



March 2023 Newsletter

What We Found Out about Angola: Laboratory Results for the Early 19th-century Maroon Community

By Uzi Baram

This article is Part II of a two-part feature about community activism and the archaeology of Manatee Mineral Spring. This article originally appeared in the 2022 issue of the magazine *Adventures in Florida Archaeology* published by the Florida Historical Society Archaeological Institute ([link](#)).

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ADVENTURES IN FLORIDA ARCHAEOLOGY



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CUBAN CHUG PROJECT
(VESSEL #006 216)
VESSEL no. 6
24 NOV 2021



**WHAT WE
FOUND OUT
ABOUT ANGOLA**



FLORIDA HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

ON THE COVER

A sample of the artifacts pictured in this issue of *Adventures in Florida Archaeology* reflect the exciting diversity of sites, time periods, and cultures being studied by Florida archaeologists.

BACK COVER

The skeleton of a dog is among the remarkable remains helping to reconstruct the Angola community in south Florida.



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WHAT WE FOUND OUT AB



Laboratory Results for the Early 19th-century Maroon Community

UZI BARAM

From Legend to History

Until recently, the history of the City of Bradenton—with a population now exceeding 60,000—started in the 1840s. The Indigenous history is ancient, but the Spanish *entrada* in Florida disrupted settlements and communities. Seminole history thus becomes incorporated through the Armed Occupation Act of 1842, when Anglo-American pioneers came to the Manatee River to take Native lands and start settlements that grew over the decades. Local history books relate tales of indigenous Native Americans on the Singing River, the exploits of Hernando de Soto, the battles of the 19th-century Seminole Wars, and of forts and a castle.

A nearly forgotten chapter in this history is archived in a 1973 presentation by Bradenton lawyer Dewey Dye Jr., who spoke on the maritime history of the region. A transcription of a speech to the Manatee County

Historical Society includes mention of Angola, a name culled from the 1828 Spanish Law Claims Commission. In a 1990 publication, historian Canter Brown Jr. expanded on the history of Angola. Sarasota community scholar Vickie Oldham sought to find the exact location of that haven of liberty. I joined the interdisciplinary research team “Looking for Angola” as an archaeologist, dedicated to community-based research.

After several years of research and only a few weekends of volunteer excavations, I had assembled archival, geographic, and material evidence to declare success for “Looking for Angola.”¹ This community is an important chapter in the history of the freedom-seekers. It is a complicated past, with broad strokes that paint Spanish *La Florida* as a haven from slavery, famously at Fort Mose, and then at a British fort on Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River. Although a US naval engagement in July 1816 destroyed the fort

OUT ANGOLA



and killed hundreds of maroons and Native Americans, many escaped to Billy Bowlegs' town on the Suwannee River. In April 1818, Andrew Jackson led a raid into Spanish territory that caused refugees from the Battle of Suwannee to escape to Tampa Bay, where they joined others already at Angola on the Manatee River, swelling the number of residents to more than 700. They lived in liberty until summer 1821, when a slave raid destroyed the community. Hundreds of people were captured, but many escaped to the Florida interior or the British Bahamas, where their descendants continue to live.

In summer 2018 and 2019, an Angola descendant living in Bradenton organized relatives and friends to participate in a Back to Angola Festival. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented a festival in summer 2020. Throughout the project, the research team partnered with local residents and descendants to ensure the archaeology was meaningfully addressing heritage concerns and achievements. The celebration at the Manatee Mineral Spring felt like the culmination of the public anthropology program—descendants walking where their ancestors once found liberty.

Thanks to the efforts of Sherry Robinson Svekis of Reflections of Manatee, in 2019 the National Park

Service “Network to Freedom” initiative recognized Manatee Mineral Spring as part of the Underground Railroad. But that was all we could say: there was a maroon community by the spring on the south side of the Manatee River in Bradenton. A location. Not all of the community, but a part of it. That insight was significant, but told us little about the lives of the people of Angola. It seemed that research would have to wait.



LEFT: Because pottery styles have changed over time, ceramic sherds are useful in helping to date an archaeological site.

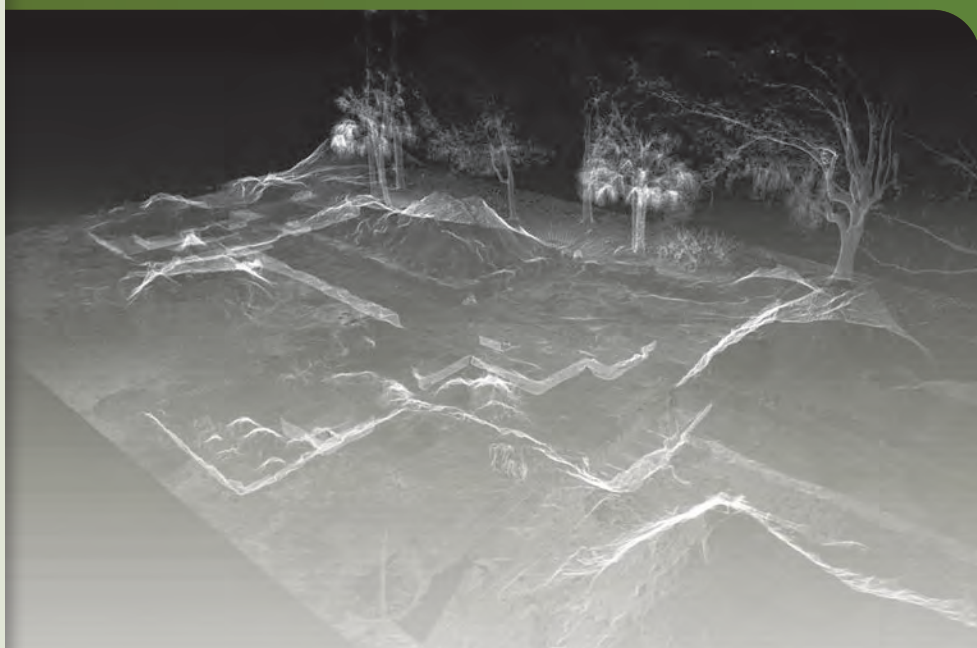


CENTER: An aerial view shows the excavations by the south side of the Manatee River. Courtesy of Kimley-Horn



RIGHT: Students research artifacts at the New College Public Archaeology Lab. Except as noted, all photos and images are courtesy of Uzi Baram.

S **RIGHT:** A 3D scan of the excavations. Extensive excavations to the water table revealed multiple landscapes, including the early 19th-century marronage of Angola; the 1840s village of Manatee to 1850s Branch Fort; late 19th- to early 20th-century growth of Manatee into Bradenton; and leveling the surface for development and a park for the mid 20th to early 21st century. Courtesy of Laura Harrison, Access 3D Lab



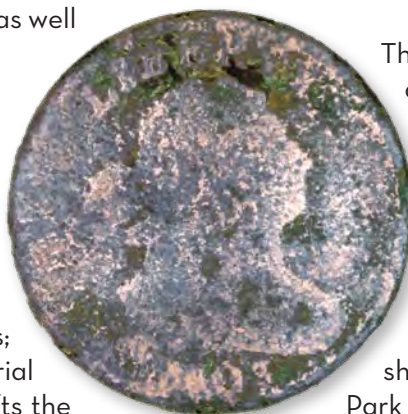
In April 2019, news that Bradenton’s Riverwalk entertainment district would expand to the Manatee Mineral Spring Park led to a community-based effort organized by Svekis that enabled excavations in January 2020. Svekis also wrote a grant to the Florida Division of Historical Resources for laboratory analysis of the findings. Lab work now interprets the daily lives of the Angola maroons from the 1770s to the community’s destruction in 1821. Angola no longer is a legend; rather, the history and people are known by what they did while living by Manatee Mineral Spring as well as the spirit of their descendants.

The Lab Work: Belongings and Naming

A month of excavations in an urban context led to more than 35,000 items being recovered. The lab work included cataloging what archaeologists typically call artifacts; however, I insisted we examine the material culture as belongings. “Belongings” shifts the perspective from an object made by a person to things possessed by someone. Nearly all the belongings were manufactured—ceramics from factories, mass-produced metals, and machine-made bottles.

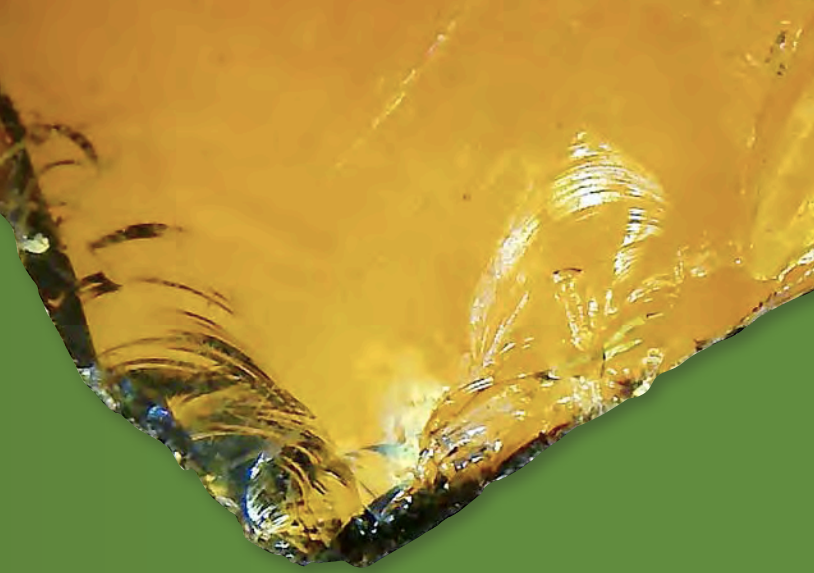
But thinking of them as belongings raises the question: to whom do they belong? In the consciousness-raising summer of 2020, when millions of people poured into streets in the United States and elsewhere in the world, with the imperative to remember the individuals and their stories—to say their names, the assemblages became connected to the names from the archives,


both those captured in 1821 and those who escaped to freedom in the Bahamas. Examples from the archives include the names of Sipsa, Nancy, Hector, Manuel, Mary, Peter, Cyrus, Ned, Queen, Dianna, Lewis, Charles, and more. Having collaborated with the descendants of Angola, as recent scholarship (Flewellen et al., 2021) makes clear: archaeology is antiracist, or it is nothing. Remembering these individuals, and their histories through their belongings, keeps the memories of their struggles and determination alive.




The extensive report about the excavations and lab work lays out details from recovered items that date from the late 18th century to the present. Most materials from Manatee Mineral Spring, located on the south side of the Manatee River, post-date the marronage. The excavations consisted of trenching that created an atypical shape for the Manatee Mineral Spring Park property (with two additional trenches), exposing an area 50 meters from north-south, and they ranged in width (east-west) from 2 meters for the north-south axis to 30 meters for the east-west trench. The two test trenches were both 10 meters going north-south by 2 meters going east-west. For the Power Property, a square, opened up by trenching, was 9 meters by 9 meters.

S **CENTER:** 1808 coin recovered at the Angola site excavations. The Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research identified the artifact.



 ABOVE: Microscope photograph of flaked glass sherd reveals the sharp edges.

 RIGHT: A well-preserved barrel well was a surprising find due to the site's proximity to a natural spring.

For the marronage, interpretations of the ephemeral discontinuous layer suggest multiple interesting features and findings. The contrast between the maroon landscape and the later periods, a thin and discontinuous layer versus the more robust layering for the Village of Manatee, is simply because the Angola community sought not to be seen. However, as archaeologists always note, people leave evidence, and if preservation allows, it can be recovered. The enigma is not the thin, discontinuous layer for the maroon landscape, but the absence of pre-Columbian remains. Until the 1930s, there was a mound nearby, as noted by the local collector Montague Talent. The material evidence for the layer being Angola comes from ceramics and a coin.


The recovery of an 1808 Draped Bust Half Cent (minted from 1800 to 1808)—which, according to Numismatic Guaranty Corporation, was “America’s unwanted coin”—offers a clear dating tool. This type of coin supports a hypothesis that it belonged to someone who had been enslaved in the United States—a very low value and unwanted coin, but easily a remembrance or even a good luck piece.

As is often the case in historical archaeology, the more robust material evidence comes from ceramics. Jean Louise Lammie, who identified the 1,801 recovered ceramic sherds and presented her findings in the research report, generated a histogram that shows spikes in the early 19th and the mid- to late-19th century. The early 19th century is the Angola period, historically from the 1770s to 1821. The ceramics are British mass-produced wares, solidifying insights from historian Nathaniel Millet (2013) that the maroons saw

themselves as British subjects and received support from British merchants and military officers while in Spanish *La Florida*. The excavations examined only one locale for Angola, which spread from the mouth of the Braden River across the south side of the Manatee River and south to Sarasota Bay. The area by the Manatee Mineral Spring probably was a lookout point since the river used to turn shallow at that point, and the maroons, after their experience at Prospect Bluff, would have feared US naval ships.

Other materials were clarified through laboratory examination. Mary Maisel examined the nearly 8,000 pieces of glass, separating them into soda-lime, lead, manganese, borosilicate, cobalt, milk glass, and unidentifiable. Of the many sherds of mass-produced glass, some had sharp edges, suggesting they had been knapped. Excavations at known 19th-century Seminole settlements have yielded such flaked glass, once used as sharp tools.

After examining materials from the early 19th-century layer, the archaeological research has revealed intriguing facets about the daily lives of the freedom-seeking people, revolving around water, rituals, and animal companions.

 **BELOW & RIGHT:** A G-shaped object and half a projectile point are enigmatic recoveries from the site.



Excavations revealed many features, and all but one were soil stains identified as postmolds—evidence of bygone structures, pits, or something else. The one well-preserved feature was a barrel well, which was surprising because the spring is nearby. Despite extensive research by Reflections of Manatee, no mention of a well for the village has been found.

The well is at the correct stratigraphic level for the maroon community. There were two posts on either side of the well, and debris was found on top of the well itself. A ceramic sherd embedded in the rust of a metal cube may offer support for the dating. The Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research is investigating the artifact.


Once cleaned out, fresh water gushed up the barrel. Remarkably, the well works as well in the 21st century as it did in the 19th century. However, why was there a well when a spring was nearby? Our hypotheses include health concerns, a sense that spring water might have been sacred, and easier protection for the water source.

Archaeologists have been recovering material insights into the lives of people of African heritage in North America for decades. Decolonizing thinking allowed an understanding of objects in context to represent diasporic lives. From our excavations, two buried items—one in each pit located in the center of a probable structure—are intriguing possibilities.

Professor Rosalyn Howard wrote in the research report, “...the underlying intentions of the ritual objects,

to attract spiritual power for offensive or defensive purposes, remained and their physical placement inside or outside the home had significant meaning.” As Howard noted, the G-shaped belonging could have been used for many purposes, including an ornament, buckle, or fastener, but its burial in a pit was intriguing. One cultural possibility is as a representation of the Yoruba *orisa* (deity) Ogun, a god of war and iron, who is honored by jewelry usually made of iron, but other metals could have substituted. Similarly, the flaked glass projectile point, while possibly broken, “could emit the spiritual energy of a good luck or love charm.” These insights remind us of the humanity for people having survived military clashes and living in a harsh environment, seeking the supernatural for support. Buried, these belongings remained in the ground until excavations recovered and honored them.



 BELOW: A wheel-thrown vessel, broken in three pieces, was the only non-mass produced ceramic find.




Among the finds, one item stunned the excavators and captivates those who hear about it: a complete dog burial in a rectangular wooden box. Only the soil stains remain of the box, but the skeleton, analyzed by Professor Diane Wallman, gives a clear sense of the canine.

The remains indicate the shoulder height as between 16–18 in (41–46 cm) high and the weight as 44–48 lbs (20–22 kg). Professor Wallman draws a size analogy to a border collie or Australian shepherd. Given modern, meaningful relationships with dogs, it is easy to imagine this dog, after loyalty to a person or group of people, being placed after death in a wooden box and carefully buried as a sign of respect. Archaeology rarely gives us emotional moments in time, but the excavations by Manatee Mineral Spring may offer such an opportunity.

The coin, ceramics, barrel well, and dog burial are fragments from the daily lives of the freedom-seekers. Inferences from the laboratory analysis offer several insights into the daily lives of the freedom-seeking peoples:

- Extensive use of British mass-produced goods;
- Seminole-style glass flaking;
- A robust agricultural community with livestock, pets, and marine resources; and
- A primary presence for the marronage by the Manatee Mineral Spring, with hamlets south of the Manatee River to Sarasota Bay.

 BELOW: A dog skeleton, approximately the size of a modern collie or shepherd breed, was among the finds.



In 2016, I worked with Digital Heritage Interactive to create a model for the Angola landscape, putting together elements from the small-scale excavations, archival research, and inferences on the time period. The landscape is available as a virtual world at “Commemorating a Bicentennial of Tragedy and Survival,” <http://tragedyandsurvival.timesifters.org>. Although the log cabins are too close together, the model has held up. The laboratory analysis has expanded the model to show the maroons with British mass-produced goods, connections to rituals and animal companions, and structures that facilitated years of liberty by the shores of the Manatee River. As archaeologists often say, there is much more research to be done, and as director of the New College Public Archaeology, I welcome researchers interested in continuing the program’s efforts with these materials. Continuing in the spirit of “Looking for Angola,” the research team took opportunities to share not only through public presentations, but also exhibits of the materials at the Mary Amelia Curry House at Reflections of Manatee, just meters from Manatee Mineral Spring (on display since June 2021); inclusion in the Museum of Florida History’s *Spirits of the Passage* exhibit; and the Community Gallery at the Ringling Museum of Art, opened as *From Legend to History: Archaeology of the Underground Railroad in our Backyard*.

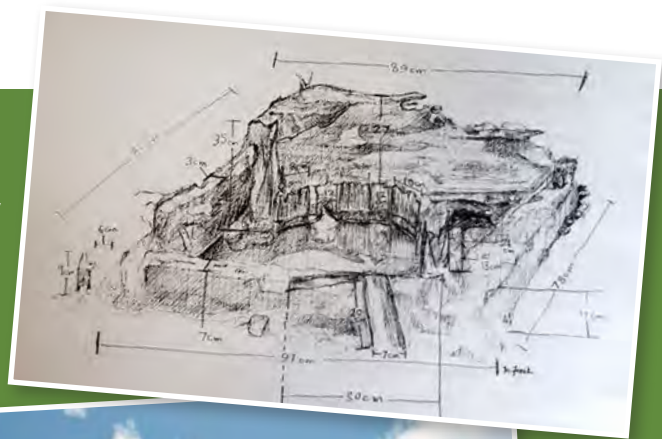
 LEFT: A ceramic in a metal cube was found on top of the barrel well.



ABOVE: An exhibit at Reflections of Manatee, Inc., provides a stratigraphic reconstruction of the Manatee Mineral Spring site over time.

RIGHT: A digital reconstruction of Angola suggests its possible appearance. Courtesy of Digital Heritage Interactive

RIGHT: An artist's rendering of the barrel well. Courtesy of Nicholas Frech



The Many Histories: A New Archive for Research

More than Angola, the excavations offer thousands of belongings from the Village of Manatee and its successor communities. In 2004, Renker Eich Parks Associates provided Reflections of Manatee, Inc., with a thorough report about archival materials for the Manatee Mineral Spring property. The documentary record had limitations; even the location of some of the houses of the early settlement was not clear. Historical archaeology is predicated on archaeological research offering different as well as additional insights into the past, and the excavations provided materials for a new archive to complement and expand insights from the documentary record. I welcome scholars to delve into these materials and to organize and analyze the belongings to illuminate the lives over the centuries by the spring. We have a new archive for the maroons and on the beginnings of Bradenton, a key to the social and material dynamics that set the foundation for what became Manatee and Sarasota counties.

Dr. Uzi Baram is professor of anthropology and founding director of the New College Public Archaeology Lab at New College of Florida in Sarasota.

Notes

¹ The 2014 report is filed with the Florida Master Site File, and the insight appears in peer-reviewed publications.

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