

## **The Second Stranahan Store (aka Stranahan 96)**

The excavation at the second Stranahan store represents an excellent demonstration of Historical Archaeology. Historical Archaeology involves a combination of digging and consultation of relevant written documents. Therefore, Historical Archaeology can only be undertaken in literate cultures that have extant written documents. There are surviving documents and images concerning the developments undertaken by Frank Stranahan on the New River. This data, along with extensive records about the history of Fort Lauderdale, can be found in the care of the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society. You can visit the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society at the Old Fort Lauderdale Village and Museum (<http://www.oldfortlauderdale.org>). You can also visit the site of the Stranahan House that operated as the Stranahan Store until 1906 (<http://www.stranahanhouse.com/>). The Palm Beach Museum of Natural History's South Florida Archaeological Collection contains artifacts from a 1996 excavation at the location that was the former site of the Second Stranahan Store. These artifacts present many interesting insights about the population of Florida, including the shifting class demographics of this area.

### Historical Setting

The United States gained Florida from Spain on February 22, 1819. The handover was accomplished with ceremonies and flag exchanges in the summer of 1821. On March 3, 1845 President John Tyler signed the bill admitting Florida as the twenty-seventh state (Gannon, 1993). White settlers began to move to South Florida starting in the 1830s; however, the area was depopulated by a succession of conflicts (Carr, 1989). A series of wars between American governmental forces and the Seminoles shook Florida; these wars finally ended in 1858 when the remaining Seminoles vanished into the Everglades. This was followed by the disruption caused by the US Civil War from 1861-1865 (Gannon, 1993). As such, the continued development of Florida was held back until the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One symbol of this process was the commencement of construction on the Florida East Coast Railroad by Henry Flagler (O'Sullivan and Lane, 1991). Another sign of this growth was the construction of new stores in South Florida, including the Brickell store on the Miami River and the various Stranahan stores on the New River (Beiter and Parry, 2000; Carr, 1981; Carr, 1989).

The Stranahan Store operated in a total of five buildings in two locations on the banks of the New River. The location of the first store is still occupied by the Stranahan House, while the location of the second store is now covered by the Riverwalk development. The first store operated from 1893-1906 in a succession of four buildings. These buildings were located on a parcel of land located on the Atlantic Coastal Ridge on the riverbank of the New River. The four structures that operated as the first Stranahan store consisted of: 1) a palmetto thatched building, 2) a small wooden store, 3) a larger wooden store, 4) the first floor of the Stranahan house (Carr, 1989). The second Stranahan store operated from 1906 until it burned down in the Fort Lauderdale fire of

1912. In 1913 the Oliver Building was built on the lot. This construction was named after the Oliver Brothers, who had bought the store from Frank Stranahan prior to the fire. According to Patty Flynn (2005), the Oliver brothers sold some different items, including porcelain. Finally, this building was demolished in 1996 to make way for the Riverwalk development (Beiter and Parry, 2000). These stores represent an interesting insight into the people who lived in the South Florida area, because the materials people bought are a telling hallmark of the life they lived. Therefore, through the combination of researching the written documentation and the several archaeological endeavors undertaken at the locations of the Stranahan stores, a better understanding of South Florida during the turn from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries can be established.

### Archaeology at the Stranahan Stores

From June 18<sup>th</sup> to July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1982 an archaeological excavation was undertaken on the grounds of the Stranahan house, which had been the location for the first Stranahan store (Carr, 1989). The written documentation reveals four structures had been used as the first Stranahan store; however, during this undertaking, no evidence of the first three structures was found (Carr et al., 1995). During excavation, evidence of extensive trade with the Seminoles was found. Specifically, numerous glass beads of styles that the Seminoles wore were recovered from this site (Carr, 1989).

The site of the second Stranahan store was excavated from October 1996 to January 1997. This digging followed the leveling of the Oliver Building in 1996. This site had been greatly disturbed by the construction and demolition of the buildings that occupied this area; however, numerous artifacts were recovered. Artifacts recovered from this site include: glass fragments, various ceramics (both decorated and undecorated stoneware and fragments of porcelain), gun cartridge cases (one example was a 38w made by Union Metallic Company who were in business from 1878-1925), nails, a wood piling (with some evidence of burning), a glass inkwell (a Cone bottle from between 1890-1910), and a 1896 US quarter (Beiter and Parry, 2000). These artifacts are curated at The Palm Beach Museum of Natural History as part of the South Florida Archaeological Collection.

Comparing and contrasting the artifacts recovered from the locations of both stores, several interesting points become apparent. First, at the first Stranahan store numerous glass beads were recovered and it is documented that these were traded with the Seminoles (Carr, 1989). This trade was common in South Florida, for example, at the Brickell store, Carr (1981), recovered a total of 654 beads. However, at the second Stranahan store no beads were found. Beiter and Parry (2000:32) suggest that “changes may have taken place since the time of Stranahan 1—perhaps the Seminoles shifted their patronage to other stores or the use of beads was no longer a part of the Seminole material culture.” They also speculate that the beads may not have been kept in stock at the second store, or that their sample size was too small, or that the Seminoles spent less time at the second store resulting in a lessened chance of losing beads. The second major difference between the two stores relates to the class standing of the potential consumer. Porcelain fragments were found at the second store, but not at the first (Beiter and Parry, 2000). Although, it should be noted that it is possible these fragments may have come

from the store operated by the Oliver brothers (Flynn, 2005). Either way, the presence of porcelain has previously been suggested as an indicator of customer's originating from the upper reaches of the middle class (Wall, 1999). Beiter and Parry (2000:33) posit "Stranahan 2 had a clientele that included middle class individuals whereas Stranahan 1 did not, which would be expected with the increase in population and commerce that occurred during the Stranahan periods." This dissimilarity exposes the continued development of Florida during the turn from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### Consideration and Reflection

It was by the work of numerous pioneers that South Florida became the paradise that many now recognize. One of these individuals was Frank Stranahan, who operated several stores along the New River. The concept of the consumer culture is something that is familiar to many of us. Indeed, one way of understanding a cultural time period is investigating what people bought. It is through such observation that the changing cultural dynamic of South Florida can be witnessed. The decrease of glass beads and the increase presence of porcelain at the Stranahan stores expose such a cultural modification. Such historical artifacts present a unique investigative tool to unraveling even the recent past. The Palm Beach Museum of Natural History is honored to be the repository of these cultural treasures.

Peter Ferdinando  
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Environmental Setting:  
Riverbank, New River

Site Type:  
Historical construction

Site Function:  
Trade/Store

List of Artifacts Discovered:  
Nails, post-1920 glass fragments, pre-1920 glass fragments, melted glass, porcelain hard, cement with inclusions, metallic fragments, ceramic misc., asphalt, buttons (bone), plastic fragments, linoleum, 1896 US quarter, light bulb, cartridge, piling charred, track carriage, inkwell (glass), honing stone, bottle closures (caps), and stud sleeves.

Chronology:  
Second Stranahan store (1906-1912), the Oliver Building (1913-1996), and the Riverwalk development (1997-present)

Florida Master Site File #:  
Stranahan Store 2: 8Bd2916

Stranahan Store 1: 8Bd259

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