles into tepid waters, reaching, almost, to the Tropic of Cancer, where the floristics of temperate, sub-tropic, and tropic regions not only meet, but mingle; where the animals of temperate regions associate with those of the tropics. As much as possible of this natural history museum should be preserved, not only for its beauty, but for its educational value, for it is within easy reach of the majority of the United States. Many localities whose natural features, now destroyed, are not duplicated elsewhere could easily

³³ Florida Natural Areas Inventory, "Summary of Florida Conservation Lands," http://www.fnai.org/pdf/Maacres_200903_FCL_plus_LTF.pdf, accessed February 27, 2011.

³⁴ ———, "Acres of Conservation Lands by County," http://www.fnai.org/pdf/MAXCounty_201008.pdf, accessed March 17, 2011.

have been made state or federal reservations, if the public officials had had the proper interest and foresight in such matters.³⁵

Florida's public officials have made many missteps and mistakes in their stewardship of Florida's lands during the state's history, but recent efforts to acquire and administer lands for the public have proven that all was not lost in 1929 nor is it today. Silver Springs can not only be protected, but it can become a community asset and a hub where visitors into future generations can encounter the beauty and wonder of the natural assets of Florida's interior. As much as those encounters may lead to learning or contemplation, the Florida interior will once again be, with Silver Springs as its heart, a place of discovery. As we learn more from Silver Springs and other protected areas in the interior about the world both around us and beneath our feet, it may even again become Florida's frontier.

³⁵ John Kunkel Small, *From Eden to Sahara: Florida's Tragedy*, (Lancaster, Pa., 1929), 14.

CHAPTER 11 CONCLUSION

It should be evident from the preceding pages that Florida's identity has not only evolved over the centuries but also that the process of "discovering" and reimagining Florida has been—and remains—a fluid and dynamic one. Moreover, it has been argued, the role of the Florida interior in shaping the idea of Florida as a whole in the American experience and imagination has clearly been a pivotal one.

At the beginning of America's tenure of Florida, competing visions of the land as either a barren "desert" or a fertile Eden dominated the thoughts and writings of those who, for the most part, had limited first-hand knowledge of the terrain and topography. The experience of the Spanish and the English, who were unable to establish much more than coastal footholds in St. Augustine and Pensacola led some to believe that acquiring Florida would be mere folly. For others, however, the failure of the English and Spanish to develop Florida was more a reflection of the nature of their efforts rather than of the potential of the land.

American settlement of Florida was hindered for several decades by the Second Seminole War, which secured possession of the interior for American settlers, and then by the failure of officials to provide more than the barest bones of a transportation infrastructure. The Ocklawaha River in particular remained all but un-navigable until after the Civil War. During this time, as spring resorts became popular in other parts of the country, Florida's spring-laden interior remained largely unreachable and unknown to most people and Florida did not enter into the American imagination as a spring resort destination.

Following the Civil War, thanks largely to the efforts of entrepreneur Hubbard L. Hart, Silver Springs quickly became a well-known and largely sought travel destination. By clearing the Ocklawaha River and providing steamboat service from Palatka on the St. Johns River, Hart was able to bring thousands of people to Silver Springs, and both the journey and the destination became widely celebrated in literary accounts by the likes of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Sidney Lanier. Silver Springs became heralded as a natural wonder of the world and, by 1880, was the single largest tourist destination in Florida.

The Golden Age of steamboat travel would not last very long, as a handful of northern entrepreneurs saw the potential of opening Florida to railroad traffic. Two men in particular, Henry Plant and Henry Flagler, led the way. Plant's line cut southwest through the state to Tampa on the Gulf coast, while Flagler extended his line down the eastern seaboard, creating coastal resort destinations down the line as he did so. Soon the railroads were bringing visitors to the coasts of Florida (and sending agricultural produce northward). Writers and other visitors turned their attention away from the cypress trees and natural springs of the interior and toward the towering facades and artificial pools of beachside hotels. Silver Springs and much of the north Florida interior was forgotten in the early twentieth century as the coastal resorts flourished.

With the advent of the automobile and the boom of the 1920s, interior communities saw new opportunities to position themselves as vacation or relocation destinations for frozen northerners looking for part-time or permanent relief from winter. Hundreds of chambers of commerce sprung up around Florida as seemingly every community tried to cash in on a cresting wave of speculative investment in Florida lands. Developers

around Silver Springs sought to turn the area into a resort hotel destination, but the plans fizzled quickly as the Florida boom turned to bust in the second half of the decade. Nevertheless, two local men, Walter “Carl” Ray and William “Shorty” Davidson, remained undeterred. They saw a future for Silver Springs as a place for travelers to visit on their way to or from other destinations in Florida, not as a final destination in itself. The interior, they realized, was different from the coast and its charms should be promoted, not altered to be more like the beach resorts.

As the road network grew in Florida in the 1920s, Silver Springs and Ocala’s central location made them a hub for major highways, and Ray and Davidson’s relentless promotion of the springs brought the area back into the national consciousness. The managers of Silver Springs, along with those of other attractions in the Florida interior, used the natural attributes of their locales to fit into a number of tropes which were coming to define the Florida interior in the American imagination: Florida as a garden, a fountain, or a jungle. Those images tapped into competing nineteenth century notions about Florida when it was in the process of being discovered by Americans, and it allowed a new generation of Americans to undergo their own process of “discovery,” even as the attractions they found were increasingly contrived to fit tourist expectations. Soon, even coastal areas would see “spring,” “jungle,” and “garden” attraction amidst the beachside resorts.

Despite the Depression, Silver Springs grew as a tourist attraction and, following World War II, exploded back into the national consciousness with visitation exceeding one million guests. In the post-war years, air conditioning, pesticides, and other technological advances made Florida living and visiting more comfortable while the

nation's newfound affluence allowed increasing numbers of people to enjoy vacations. Consequently, visitor traffic and immigration to Florida boomed, and roadside attractions like Silver Springs were primary beneficiaries, enticing drivers along the U.S. Highway system to stop in at their businesses on their way to and from other destinations.

In the 1960s, however, the arrival of the Interstate Highway System and the proliferation of corporate-owned hospitality businesses conspired to redirect long distance automobile travelers away from the time-honored U.S. Highways and whisk them to their destinations more quickly and directly. Travelers increasingly stayed along the Interstates, and no longer explored or “discovered” the interior locales. Corporate-owned theme parks also came to dominate the tourist landscape, using their financial resources to create larger and even more contrived attractions. Ray and Davidson sold Silver Springs to ABC-Paramount, Inc. at the beginning of the 1960s and the park began to lose its local flavor and the support of the local government as a community asset. The Florida interior's most distinctive and defining natural features in many ways ceased to belong to Florida. With the increase in air travel, the arrival of Walt Disney World and the rapid growth of Orlando, the gas crisis of the early 1970s, and other factors, Silver Springs and the Florida interior again began to fade from the American consciousness.

Nevertheless, even as natural Florida was becoming a forgotten—or non-existent, thanks to rampant development—entity, a new groundswell that emerged in the 1960s to save natural lands had taken hold and was growing rapidly in Florida and around the nation. Florida embarked on an ambitious program to purchase and conserve natural lands, and many of the springs of the northern interior became part of the state park

system. Silver Springs, whose management changed hands several times, remains privately operated under lease arrangements, but much of the land around the springhead and along the Silver River is now owned by the state. Most recently, Marion County has entertained the notion of taking over the lease and operation of the springhead area, and returning it to being a natural and community managed resource.

From the earliest days of the American presence in Florida to the very present, therefore, the process of discovering and rediscovering Silver Springs and the Florida interior has been a critical component in the evolution of Florida as a whole in the American imagination. From all appearances, moreover, it will continue be so into the future. It has been well-documented that Florida has changed over the years from a natural environment to a constructed one, but it also has been forgotten that the natural environment is defined largely by the interior—a place of springs, rivers, pine forests, and hardwood hammocks. Additionally, it has been forgotten (more than once) that these places do still exist. To overlook the persistence of the natural interior, changed as it may be in places, is to oversimplify and under-appreciate the role of that region in defining Florida.

Additionally, the role of the interior in the development of Florida speaks to the larger role of interior regions in shaping the national identity. The idea of the American interior, whether it be that of a howling and unknown wilderness or that of a pastoral and agrarian heartland, has long shaped perceptions of the nation, its development, and its character. By reconsidering the role of the interior against that of peripheral or coastal areas, scholars will gain a better understanding of the elusive idea of “frontier” and the evolution of the American terrain and topography. This work addresses Florida

specifically, but the writer hopes it may help instruct and inform the larger debate over the physical and cultural conquest and development of the North American continent.

This work, it is hoped, has cast the spotlight of inquiry and curiosity back upon the Florida interior, its natural features, and the importance of those features in shaping Florida's historical and cultural development along with its perception in the minds of American and European travelers. Before resorts and developments grew and flourished along its coasts, Americans came to grips with Florida through both conquest and discovery of its interior. Moreover, the process of "rediscovering" these places has been a recurring phenomenon in how visitors and immigrants have perceived and understood Florida. It is the writer's belief—and hope—that this process will again become a central one and that a understanding of the region's past will help guide its use and stewardship into the future.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tom Berson is a native New Yorker and former journalist who received his B.A. in History from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. He worked for a number of wire services, magazines, and newspapers in the Rhode Island and Washington, D.C. areas before moving to Florida for a newspaper job in 1997. He returned to school in 2003 and received a M.A. in American and Florida Studies from Florida State University in Tallahassee in 2005. He then enrolled in the doctoral program in History at the University of Florida in Gainesville, where he focused on Florida and environmental history. From 2007 to 2009, he taught first as an adjunct and then as a visiting professor in the History Department at Stetson University in Deland before returning to Gainesville, where he completed his Ph.D. in August 2011 before returning to Stetson as an adjunct professor. He enjoys travelling, kayaking, and camping.