The Spanish River Papers

WINTER 1986
The title, Deerfield Island, refers to a very specific piece of real estate as it exists today. This paper will attempt to trace and describe how this particular plot of land evolved into its present form.

Rock formations in Florida are young. The oldest known rocks on Earth are about three billion years old. In contrast, Florida rock, essentially all limestone of various types, varies in age from six million to a mere hundred thousand years. The different kinds of limestone vary in structure depending on how and when they were formed. The Miami limestone, Oolite, is so named because viewed with a hand lens it appears as egg clusters. In reality, it was formed by tiny spherical sand grains cemented together. The Anastasia or Coastal Ridge limestone found north of the Miami type consists of coquina or shell fragments in the agglutinates. Close to the border between Broward and Palm Beach counties, the Anastasia and Miami Oolite grade into each other. These two types of limestone were formed during various interglacial periods when South Florida was below sea level. They vary in thickness and form the aquifers or underground fresh water systems.
reservoirs underlying almost all of mainland Florida.\(^1\)

In addition, two other geologic events, or strictly speaking, the lack of events give Florida, and in particular South Florida its unique form. The first of these is seismic activity which in other places caused igneous rock intrusion and mountain and fault formation. The second of these occurrences which Florida didn't have is glaciation. These glaciers ground down hills and ridges, and in their retreat, deposited much rock and altered the topography. Thus we have the flatness of Florida, especially south Florida; lacking deep harbors and having only short shallow rivers, the New River being a possible exception.\(^2\)

Prior to manipulation of the natural waterways by man, most of the area now called Deerfield Island was a treeless marsh peninsula. Today there is evidence in the form of many dead pine trees, both erect and lying on the ground, that the eastern part of the peninsula had stands of slash pine, *Pinus elliottii*. This marsh, with Saw-grass, *Cladium jamaicense* its predominant species, was probably similar in appearance to the Everglades though separated from it by the Atlantic Coastal Ridge. There are a number of mature pond apple, *Ammona glabra* trees, growing east of, and parallel to the Mangrove Swamp. Being a fresh water species, they probably grew along one of the former branches of the Hillsboro River.\(^3\)

The Spanish River running North-South formed the peninsula's eastern border. The Hillsboro River, running in a northwesterly direction formed the southwestern border.

Prior to 1830 the Hillsboro River was called by several other names; New River, Middle River, and Potomac River being among them. The original spelling of Hillsborough was because the English Earl of Hillsborough had received land grants in the area during the English occupation of the territory in the eighteenth century. It seems the changeover in spelling took place between 1846 and 1856 since military maps of that era show "Bruff Map of 1846 Hillsborough," "Ives Map of 1856 Hillsboro."\(^4\) However, it isn't quite that simple, since several recent uses of the older Hillsborough spelling can be found. For example, the 1900 Map of Boca Raton, Dade County, Florida shows the Hillsborough River as the western boundary of the city. It appears on this map where the El Rio Canal flows today. Another example is found in a 1965 Florida Statute, defining the legal limits of the City of Boca Raton:

"...thence run westerly along said township line between Townships 47 and 48 south to its intersection with the center line of the Hillsborough State Canal also known as Hillsborough River or Hillsborough Canal."\(^5\) I agree with Scott Bruce who says, "Nobody seems to know how the spelling was simplified to Hillsboro."\(^6\)

The Spanish River was a stream located where the Intracoastal Waterway is today.\(^7\) Lilly Pierce Voss, describing the broad boggy land located west of the Orange Grove House of Refuge states: "...narrow stream of shallow water in the bog which apparently prompted the later local legend that the 'Spanish River' once ran along that section behind the Ocean Ridge from Boynton Beach south to Boca Raton."\(^8\)
She said that as far as she knew the river was never navigable.

The Spanish River was also known as the Rio Seso and as it meandered south of Lake Boca Raton it was called the Little Hillsboro until it joined the Hillsboro River, of which it was considered a tributary. "The last two and a half miles before reaching the Hillsboro River were crooked, narrow and unnavigable."

Lt. C. Ives reports the creek flowing south from Boca Raton as being twenty feet wide where it connects to the Hillsboro River. This river, the Hillsboro, he describes as being fifty feet wide, lined with mangroves and increasing in size to a width of one quarter mile at its mouth. Pierce says he rowed up the Hillsboro River until it branched many times. He explored the branches which finally ended in a large sawgrass swamp. The difference of opinion on the size and navigability of these natural waterways is easily understood. Certainly the width, depth, and even the length could vary greatly depending on the season and climate.

Attitudes towards a wilderness area such as the Everglades were vastly different during the nineteenth century than they are today. The Seminole Indians adapted themselves to the environment. For example, they used long shallow draft canoes that were made from hollowed out cypress trees, with which they could pole almost everywhere in the Everglades. In contrast, the white man's attitude was to change nature to suit his own needs and way of life. The failure to appreciate and understand Florida's unique environment was partly a reflection of the ethical
sensibilities of the day, and partly lack of knowledge about the complex chain of life and hydrology of the area. While much has been learned over the years, this knowledge is far from complete today. And because of the vast increase in the population the impact on the environment is many fold.

Early in the nineteenth century ideas on the feasibility of draining the Everglades were expressed. The Federal Swamp Lands Act of 1850 laid the groundwork for the future drainage of this area and central Florida north of Lake Okeechobee. This law ceded to the states all swamp and overflowed lands within their borders. What constituted swampland was clearly specified "... each forty acre tract must be so overflowed, either at the planting or harvest season, that it could not be freed from water without artificial drainage."12

Florida claimed 20.3 million acres which included "... some lands which were--a bit of fraud here--high and dry."13 Dau feels more strongly on the subject "... as far as Florida was concerned, no one Congressional Act ever resulted in so much fraud or did more to rob the people of this state and their descendants of their God-given heritage in land than this did; nor have its evil results subsided to our day."14

Florida's Senator J.D. Wescott, Jr. who had urged passage of the act, commissioned a study which found the Everglades, utterly worthless to civilized man, as it existed at that time. It predicted that with drainage, the culture of sugar and tropical fruits would make the United States independent of the West Indies and claimed that in less than five years the Everglades would be populated by at least 100,000 persons who would be available to protect the entire south portion of the United States. A dissenting view was expressed by Stephen R. Mallory, who later became a U.S. Senator and Secretary of the Confederate navy. Though modestly claiming not to be an expert, Mallory's findings were that it might be impossible to ever drain the Everglades, which were much more complex than generally thought.15

During the remainder of the nineteenth century nothing was done about Everglades drainage due to lack of funds and disagreements over land titles. In 1903 Governor William Sherman Jennings managed to have returned to Florida almost three million acres of land. Florida's title to this area had been revoked by the Interior Department in 1897 because it was said to have been Seminole land. Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward had campaigned with a platform urging Everglades drainage. A Board of Drainage Commissioners was established and funds for drainage were to be obtained by taxation.16

Drainage proved much slower than expected, only 13.2 miles of canal had been built by the end of Broward's governorship. His more important contribution had been to convince the citizens of Florida that drainage was necessary. He pointed out that the Mississippi River had been restrained, and that the people of Holland had built dikes to hold back the ocean. By comparison, he commented, the Everglades Project was insignificant.17 The dredging continued during Governor Albert W. Gilchrist's administration
and in 1911 the Hillsboro Canal was nearly completed, connecting to Lake Okeechobee forty-five miles to the northwest. This was considered to be a momentous event in Deerfield Beach and Governor Gilchrist attended the celebration. The cost was estimated to be twelve hundred dollars per month to operate each dredge which was able to construct one mile of canal per month at an average width of sixty feet.

In 1881 Florida Coast Line Canal and Transport Company was organized and in 1882 was given the authority to dredge a canal from Jacksonville to Biscayne Bay. This was completed in 1895 and became known as the Florida East Coast Canal. It was fifty feet in width, having a depth of five feet. For many years the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had been interconnecting and improving the natural and previously canalled coastal waterways of the eastern United States. They required local cooperation in the form of lands needed for right-of-way and places for disposal of dredged material. The southern part of the peninsula formed by the East Coast Canal and the Hillsboro Canal was designated by the Florida Inland Navigational District (FIND) as spoils area #702 and put at the disposal of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1934. This enlargement to one hundred feet in width and a depth of eight feet was completed in 1935 and named the Intracoastal Waterway. In 1945 further enlarging brought the channel to its present dimensions of one hundred and twenty-five feet wide and twelve feet deep.

This designation as spoils area #702 was the first name this area had. However in 1930, events took place which were to give the place a name, which, though never official, remains in common use today. Al Capone, the notorious gangster, had purchased a residence at Palm Island in Miami which he occupied part time. In the spring of 1929, fearing assassination by the Bugs Moran Gang, Capone and his bodyguard had themselves arrested in Philadelphia for carrying concealed, or in fact, not quite concealed weapons. He was released in March 1930, and Governor Doyle Carlton of Florida, who was usually considered to lack leadership, acted in a prompt and decisive manner in ordering the sixty-seven county sheriffs to arrest Capone and escort him to the state border if he should appear anywhere in Florida.

Although Capone's lawyers quickly established his legal rights of domicile, the police continued to harass him; arresting him several times during the spring of 1930. For several years federal authorities tried to obtain enough evidence to indict him. It is logical that during the summer of 1930 he should try to find a secluded place to live. He planned to build a $250,000 house on the peninsula. This was an ideal location for his purposes, being directly across the Hillsboro Canal from the gambling casino that is today Riverview Restaurant. A 1930 article in the Lake Worth Herald states that the Boca Raton Town Council frustrated his attempt to buy the land by requiring that he build an access road. Perusal of several years of the Boca Raton Town Council Minutes of this era reveal that at the meeting of June 30, 1931 Clarence H. Geist, the owner, petitioned that all unnamed and unpaved roads in the area, west of the
Florida East Coast Canal, south of Camino Real, and east of Federal Highway be closed. The Council resolved to relinquish any and all rights to said streets. This ordinance would have effectively prevented him from building any access road.

In 1928 Clarence H. Geist bought the Cloister Inn. He poured eight million dollars into renovations, and in 1930 reopened it as the Boca Raton Club. Obviously there was great concern about the possibility of having Al Capone for a neighbor as revealed in the following correspondence between the Boca Raton Club and the City of Boca Raton.

It might also have some effect on the cases which are still pending against him in Miami. I think that you will agree with me that this is not a very good reason for broadcasting to the world that he has purchased a tract of land at Boca Raton. Of course, we want to follow this matter closely and leave no stone unturned to keep him out and devise ways and means of checkmating anyone who is going to cause trouble for us on the so-called Capone property.

If he is going to have a home furnished by the Government for a few years he is not going to build here, or anywhere else. Otherwise I look for some activity this winter.

Capone's home was furnished by the Government as he was sent to Federal Prison in 1932. One wouldn't expect to find Capone's name on any legal document since he "...unlike his brother Ralph, never maintained a bank account, or acquired property under his own name, endorsed no checks, signed no receipts and paid cash for everything." Though it was thirty-one years later that the area became an island, it was called Capone Island more frequently than the more accurate designation, Capone Tract.

In the late Fifties, the Arvida Corporation began construction of the Royal Palm Yacht and Country Club community which occupied the land extending north to Camino Real. Part of this development was to dredge a canal linking the Intracoastal Waterway and the Hillsboro Canal. This was completed in 1961 and named Royal Palm Waterway. The area became an island for the first time.

FIND turned the island over to the Internal Improvement Fund after the 1965 Legislature had decreed that unused spoils areas should be used for recreational purposes. It was too small to be made a State Park. It was also suggested it be made a field laboratory for studies of beach erosion; nothing came of this idea. The next plan was to turn it over to Broward County for them to develop a park.

"The site was the center of a battle from 1954-1965 between Palm Beach and Broward County over which county should obtain title to the land. Broward won, but land unused as yet." I can find little documentation of this
"battle", however, historic county designations seem to show good reasons for such a disagreement. On July 21, 1821 Andrew Johnson divided Florida into two sections, all land east of the Suwanee River, including the Keys, was in St. Johns County. On December 29, 1824 the area north and east of the Hillsboro River and Inlet became Mosquito County. This became St. Lucia County in 1844, then Brevard in 1885, then Dade County.31

In 1909 Palm Beach County was created out of the northern part of Dade County, this included all the northern part of the present Broward County. In 1913 Tom Bryan was sent to Tallahassee to lobby for the creation of Broward County which actually took place on October 1, 1915. He was also instrumental in having it named for the former governor, Napoleon Bonapart Broward, who had hired Tom's brother, Reed Bryan, to build dredges. Broward never knew of this honor, having died in 1912. In determining boundaries, both sides agreed to let the Hillsboro Canal separate the two counties in the East. Bryan argued that the Hillsboro Canal should become the county line all the way to Lake Okeechobee, but Palm Beach insisted the line continue due West across the Everglades.32 This would tend to support Palm Beach County's claim to the Island but the matter was settled by the Special Act of 1965 previously quoted in this paper. If the border Bryan was lobbying for had been approved, Palm Beach County would have lost approximately one third of its total territory and more than one half of its Everglades agricultural area, so perhaps they were philosophical about Broward County gaining a mere fifty-five acre portion in the east.

Broward County continued planning a park. It was thought a bridge to the Island was a necessity. One idea was to have a fixed bridge to the south-western side, which would eliminate all through boat traffic on the Hillsboro side of the Island. This was to be compensated by deepening and enlarging the Royal Palm Waterway. The Royal Palm Yacht and Country Club Homeowners Association made so many objections and stipulations that a substitute plan for building a new 120-foot-wide canal on Broward County property was studied. Permission from three government agencies would be necessary; the owners, Florida Internal Improvement Fund, and the two Federal agencies that control navigation and waterways, the U.S. Coast Guard and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. To do this would have left an island 50 feet by 2,300 feet between the two canals.33 One hopes the ludicrousness of this became apparent quickly.

The Broward County Commissioners sent an engineer to Juno Beach to investigate the possibility of buying the antique turn bridge that was being replaced there. This type of bridge was common in the county in earlier days, but except for the Eleventh Street Bridge over the New River in Fort Lauderdale, had all been replaced.34

Many local residents of Deerfield Beach and Boca Raton who lived near the island formed an organization called the Society for the Preservation of Capone Island. They did not want a park or any other kind of development and they pointed out that, since the
The last spoils had been dumped in the 1930s or '40s, plant and animal life had become established and flourished. It was one of the few wilderness areas close to the ocean remaining in north Broward County; many sea birds, both migratory and seasonal used it as a roosting and feeding place. In addition, there were other birds who nested there and animals such as grey foxes, raccoons, armadillos, and gopher tortoises had established homes there. The gopher tortoise is listed as a threatened species by the Florida Committee on Rare and Endangered Plants and Animals. Deep dry sandy soil is needed for their burrows which may be over twelve feet deep and thirty-two feet long. Many other species share the burrow, often to escape the heat of the day. The eggs and baby turtles have many predators, including raccoons and birds; the adult's only enemy is man from hunting and habitat destruction; the developers also preferring the high dry ground.

The members of The Society for the Preservation of Capone Island collected money to print and mail anti-park literature to residents of the area. They gathered signatures on petitions sent to city, county, and state officials. A Boca Raton lawyer acted as legal counsel and led the organization during several of its rebirths. Opposition to park construction seemed to have the desired effect. Some county officials questioned why the Parks Department should spend money developing a park that people didn't want since the county already owned land designated for park construction, in areas where people wanted and needed parks. Nothing would be done about this park planning for months, then the state would remind the county that they had had the land for some years with no construction taking place.

Another form of opposition to park development came from the developer, Schine Enterprises Inc., which claimed it had held an option on this tract since 1952. The company said that in 1966, when FIND transferred the land to the State Parks Department, it exercised its option by sending FIND a check for one dollar. Schine also said it had previously turned down an offer of $100,000 for its right of first refusal. Schine Enterprises Inc. filed suit in Leon County Circuit Court against various state and county officials and departments including Florida Atlantic University. The suit was dismissed on January 23, 1973, and though Schine Enterprises said it would appeal, apparently it did not.

At the time of the transfer of the island from FIND to the Parks Department, Florida Atlantic University had obtained an option on five acres to build an ocean engineering research facility. This option was never exercised, due to lack of funds. They have now relinquished this option and have obtained some acreage north of the Gumbo Limbo Nature Center between A1A and the Intracoastal Waterway in Boca Raton. The Ocean Engineering Department's plans included piping in seawater from the ocean, so this new site would seem to be more suitable for their purposes, not to mention its greater accessibility as a non-island location.

Various means of access to the island continued to be proposed, they included a foot bridge, ferry boat, and even a
ski lift from a nearby parking lot. In 1974 the county came up with an extensive development plan that included docking space for 100 boats, 275 camping sites, an activities building, swimming and canoe areas (both within the island, not in the surrounding canals), and a bike path around the perimeter. This would have meant virtual destruction of the entire vegetation and habitat. The local branch of The Audition Society joined with The Society for the Preservation of Capone Island in recommending that the island be left in its present state as a bird and wildlife sanctuary.

In 1977 the Florida Department of Natural Resources complained that the county had held the island for eight years and produced nothing. The county Parks Department decided to plan a nature study area for the island. They came up with a three year, $630,000 plan which was less than fifteen percent of the five to six million dollar amount previously considered necessary. Most of the members of the Society for the Preservation of Capone Island decided not to fight the county any longer, although they did make application to have the island designated an Urban Wilderness Area, which was achieved in 1982, and hopefully will prevent future overdevelopment of the park.

Some City of Deerfield Beach officials thought that the city should have the park, since they were responsible for police and fire protection, but lack of funds, more than county objection, seemed to prevent this. By this time the name Deerfield Island had come into official usage although much of the public and the press, as they do today, continued to call it Capone Island. In 1978 the City Commissioners of Deerfield Beach requested that the park be named in honor of Barney Chalker, Sr. who had been either mayor or commissioner of Deerfield Beach for twenty years. It was recent Broward County policy not to name parks for people. Some quite descriptive and imaginative names for county parks had been given. Deerfield Island Park, though admittedly descriptive is certainly unimaginative.

Various scout groups, especially Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts had camped on the island for many years. They had removed some of the undesirable plant species, especially Brazilian pepper, Schinus terebinthifolius and replanted native species. They were very anxious not to lose their camp site. When the county finally started to develop the Nature Park, they agreed to let the scouts continue camping and reforestation.

The plans that were finally acted upon consisted of building a Managers residence and office, restrooms, a picnic shelter seating forty or fifty people, and about ten picnic sites with grills. In addition a floating dock with spaces to dock ten boats was planned. Two trails were laid out starting from a double kiosk, which contained information and maps for self-guided tours. The longer trail, The Mangrove Trail included a 1600 foot boardwalk through the mangrove swamp which occupied about eight acres of the western portion of the island. The other trail, The Coquina Trail, so named for the large amount of coquina rock on it, made a circular tour of the eastern half of
the island, with a lookout over the Intracoastal Waterway.

The county was fortunate to have use of CETA (Comprehensive Employment Training Act) funds and labor for all of this construction. Materials and workers had to be brought to the site by barge. There was no electricity and pilings to support the boardwalk had to be driven six feet into the mud by a gasoline powered pile driver. The chief naturalist supervised the construction, insuring as little destruction as possible of trees and insisting that the boardwalk not go in straight lines and right angles thus producing more esthetic results. Except for the docks, construction was completed in 1979. The Florida Boating Improvement Program gave $100,000 for construction of the docks. Deerfield Island Park was officially opened and dedicated on September 15, 1980.44

The first Park Manager didn't occupy the residence. He had teen-age daughters who felt that living on an island would interfere with their social life. A year later, the present park manager was appointed, and he and his wife occupy the house that had been built for that purpose. The park boat uses the Riverview Restaurant dock at present, but a permanent facility will be built next to the restaurant on land owned by the city.

The manager and his staff of three rangers have done much to overcome neighbors' resentment. Transportation on the park boat has been provided for the public twice a month for guided nature tours. In addition, the manager invites groups of the residents to picnic luncheons. Scouts continue to camp on a regular basis, in an area in the northern part of the island; they usually arrive in their own canoes. School groups come regularly, spend the day learning about Florida's ecology, and enjoying themselves in the woods. Garden clubs and many other groups come for picnics and nature study.

There has been favorable publicity by the various local newspapers. In fact, the publicity has been more widespread than one would expect. John Platero, after visiting his friend, the Park Manager, submitted an article about Deerfield Island Park to the Associated Press. That article has appeared in Tampa, Florida, and Monroe, Wisconsin, and in other newspapers in the United States. A few months ago, a couple from France visited the Park and told the manager the article had appeared in their local paper.

Since more than half of the island was covered by spoils material exotic pest type vegetation is prevalent. The
Australian pine, *Casuarina equisetifolia* is not the problem here that it is on beaches and in the Everglades, where it interferes with the nesting of sea turtles and alligators, however, the thick mat of needle-like leaves it produces inhibits the growth of some native species. In addition, after thirty or forty years the wood becomes brittle, and it is feared that the flying wood could do much damage in a hurricane. On the island, these trees serve as roosting places for the hundreds of turkey vultures that winter on the island.

It is the Brazilian pepper that is so hard to control all over Southern Florida. This plant was first introduced into Florida as an ornamental shrub. It was commonly called Florida holly; it is not a holly but a member of the poison ivy family, which frequently causes skin rashes and respiratory problems. It supposedly did not escape from cultivation until the late 1950s, and it is unbelievable how widespread this fast growing pest has become. Like many introduced species, it has no natural enemies, and it takes over large areas, eliminating native species on which the wildlife are dependent for food and shelter. The park staff have worked diligently on this eradication, but it is never ending.47

It is interesting to speculate on the future of the park. Hopefully, the officials will always be dedicated to preserving this "bit" of nature which is so heavily surrounded by urban development. Perhaps the lowly gopher tortoise will be the ultimate winner in this long struggle over a fifty-five acre pie-shaped island. In 1983, the Florida Game and Fish Commission declared Deerfield Island to be an official gopher tortoise refuge.48

NOTES

5. Special Acts of 1965 (Florida Statutes) II 1, Chaps. 1232-1594.

An interesting though possibly irrelevant sidelight on this subject of spelling: A Florida historian, Frederick W. Dau, in a list of the Forts of Florida "Fort Foster on Hillsboro River northeast of Tampa County Hillsboro." *Florida Old and New*, 228.


12. Frederick W. Dau, Florida Old and New, 249.
14. Frederick W. Dau, Florida Old and New, 249.
15. Ibid., 62-63.
Luther J. Carter, The Florida Experience, 63.
Samuel Proctor, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, 222-223.
17. Ibid. 213.
22. Capone's lawyers were considered to be mobster lawyers, however, after Capone's death, two of them, Vincent Giblin and J. Fritz Gordon became Dade County Circuit Court judges. Giblin narrowly missed election to the Florida Supreme Court. See Helen Muir, Miami U.S.A., (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1953).
25. Gordon B. Anderson (Gen. Manager, Boca Raton Club) letter to James B. Sullivan (Budget Officer, City of Boca Raton), Aug. 8, 1930.
26. Ibid., Aug. 12, 1930.
kathryn Abbey Hanna, Florida Land of Change, 402.
Georgiana Kjeralff, Tales of Old Brevard, 37.
32. Stuart McIver, Fort Lauderdale and Broward County, 64-65.
Gopher Tortoise Information Sheet, Broward County Parks and Recreation, June 1985.

Ken Ketlehut (Manager, Deerfield Island Park), Interview, June 1985.