

# the Parklander

THE FAMILY FRIENDLY MAGAZINE SINCE 1991

September 2015



The Past  
Beneath  
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Take a Look into Parkland's  
Margate-Blount Archaeological Site

# Discovering Layers of the PAST

*By Dr. Peter John Ferdinando*

**T**he similarities between the job of a pastry chef and that of an archaeologist may not be evident immediately to the reader. Both professions, however, are obsessed with layers. A pastry chef builds up layers of delicious sponge, sweet filling, and colorful frosting to construct a glorious cake. An archaeologist excavates through the dirt, muck, and sand in search of the layers of the past. As they dig deeper and deeper into the ground, they, in fact, are moving back in time. Understanding the stratigraphy of an archaeological site, that is these layers of soil and artifacts deposited in the earth over the eons, helps archaeologists interpret the history of the people who lived there.

Peeling back the layers of the Margate-Blount archaeological site demonstrates that Parkland's past stretches back thousands of years. The



hard work of archaeologists and their teams of excavators at the site reveals much, from brief stops by Seminole and Yamasee, to a long-lasting pre-European contact Native American village. The Margate-Blount site thus tells a layered story about the residents and visitors to a small stretch of high ground located on the edge of the Florida Everglades in what is today the city of Parkland.

## **Seminole and Yamasee Visitors, A.D. 1670-1850**

After digging through a layer of modern twentieth-century trash, archaeologists at Margate-Blount found indications for several stopovers at the site. The recovery of a gun flint



ABOVE: Members of the BCAS excavating at Margate Blount  
LOWER LEFT: A Nineteenth-century Seminole Warrior

and .50 caliber musket ball suggest a possible visit by a Seminole party at some point in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. The site's high ground provided a dry place upon which to camp for the night, and the close-by waters of the Everglades offered an easy dinner of fish, turtles, or other aquatic animals. It is easy to picture, in the embers of a campfire, a Seminole unpacking his bag and losing the gun flint and musket ball in the encroaching darkness at the dusk of the day. A little earlier, sometime in the late seventeenth or early to mid-eighteenth centuries, another party of Native Americans also paused at the site. The recovery of five broken fragments from the same San

Marcos-style vessel indicate a visit by Yamasee from the northern reaches of then-Spanish La Florida. As they cooked around a campfire, one of their cooking pots broke and they abandoned it on the site for future archaeologists to uncover.

## **Site Abandonment, A.D. 1500-1670**

Moving down through the layers of the site and thus back further in time, Margate-Blount seems to have sat empty for the sixteenth and much of the seventeenth century. Archaeologists found little evidence for visitation or occupation by the original southern Florida Native Americans during the time of early European contact. Other

**The changing decorations on these ceramics further demonstrate that Native Americans occupied the village site from around 500 B.C. through A.D. 1500. Indeed, much like the inevitable change in the styles of computers and cell phones, Native Americans altered the designs on their pottery through the years.**

archaeological sites in the Florida peninsula have various contact-era goods, from shipwreck metals and iron tools, to trade beads and the buttons of European clothing, but the archaeologists working at Margate-Blount found only two beads of undetermined age. Moreover, while the Spaniards discussed the Tequesta who resided at the mouth of the Miami River, the Jeaga who lived along the coast of modern Palm Beach County, and the Mayaimi who occupied small villages around Lake Okeechobee, they did not mention any people in the vicinity of the Margate-Blount site. Why Native Americans abandoned this location for these couple of hundred years is unknown.

**A Small but Bustling Village, 500 B.C. to A.D. 1500**

Archaeologists, however, discovered ample evidence at Margate-Blount for a long-lasting, pre-European contact Native American village. This settlement sat on a high

ridge near the edge of the Everglades, which gave the residents access to a well-stocked natural larder, while also providing them a refuge from the water. Archaeologists

easily identified this village from its midden and burial mound. This midden, an accumulation of dirt, discarded animal bones and shells, sherds of pottery, and broken



Blount residents evidently had contact with groups living on the coast, because they maintained bustling exchange networks that brought marine shell and shark teeth into the Florida interior. They used these as tools, the shells to make hammers and chisels and the shark teeth as cutting edges. The recovered ceramics also indicate likely regional contacts with the peoples of the Everglades Culture to the South, the Belle Glade Culture from around Lake Okeechobee and the Kissimmee River Valley, and even some of the peoples who lived on the west coast of Florida. The frequency of pottery types from Margate-Blount, however, aligns the inhabitants most closely with the primarily coastal East Okeechobee Culture of Palm Beach and Martin counties. The changing decorations on these ceramics further demonstrate that Native Americans occupied the village site from around 500 B.C. through A.D. 1500. Indeed, much like

shell, bone, and wood tools, along with other detritus, helps reveal a lot about the lives of the people living there. The people ate much fish, turtle, and snake, supplemented with a smaller amount of mammals like raccoon, opossum, and deer. The Margate-



**TOP RIGHT: The BCAS Traipsing to the Site**  
**ABOVE: A Tequesta Manufacturing Clay Pottery**  
**LEFT: BCAS break time: (L to R) Ed Pullin, Milt Wolfe, Viola Shaffer, Fred Kirsch, Helen Alpirin, Wilma Williams and Howard "Butch" Roloff.**



**PERSONAL ARTIFACTS:**

**Carved Bone and Antler from Margate-Blount**

Along with shell tools and pot sherds, archaeologists recovered intricately carved bone and antler artifacts from Margate-Blount. They date to A.D. 1200-1500, and depict various animals, including a more realistically-realized dabbling duck, turtle, and an eel or barracuda, a more stylized rattlesnake, and the vulture pictured above (size about 2.4"). Many of these carvings came from an area in-between the village midden and burial mound, which also included the burials of alligators, turtles, raccoons, and rattlesnakes. The artifacts small size suggests use as personal adornments, with the depictions perhaps evoking clan affiliation or individual affinity with specific animals. Former Florida State Archaeologist Dr. Ryan J. Wheeler studied the ancient art of Florida in-depth, and argued effectively for stylistic connections between such Florida artifacts and the designs and motifs developed by the peoples of the Hopewellian Culture of the Ohio Valley and the Mississippian Culture of the wider American Southeast.

the inevitable change in the styles of computers and cell phones, Native Americans altered the designs on their pottery through the years. While the ceramics from Margate-Blount midden indicate Native American utilization of the site for some two thousand years, questions about the local population size, and cycles of occupation and abandonment remain. The number of inhabitants of the village probably fluctuated between two to four dozen individuals. Indeed, although he was

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talking about the peoples who lived around Lake Okeechobee in the sixteenth century, Spaniard Hernando de Escalante Fontaneda stated that such interior towns included between twenty to forty inhabitants. This number is a clear contrast with some of the larger east-coast Native American towns of at least several hundred residents. Although their village may have been small, the construction and use of a burial mound at Margate-Blount, along with the abundant food resources from the Everglades, suggest Native Americans lived year-round at the site from about A.D. 750 through to 1500. Moving back to the period from 500 B.C. to A.D. 750, the far fewer pottery sherds may indicate the presence of either less people or more intermittent occupation of Margate-Blount. Also, every few generations the residents may have abandoned the site in response to changing environmental conditions, including

the exhaustion of the local wildlife and changes in water levels.

**The First Known Parkland Residents, Some 3000 Years Ago**

Peeling back the last layer of Margate-Blount, archaeologists came to the earliest evidence of human activity at the site. Deep in a trench, they found fragments of semi-fiber tempered pottery. Southern Florida Native Americans made these ceramics using clay and plant fibers some three thousand years ago. The then-inhabitants of the site again may have moved seasonally through the landscape, living on the freshwater resources of the Everglades and marine animals of the Atlantic Ocean. Although there is no evidence of earlier human visitors to the site, paleontologists have found fossils of megafauna like mammoths and mastodons in Parkland. It is quite possible that Paleo-Indian hunters also lived in the region as they tracked these various animals, but such a supposition awaits confirmation by new discoveries.

**Preservation and Research**

The layers of Parkland's Margate-Blount tell us about the past of a small patch of southern Florida. The preservation of such cultural resources is a vital, and the valiant efforts of Ken Cutler and Jeff Schwartz to educate the public and preserve the site is an important first step. Continued research on the artifacts from Margate-Blount, however, is essential



**A Timucua chief**

to confirm and challenge archaeological interpretations about the site. The Palm Beach Museum of Natural History ([www.pbmnh.org](http://www.pbmnh.org)) curates some materials from Margate-Blount. Study of these artifacts might tell us much, from determining the season of capture of the animals eaten by the occupants to investigate whether Native Americans occupied the village year-round, to using DNA and chemical residue analysis to determine what the Yamasee ate for dinner three hundred years ago. Ultimately, each new discovery adds another important ingredient to the layers that make up Parkland's past. ⓘ

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Paintings by Theodore Morris,  
[www.losttribesflorida.com](http://www.losttribesflorida.com)

Page 18 *Mammoth Hunt*  
*Red Cacique*

Page 19 *Warrior*

Page 20 *Woman of the Sacred Clay*

Page 21 *Chief Outina*

Page 21 Antler Bone: Photo  
Courtesy of the Graves  
Collection, Broward College.

Page 22 *Statuary: American Royalty*

Page 21 Bottom left photo credit  
Miami Herald's Mel Kenyon.  
All other black and white  
photos from the Archaeo-  
logical papers of  
Wilma Williams,  
History of Miami.



**“It is fitting for us to celebrate the long and admirable history of Florida’s native peoples because Florida has been home to more than 25 tribal groups... All of them contribute to the rich and complex history of our great state and to the rich diversity of cultures that make up Florida.”**

**Former Governor  
Charlie Christ**

## Memorable Indian Sculptures

### A Depiction of Earlier Florida Inhabitants

**A**merican Royalty represents the residents who were in Florida during the time of the European contact in the 16th Century. The artists, Bradley Cooley and Bradley Cooley, Jr., of Lamont, Florida, have based this statuary on engravings done in the 17th Century by Theodor de Bry who created his work from the watercolors of Jacques LeMoyne, an artist who traveled the Jacksonville area during the 16th Century, recording the Timucuan people he encountered there.

*American Royalty* represents a group of indigenous Florida people of the period and shows a king, queen and servant. The king wears elaborate shell and stone jewelry and has extensive tattooed patterns over his body. In the 16th Century, tattoos were created by rubbing charcoal in small incisions made in the skin. The king also wears a bone and feather headdress, a sash woven of Spanish moss, and copper ear spools. These ear ornaments were traded from the Great Lakes area. The king's long nails are indicative of his royal status.

The queen also wears copper ear spools and a graceful drape of woven and braided Spanish moss. The servant, wearing an alligator tooth necklace with a copper pendent centerpiece, walks behind the king and queen and is not permitted to look upon them while carrying the king's deerskin robe.

Artists Cooley and Cooley Jr. created each figure by first layering clay over a foundation armature of wood and metal. More and more clay was applied and skillfully modeled to become a life-like recreation of their vision. When the clay figures were completed to the last detail of hair, skin and clothing, they were prepared for casting by master mold-maker Carla Knight of Denver. The rubber molds of the figures were then shipped to the foundry in Colorado, where wax was poured into the molds to recreate a positive image. Ceramic molds were cast over these wax figures and heated to melt out the wax in preparation for the pouring in of molten bronze heated to 2,000 degrees. After breaking away the ceramic molds, the bronze figures were reassembled, cleaned and finished with varying shades of patina.

“It is important to tell the story of where we came from and honor the native people who have inhabited Florida,” then Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp said. “Understanding our past helps to shape our future and reminds us of our common goals and common future as Floridians.”

*American Royalty* is the third sculptural grouping installed outside of the R. A. Gray Building. Other groupings have included *Movin' On*, representing the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians in Florida of the 1930s and the Seminole Family, representing an 1830s Seminole Indian family in Florida.