

# JOURNAL OF FLORIDA STUDIES

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### **Preface: Travel and *Travels***

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It is a little appreciated fact that when William Bartram purchased land in Florida, he bought near a road. In 1766 he settled on the east bank of the St. Johns, on Little Florence Cove, just south of the present-day Highway 16 bridge. He had worked most of the early 1760s as a trader, on the Cape Fear River in eastern North Carolina, and before that mentored under his father John Bartram—a successful farmer and the self-taught "Botanist to the King." With Florida having fallen into British hands following the Seven Years (or French-Indian) War, the two Bartrams explored the St. Johns from its mouth to its swampy headwaters. After their Winter 1765-66 trip, John returned to Philadelphia. William stayed. His tract was small by comparison, a modest 500 acres, dwarfed by the speculative purchases of his far wealthier planter-friends.

In 1766, the British colony of East Florida was to be the next big thing. The subtropical setting, alongside contiguous English-speaking colonies, held potential for immensely profitable Caribbean staple crops like rice and indigo. Billy Bartram, in his thirties and still unfocused professionally, would try his hand as a planter. John, while recuperating in Charleston during his return home, sent down supplies and a half dozen slaves (including an expectant mother and a three or four year old boy). But the Florida plantation did not suit William, physically or temperamentally. This was not paradise; he pulled up stakes within a year. Charleston friend Henry Laurens, later president of the Continental Congress and then claimant to two hundred thousand acres upriver, described the woebegone William Bartram reduced to penury, in "imperfect health," body and spirit dampened. Based largely upon Laurens' report, Bartram

scholars often ask: *why did he settle on such a poor piece of land?*

Maybe it was the road. From near the site of Bartram's property today, traffic still rumbles over Shands Bridge. The territorial capital, St. Augustine, was twelve miles away; an overland trek from the river avoided the dangerous Matanzas shoals, off the Atlantic. Bartram's tract sat just a short jaunt downstream from Fort Picolata, historically a gateway to the Florida interior. San Francisco de Pupa, terminus for the road to Tallahassee, guarded the river's west bank. William Bartram, a former trader, understood commercial opportunities—despite our perception of him as a vagabond or flake. He showed many talents over the course of his long, eight-decade career; we now know him as an artist, author, naturalist, "plantsman" (or horticulturalist) and astute observer of Native American life. We know him as the author of the classic *Travels*, a 1791 book with a much longer title that chronicled his 1773-77 tour through the American South—from North Carolina to Florida, and from the coast of Georgia to the Mississippi River. If William Bartram understood

one thing, it was the value of a good road.

"Travel and *Travels*," Issue 4 of the *Journal of Florida Studies* takes mobility as its theme. Inspired by the 250th anniversary of John and William's tour of the St. Johns, in Winter 1765-66, this two-part special issue explores: (1) the world of William Bartram and (2) Florida as a continued site of travel and exploration. Part One, the December 2015 issue you now read on your monitor or phone or tablet, focuses on *Travels*, with selections directly related to Bartram and his world. The range of interests is every bit as broad as those of our artist-author-naturalist-ethnographer friend.

Eric Breitenbach shares clips from his Bartram documentary currently in progress, while Tom Doran examines the rhetoric of Bartram's descriptions of non-human animals. Karen Bearor, Shelbey Rosengarten, and Elizabeth Athens together deepen our understanding of Bartram as an artist. Matthew Jennings guides us through recent scholarship in Native American studies, while Jacob Greene provides us with a timely media analysis of the visual rhetoric of sinkholes.

Herpetologist, Richard Franz, shares field notes from recent explorations along the Ft. Gates Ferry Road in Putnam County. Practical issues of creating a Bartram Trail in Putnam County are shared by Sam Carr and Dean Campbell in text and video.

Our photo portfolio, "Florida First Contact," expertly curated by Alison Nordström, presents the work of seven photographers who encounter Florida for the first time. Bartram's own encounter with Florida has long been an inspiration to poets, and we are happy to include tributes in verse by Lola Haskins, Jesse Graves, and William Logan. Michael Wiley, finally, offers the truly unexpected – "Hardboiled Travels with Bill Bartram," written from the point of view Bartram's native guide—in the style of the hardboiled detective novel.

In March 2016, keep on the lookout for Part Two of this special issue, "Travel and *Travels*." The second half will explore Florida as a destination or setting for discovery. Fittingly, given the eighteenth-century exchange of Havana for Florida, we include reflections by Cuban American authors Manuel Cachán, Albert Lopez (writing on José Martí) and Chantel Acevedo,

all of whom have southern ties. The photo portfolio will present the work of Miami-based photographer, Maria Martinez-Cañas. Jeanne and Peter Meinke take us from Tampa Bay to Poland, Cathy Salustri journeys with Zora Neale Hurston and Stetson Kennedy down Florida's blue highways, and Heidi Hutner explores the Jewish migration to Fort Lauderdale. Gregory Specter examines Harriet Beecher's Stowe's presence in the state, while Elizabeth Powers provides us with new insights into post-Civil War Florida travel guides. The second part of "Travel and *Travels*" will also feature more poetry, with work by Debora Greger, Marty Williams, and a special pairing from long-time Anhinga Press editor Rick Campbell. Other surprises await.

As guest editor of the *JFS*, I have immensely enjoyed the ride. A long myth about William Bartram is that of the solitary pilgrim, who explored the world alone. Such was not the case. Bartram relied upon a thriving network of scientific colleagues, friends and companions, family, natives, and African Americans. So too has this double issue come with collaboration. Particular thanks go to Casey Blanton, for trusting me with

her journal, and to USF St. Petersburg Masters of Liberal Arts student Josh Silvis, for the hard work of editing and formatting. Florida has been my adopted home since 2001. My hope is that "Travel and *Travels*" leads you down new backroads and byways, mapped in the words and images of this double issue. Along the way who knows what sites you will see—or what people you will meet?