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Static Flowers:
Following William Bartram

by

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Abstract

Following the plot of William Bartram’s *Travels* through North Florida, this dissertation presents a multi-sited investigation of Florida’s rural modernities, illuminating contingent and accidental relationships between disparate social phenomena. Bartram’s *Travels* is a canonical text of Floridiana that can be read as an historical myth chartering the contemporary cultural production of Florida’s landscape. Testing its plot against the ethnographic realities in place today leads not to a problematization of the myth but rather a discovery of the structures of feeling at work in a provincial American setting: the dominant, residual, and emergent trends in the social construction and interpretation of a region. Bartram’s text becomes a found apparatus for an empirical critique. Borrowing on Bartram’s major themes, connections are traced between botany, history, floral art, farming, gardening, small towns, and tourism as sites of invention and imagination, as well as disjuncture and difference.
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Introduction

In 2002, I went home to follow the path of a stranger: William Bartram, the American naturalist whose pre-Revolutionary description of northern Florida partially inspired Coleridge’s image of Xanadu in “Kubla Khan.” Bartram was an early anthropologist in that he wrote extensively and sympathetically about the Native Americans he encountered throughout the Southeast. But he was first and foremost a botanist, collecting samples of unusual flora and writing about the landscapes in which they grew. His account of North Florida in colonial times is weirdly beautiful, and it is also intriguingly durable. Educated Floridians occasionally know of his work. Some of the places he describes can still be recognized today—in which case, they now bear commemorative plaques.

In between Bartram’s strange wilderness and the banal experience of Florida’s provincial modernities, there is of course a world of difference, but also a world of coincidence and possible connection. By following Bartram into places in Florida that I would not on my own consider important for study, I expected to illuminate sites that others too might have chosen to overlook. I wanted to juxtapose those sites, producing by implication a sort
of regional yet non-essentialized cross-section of North Florida invisible to local experience. I intended to evoke (in contrast to Bartram) the incoherence of place—how each place hangs together as one for the most part indirectly through strange circuits of the imagination relating it to what is vanishing or emergent rather than to what endures. Finally, I hoped to go home, see it from a new perspective, and set free the interplay of memory and affect.

Although the result of my investigations may seem to be a form of travel writing, I would like to complicate that observation with several important points. I have parodied Bartram, following his plan, his form, his objects of interest, and in some cases his style, so the result will inevitably seem to have been yet more travel writing. But I have always written with very different reasons in mind. Travel writing can be attacked as a genre complicit with colonialism (e.g. when it is a survey of unexplored territorial possessions), scientism (e.g. when it presumes to be objective reporting of simple facts), and consumerism (e.g. when it is a spectacle of leisure-time consumption designed to heighten escapist, vicarious pleasure). But no such purposes animated this research, which was designed instead to be in accord with the goals of multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1998), gathering up
portraits of ethnographically thin situations and activating unexpected sources of meaning between and among them.
Bartram’s Travels

William Bartram begins the chronicle of his Florida travels with this advice to his audience:

“We are, all of us, subject to crosses and disappointments, but more especially the traveller, and when they surprise us, we frequently become restless and impatient under them: but let us rely on Providence, and by studying and contemplating the works and power of the Creator, learn wisdom and understanding in the economy of nature, and be seriously attentive to the divine monitor within. Let us be obedient to the ruling powers in such things as regard human affairs, our duties to each other, and all creatures and concerns that are submitted to our care and control [sic]” (Bartram 1996:69).

In this way, Bartram succinctly summarizes the passions that motivated his journeys. Bartram, who has already weathered his share of the crosses and disappointments of which he refers, nevertheless expresses unwavering awe at the natural beauty he encounters during his expeditions. His writings tell of a spiritual journey as well a scientific one and have a poetic beauty that his father that his father, John Bartram, was not able to master in his own travelogues.

Bartram’s Florida trip is recorded in Section II of Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges or Creek Confederacy,
and the Country of the Choctaws (hereafter simply Travels) and begins not in Florida but in Georgia. After traveling on foot from Savannah (which Bartram spells Savanna), he boards a boat on the Altamaha River, which takes him to the town of Frederica, on St. Simons Island before continuing to its final destination, an Indian trading lodge near the top of the St. Johns River. While in Frederica, he visits James Spalding, an important trader in the area, but also takes time to explore the island and catalog its natural beauty before setting sail for Florida.

However, before Bartram’s vessel reaches its destination, they are hailed by a passing ship. The news is bad: the two trading posts on the St. Johns have been plundered by Indians, the traders barely escaping with their lives. Though everything at the upper store had been lost, the traders at the lower store, where Bartram was headed, had managed to salvage some items and hide them on a small island nearby. Among what was hidden was a trunk belonging to Bartram, which he had sent ahead so as to be able to travel more lightly.

The captain of Bartram’s boat decides to return to Frederica for further instructions, but Bartram is determined to continue his journey, and has the captain take him ashore, along with another passenger who is interested in sharing his adventures. Bartram hopes to secure his trunk,
which contains books and papers he is unwilling to lose. So Bartram is left on Little St. Simons Island, where he and his fellow traveler walk to a nearby fort. After arriving, his unnamed companion is tired and takes a nap (causing Bartram to suspect that he is “indolent” (Bartram 1996:75)), but Bartram immediately takes a walking tour of his surroundings.

The following day they are ferried across to Amelia Island in Florida, where they call on a Mr. Egan at the indigo plantation of Lord Edgemont. Egan, whom Bartram was encouraged to call upon by a contact in Frederica, indulges Bartram’s appetite for exploration by riding with him over much of the island. During the tour Bartram is fascinated by the Indian shell mounds, burial sites of the long defeated Ogeeche Indians, the first of many such mounds he will see on his Florida journey. Bartram notes the relatively low population of the islands here along the coast despite their fertility, and speculates that this may be due to the fact that much of the land is owned by just a few wealthy farmers and because the area is easily attacked by pirates.

From Amelia Island, Bartram sails with Egan and the unnamed companion to the St. Johns River. They also bring four “stout negro slaves,” in case they are needed to row the boat. At Fort George Sound, Egan shoots one of the pelicans they see feeding and brings it on board. Bartram examines the carcass and describes the bird in great detail. When evening
comes, they pitch a tent on the mainland, but have difficulty sleeping due to the "stings of musquitoes, the roaring of crocodiles, and the continual noise and restlessness of the sea fowl" (Bartram 1996:79), which he describes as completely covering the nearby trees. Bartram’s detailed description of the area dwells especially on the "Palmetto royal," the appearance and lifecycle of which he covers from sprout until they die of old age, when they decay on the ground after having been felled by their own great weight.
Amelia Island

Amelia Island is the northernmost stop on my trip. If you go any further north, you’ll find yourself in Georgia. The best way to drive there from Gainesville is to avoid the interstates, and conveniently, US 301 becomes A1A when it enters Nassau County. A1A goes right into Fernandina Beach, the only town of any size on Amelia Island. I join US 301 in Waldo, only ten or twelve miles from Gainesville. Waldo is a tiny town whose main draw these days is its flea market, but it once had a more prominent place on the Florida map. In fact, in 1883 Martin Johnson Heade writes to his friend E. J. Loomis of Washington D.C. that he was “about 2 weeks at Waldo;& I believe that’s about the only place in Florida where one can live comfortably at a reasonable price.” Later in the same letter, he goes on to say, “I got to Waldo by accident, but I don’t regret it. It is a healthful place, but not very attractive, but it’s a nice place for people who come for health & can’t afford the prices on the St. Johns” (Heade 1883).

US 301 also passes through Starke, which is known as the home of Florida’s electric chair. Probably not by coincidence, there seems to be a high law enforcement presence there. Bradford High School is on my route through town, and according to their marquee their mascot is the tornado,
which is amusing in itself, but given the town’s reputation, I wonder if they considered a mascot with an electrical theme, like a lightning bolt or a kilowatt.

Near Lawtey, a few miles down the road, there are several tourist traps – stores selling junk with shells, flamingoes, and Disney characters on them. Textile Town, one such establishment, has gone for irony in their advertising: their signs say such things as “Disney T-shirts, $9.95 – none higher!” “Ugly towels, nice restrooms!” and “Textile Town: if you can’t stop, wave!” The fruit-and-vegetable stands are becoming more frequent, too, and one place has a sign spelling “peaches” as “peaghes.” In the course of my travels, I have learned that “Indian River” refers to the preferable sort of oranges, peaches are from Georgia if their origin is worth mentioning at all, and “Silver Queen” refers to corn. In Bradford County, I also pass several billboards, with public service-minded messages like “Go to the church of your choice this Sunday, but by all means go!”

As soon as you cross I-95 on A1A, tourism-laced suburbia begins. I stop and get gas at one location just because they advertise “live sharks” at their attached gift shop. It turns out that these “live sharks” are on videocassette, which is being played on a monitor that is mounted over the most diverse display of stuffed animal shark species I’ve ever seen. The
bridge over the Amelia River takes you from the mainland to Fernandina Beach, which is a mix of tourist-oriented surf shops, gingerbread-y Victorian era homes, and expensive looking neighborhoods. The stretch of A1A that runs along the Atlantic coast of the island provides a comprehensive tour of every kind of pricey beachfront architecture imaginable, most of it quite new looking. One house is even lighthouse-shaped. Quite a few seem to be rentals or time-shares, based on the signage in their sandy front yards.

Fort Clinch State Park occupies the northern end of the island where Bartram came ashore. The park is huge – 1,121 acres, and once past the park gates it’s about a four mile drive to the park’s namesake. Fort Clinch, which according to the park’s brochure was named for General Duncan Lamont Clinch, a notable figure during the Seminole War in the 1830s, is located on the western end of the northern tip of the island. The pamphlet on the fort’s history that I pick up at the gift shop tells me that the fort was used in three different wars. It was built starting in 1847, and first used during the Civil War. The fort was taken by Federal troops in 1862 when General Robert E. Lee ordered a withdrawal. The fort was used again during the Spanish-American War in 1898. The fort was then abandoned until it and the 256 surrounding acres were purchased in 1935 by the state of Florida for use as a public park, which opened in 1938. However, the fort
was pressed into use one last time, during World War II, when it was a Coast
Guard communications and surveillance center, operated jointly with the
Army and Navy.

Access to the fort is gained through the gift shop, which ensures that
everyone pays the $2.00 entrance fee. The shop is cool and dark and a
welcome respite from the Florida summer. In exchange for the entrance fee,
the shop manager hands me a pamphlet containing a map of the fort and tells
me that there are two tour guides hanging around who will be able to answer
questions should I have any. I thank him and head out into the bright
noonday sun, which is absolutely blinding as it bounces off the white sand
trail that winds around a low grassy hill to the fort, a massive red brick
edifice with a tunnel-like opening. Inside is a large grassy area with a
flagpole in the center and old buildings, also dark red brick, scattered around
the edges. I briefly explore the jail, directly to the left of the entrance and
attached to the fort's wall, then head up the earthen ramp that allows access
to the top of the fort. Up here there is grass, a few old cannons, and a
pleasant sea breeze. Beyond the fort is the ocean, or actually Cumberland
Sound, which separates Florida from Georgia. A few men are fishing along
the beach, and I realize that I cannot wait to get out on the beach myself.
After enjoying the view for a few minutes, I head back down a set of stairs so that I make a quick tour of the rest of the fort and hit the beach.

But alas, it is not to be. I enter one of the fort’s freestanding buildings, only to find that one of the guides, an elderly gentleman in a replica Civil War uniform, and a group of three women are there. He’s telling them — well, now us, because he beckons for me to come in and join the group — about every item here in the room, which is quite a few because this is the one that was occupied by the Quartermaster. It has been populated with a number of period items, or replicas thereof, to give a better idea what it would have been like. Our guide picks up each item, and slowly explains what it is, and what it was used for. That’s if we’re lucky. Sometimes, he makes us guess, and he is happy to keep us guessing for quite a while before either one of us finally hits upon the right answer or he gives it to us. Once in the clutches of this guide, it is impossible to politely escape, as he will start firing questions at anyone who tries to edge toward the door.

Fortunately, for me he is more interested in the three other women — two sisters and their friend, all around forty, from Huntsville, Alabama.

I attempt to ask some questions of the guide, but my questions tend to be more about the fort’s present context rather than about daily life at the fort during the Civil War. I say this is unfortunate, because the guide has
chosen, or is perhaps required, to adopt the persona of a Civil War private and endeavors to only answer questions that such an individual would have been able to answer at the time. Never mind the irony of an eighty year old Civil War private – he was determined to be as authentic as possible in the role. He is a small man, a bit shorter than me, but he stands stiffly straight, and as he gives his monologue, his watery pale blue eyes bore into each of us in turn. Occasionally he calls for a volunteer to demonstrate the use of something. After a few times, we try declining, because some of his requests for volunteers are really just requests for a willing dupe for whatever lame joke he as in mind. But that only causes him to repeat, “I need a volunteer,” and wait until he has one.

Our little tour group is marched from the Quartermaster’s next door to the provisions area, then upstairs to the infirmary. All of this takes an extremely long time, and it’s oppressively hot in the brick buildings. The three women and I are sweating buckets and giving each other pensive glances. Our polite attempts to hurry this thing along go unheeded. At one point, the oldest sister takes advantage of a slight lull in the litany of objects and their uses and makes for the door. But our guide is nearer, and actually puts his arm across the doorway and tells us we’re not through yet. Despite
the fact that he is wearing a long-sleeved, high-collared woolen outfit, he
doesn’t seem to be perspiring at all.

Finally, we head out of that building. The women from Alabama go
right. I go left. Our guide, a few steps behind us since he had to lock the
door, follows them. I try not to run as I head for the safety of the buildings
along the far wall. My heart is actually pounding as I try to slip stealthily
between buildings to the exit without him noticing me and gathering me
back into the fold. My escape is well worth the cost of missing a truly
complete tour of Fort Clinch.

The beach on the north end of Amelia Island is also part of the park,
down another long winding paved road that forks off of the one to the fort.
The sand is extremely white, and littered with so many shells that they form
small “shell drifts” in places. The water is beautiful: green closer to the
shore where the waves rise up and crash on the beach, and a lovely blue
further out. I walk along the shore for a few hours, collecting shells as the
tide goes out. At one point, a middle-aged couple passes me, and the man
asks me, “What part of Yankeeland are you from?” I explain that I am a
Florida native now living in Houston, but back for a visit. He says that
usually only the Yankees are picking up stuff off the beach – Floridians
don’t bother. He adds that his wife isn’t originally from Florida, which is
why she’s collecting shark’s teeth. She opens her hand to reveal about a dozen or so of various sizes. I laugh, and explain that until recently I had only been to beaches on the Gulf, where there are few shells of any size, so this is a novel experience for me.

When I leave the beach, and the park, I take the long and winding Heckscher Drive, which as it passes through the islands is also part of A1A. It takes me along the length of Amelia Island: past the spiffy new beach houses in Fernandina Beach, through a densely wooded stretch that is much like the areas I traveled on the mainland, past a golf course and extensive spa and resort, and finally over the bridge just beyond American Beach that leads off the southern end of the island. Just south of Amelia are Big and Little Talbot Islands, both of which have their own beachside state parks as well as a few residences. After these islands, the signs of human habitation steadily increase, and it is less clear which island you are on, as they are often separated by marshy areas covered in plant life as well as threaded with small streams and inlets. The homes along this stretch are an interesting mix of old and new, under construction and needing renovation. It seems that the area is experiencing an increase in popularity and therefore property value.
As I get closer to the mainland, and to Jacksonville, industrial sites become more prevalent. I am surprised several times when rounding a bend in the road reveals some new metal behemoth squatting on the shore. Across a grassy marsh, a huge ocean liner, the *Wilhelm Somethingorother*, is visible at its dock. It looms between the trees as if it was trying to make it to the road but ran aground. I pass the Blount Island terminal of the Jacksonville Seaport (called Jaxport), some sort of gasoline storage facility comprised of a row of large white cylinders that completely fill the landscape, and a nuclear power plant, which had been visible earlier from far away across the water but then suddenly it is right there, looming over me. The massive tapering cylinders are startling in both their size and their lack of relationship to the landscape, appearing as they do in a large completely flat open field (surrounded, of course, by a very high, electrified fence). Then I am speeding back toward I-95 with a host of other vehicles in the afternoon rush.
Bartram's Travels

Three days after leaving Amelia Island, the group arrived at Cowford, or present-day Jacksonville. Bartram actually describes it as "the Cowford, a public ferry" (Bartram 1996:81) on the bank of the St. Johns, signifying that the place really didn't even seem like a town to him. He describes the river has being "above a mile wide" (1996:81), which seems a great over-estimation of the width of the river where I saw it in Jacksonville. This is probably the case, as Bartram is notoriously bad at reporting distances. Those who have attempted to re-construct his journey have had a very difficult time of it, because though the extreme detail of his descriptions make the places he visited quite recognizable, they are often nowhere near where he claimed they were in relation to other landmarks.

Bartram departs Cowford alone in a boat that Egan helps him locate. The young man who had accompanied him this far, remains behind. Bartram points out that the fellow was "stouter and hardier than myself" (1996:81), and likely not eager to face the probable hardships and dangers ahead despite his promise to accompany Bartram. Bartram states that he’s not disappointed at the loss of his traveling companion: indeed, he has had little good to say about the man up until this point and hasn’t even bothered
to refer to him by name. In fact, Bartram makes a sharp distinction between his own thirst for adventure and the interests of his former companion.

While his companion, whom he describes as a young mechanic, lacks any desire to do more than establish himself in some well inhabited area so that he might success fully ply his trade, Bartram, on the other hand justifies his wanderings in this way:

"Whilst I, continually impelled by a restless spirit of curiosity, in pursuit of new productions of nature, my chief happiness consisted of tracing and admiring the infinite power, majesty and perfection of the great Almighty Creator, and in the contemplation, that through divine aid and permission, I might be instrumental in discovering, and introducing into my native country, some original productions of nature, which might become useful to society" (Bartram 1996:81).
Jacksonville

Getting to downtown Jacksonville is easy enough, as long as you know whether you need to go north or south on I-95 when I-10 East ends. I have spent the past two hours on the stretch of I-10 that runs between Tallahassee and Jacksonville. It’s a long, fairly homogenous stretch of highway that cuts through the tree-dense landscape. The exits are few and, are sparsely colonized, with little more than a few gas stations or perhaps a fast food joint, which flash by quickly as you traverse the overpasses crossing the empty county roads. Until you reach Jacksonville, there isn’t much reason to distinguish one exit from another, except where 10 crosses I-75 in the nowhere-land ten miles north of Lake City. The road pulls me along until I approach suburban Jacksonville, where the traffic thickens and the city begins to appear, scattered on the edges of the road. Before I know it, the crush of drivers are jockeying for position as signs above us tell us that the end of I-10 is near, and I have a decision to make – or two decisions, actually. One is whether to head either north or south on I-95, which absorbs I-10’s traffic, or to take a last-minute exit and brave Jacksonville’s surface streets. The other is whether or not I want to risk a peek at my map
while surrounded by a teeming mass of automobiles all traveling at speeds in excess of 60 miles per hour.

In much of the U.S., interstates or any other highway with entrance and exit ramps passing through a major urban area are generally referred to as freeways, but I have never heard anyone in Florida use the term. Here they are always interstates, or if they’re not interstates, just plain old highways. I slip off I-10 at the last possible exit before the junction with I-95. I find myself in an area that would probably be considered “the wrong side of the tracks”: lots of boarded up buildings, and even the ones in use – which is maybe about half of them -- have badly peeling paint and faded, decaying signs.

This doesn’t look like a good area to pull off the road and belatedly consult my map, so I point my car in the direction I believe to be east and drive a while. I’m in luck, because before long I can see the skyscrapers of downtown looming over me and I can navigate by aiming my car at them. Eventually, I reach a street called Pearl Street, the name of which I remember from my one previous trip to downtown Jacksonville over ten years ago. I take Pearl until it dead-ends at a little gazebo overlooking the St. Johns, in the heart of downtown. There are several free parking meters
here, so I pull into a space and feed one. Four quarters buys me two hours of
parking time.

This part of the St. Johns is a relatively narrow spot in the river, but
it’s still quite expansive. The opposite shore is visible, but distant, and the
river is deep enough for pleasure boats to travel with ease. There are a
number of vessels motoring up and down the river on this Friday afternoon,
and more can be seen docked at intervals along the concrete-lined sides of
the river. The overall effect is quite picturesque, and many people are
walking along the sidewalk that lines the river or leaning on the railing that
separates it from the water, admiring the view.

I set out to find the sign commemorating the location of historic Cow-
ford, the hamlet that existed at this location at the time of William Bartram’s
visit to this area. It was so named because the location, as the narrowest
point of the river, was a good place to take cows across. Looking at what I
see lying just beyond the iron handrails that line the riverside walkway I am
standing on, it seems unlikely that cows strolled from bank to bank at this
location. Maybe they were ferried across, or perhaps cows are better
swimmers than I think they would be.

Supposedly the Cow-ford sign is somewhere downtown, but I don’t
know its coordinates. I take the walkway along the river past the Times-
Union Center, which I have parked beside, to the Landing, Jacksonville’s downtown dining and shopping mecca, situated on the river’s edge. I don’t have any statistics for its financial performance, but there are plenty of people strolling around inside when I arrive. The Landing looks pretty much like a shopping mall, but with a much heavier emphasis on dining than shopping, having a second floor and an outdoor riverfront patio almost exclusively devoted to dining venues. I stop in one of the shops just inside the main entrance of the Landing, called “The Jacksonville Experience.” I ask the teen at the counter if she knows where the Cow-ford marker is. She gives me an incredulous look, and says she has no idea what I am talking about.

Fortunately, there is also a policeman in the store at the time, and he is pretty sure he knows where it is. Actually, he says he thinks it is one of two places: either in the vicinity of the statue of Andrew Jackson which is next to the Landing, or a few blocks north and east of here. I tell him I’ve seen the Jackson statue, and there weren’t any other markers near it that I could see. So, he gives me the names of the streets that intersect at the other location – Bay and Newman – and the best walking directions to get there. As you get near the river in downtown Jacksonville, the roads break from the traditional downtown grid pattern, so I pay close attention. He also warns me that it
isn’t much to see, and probably not worth the trip. I tell him that’s okay: I need to find it for research rather than entertainment purposes. This for some reason piques the interest of the girl behind the counter, who remarks in a pronounced southern drawl that it seems pretty dedicated to actually go to this place just because it relates to some research project.

I set out on what will prove to be a long, sweaty hike, traveling first north on Laura Street, then east on Bay to Newman. But at that intersection, no Cow-ford sign is to be found. The City Hall Annex, which he mentioned, is on the corner as expected, and after inspecting the sidewalk along the front and side nearest the intersection, I approach the building to ask for assistance. An employee is taking a smoking break outside, so I ask her first. She’s never heard of Cow-ford, or of any sign marking it. She tells me that there’s another marker about a man who died in a burning building around 1900 nearby – could that be what I want? I tell her that Cow-ford predates that event by over 100 years, so it probably isn’t related. She suggests I go to the information desk inside, so I thank her and go through the heavily tinted doors of the depressingly institutional-looking brick building.

Just inside is a man who appears to be charged with guarding the door. I ask him about the sign, and he too has never heard of it. But he
gives me directions to the information desk, which is down an adjacent corridor near another entrance to the building. The woman at the information desk is on the phone when I arrive. I wait patiently, making the most of the air-conditioning, and when she’s done I tell her what I’m looking for. She also has never heard of it. I am not feeling encouraged, but I ask if maybe there’s some list of historic sites that she could check. She says no, then thinks about it and tells me to wait one moment. She goes into a small office to the left of her desk and comes out momentarily with an address: 128 E. Forsyth. “I think this is it,” she says. I thank her and head back out into the blazing sun.

I take a few wrong turns trying to get to Forsyth, several blocks away. When I find the address, it is just a small shop-front next to the Florida Theatre with no marker in sight. There is an area with a few shrubs and benches (too small to really be called a park) at the next intersection, so I take a look there, but it doesn’t have the marker either.

One of my wrong turns took me past the downtown branch of the library, so I head back there, confident that they will know the answer. As it turns out, the sign about the guy who died in 1900 is next to the library, but I am too hot, sweaty, and irritated at this point to care about reading it. Ironically, this is the first afternoon in weeks that it hasn’t rained on me.
At least the library is cool and dark. I ask at the circulation desk: they send me to the reference desk. The woman at the reference desk sends me to the “Floridiana” section, in a special glassed-in area. I present myself to the middle-aged man behind the desk there and repeat my question yet again. He thinks for a few seconds, then says he has no idea. He turns back to his computer. At first I think he might be doing a computerized information search or something, but after a while I realize he’s just ignoring me.

I am just suggesting that perhaps there might be a book, this being a library and all, which might hold the answer, when another librarian comes up and offers to help me. He remembers having seen the marker, he thinks, but not where. He describes a plaque with an eternal flame burning above it that he thinks is near City Hall. (I’ll later find that this is the Vietnam Memorial, a block from the Cow-ford sign.) But better yet, he actually is the sort of librarian who knows how to do a little research, and he quickly locates a book that gives a location for the sign. At last, hope! I thank him for his help with a degree of profuseness that he must have found puzzling.

When I at last spot the Cow-ford sign, it has been an hour and a half since I started looking for it – much longer than I ever expected this little jaunt to take. I take a photograph of the sign to remember it by, twisting my ankle as I step into a hole concealed by the long weed and grass that
surround the sign in the process. Then I trudge back to the Landing, feeling seriously dehydrated, but at least not disappointed.

I purchase a soda from Coastal Cookies and take it out to a bench on the waterfront. The area of the river right in front of the landing is a big boat parking lot for pleasure cruisers of all shapes and sizes. People are hanging out on some of the boats, while others have come ashore to grab a bite to eat at the Landing’s restaurants. The second floor offers a mall-style array of fast-food fare, with a somewhat international selection including Sbarro, Great Wraps and Cheesesteaks, Chinese Combo King, Pattaya Thai Express, Flames Charburger and Chicken, Bruce’s Homestyle Cookin’, Sakki’s Japan, An Apple a Day Deli, and the Cajun Big Easy. There’s also an arcade called Ostrich Landing, or maybe this refers to the upstairs area – at any rate there is a strange façade at the top of the escalators that features two bas-relief, eight feet tall ostriches next to the arcade. Outside, facing the water, are sit-down eateries: these include Ruby Tuesday, Vito’s Italian Café, Bourbon Street Raw Bar and Grill, St. Johns Tavern and Grill, The American Café, Legends Sports Bar, Dona Maria’s Cantina and Grill, Kabuki, and last but not least, Hooters. My bench is not far from the glass patio doors of Hooters, and inside I can see an entire family, including two
young children, enjoying a nice meal while being waited on by a girl in the
trademark skimpy orange shorts.

My drink restores my energy, and I walk the two waterfront blocks
back to where my car is in order to put a few more quarters in the meter. On
the way I pass a man, whom I remember seeing on the same bench as when I
passed this way on the way to the Landing two hours ago. He seems to be
having a conversation with himself in some language I can’t identify,
complete with wild hand gestures. He stops his strange tirade just long
enough to make kissy noises as I pass. After I feed the meter, I choose to
find another route back to the Landing.

I join the Friday-evening throngs browsing the shops indoors that line
the arced layout of the first floor. There are several empty storefronts, and
one women’s clothing store is having a going-out-of-business sale.
Looking at the shoppers around me, I notice that few of them carry shopping
bags: most seem to be only browsing. The people I see seem to be evenly
split between black and white, and tend to be either teens in small groups, or
older couples. While the Landing seems to be having no trouble attracting
people downtown, it seems that getting them to spend money is another
matter. I browse a few clothing stores and gift shops myself, but purchase
only a handful of Tart-n-Tinys from a coin operated machine on a vendor’s cart.

The Cummer Museum of Art is also downtown, but on the other side of the river from the Landing. Even with the aid of a map, I find myself struggling to navigate to the right spot. A road which I think is taking me in the correct direction suddenly feeds me onto a bridge and I find myself on the entirely wrong side of the river and have to figure out how to get back across again. For a while I totally lose track of which side of the river is which and find myself driving aimlessly, hoping that I am not driving right out of the downtown area altogether. The map’s two-dimensional representation turned out not to do much justice to the layered complexity of Jacksonville’s downtown, where bridges and overpasses overlap in such ways as to make streets seem to disappear on the map for long intervals. Eventually I get on the right street and find the Cummer and its adjacent parking lot. The museum is like many I’ve been to in Florida, which is not known for its historic art collections. The building and grounds are gorgeous, but the art on display, while not totally unappealing, is mostly forgettable. And unfortunately, the Martin Johnson Heade painting of a Florida landscape that I’ve come to see is not on display right now, perhaps because a large portion of the museum is taken up with a massive Toulouse-
Lautrec exhibit. To me, the best painting I see at the Cummer is the reproduction of one of Heade’s magnolias-on-velvet paintings printed on the cover of a sketchbook I purchase from the museum gift shop.
Bartram’s Travels

At the end of his first day of solo travel, Bartram reaches a plantation about eight miles upriver from Cow-ford, where he hopes to be able to repair his boat, which has sustained some wind damage. He sets up camp and spends a restful night despite stormy weather. The next morning, he hears a musket being fired, and before long, an Indian approaches his camp, bearing a slain turkey. The Indian bids Bartram a good morning in English, and Bartram responds in kind, offering him refreshment at his camp. It turns out that this Indian is employed as a hunter by a neighboring plantation, and he invites Bartram to pay a visit to his master, Mr. Marshall, who is happy to help Bartram repair his boat. Bartram spends the night at the plantation and leaves the next morning laden with ammunition and provisions that Marshall insists on giving him.

Bartram’s next stop, farther up the river, is at the plantation of a man he met on a previous visit to St. Augustine. This man is able to give him an update on the situation regarding the plundering of the trading posts. A meeting between the governor of East Florida and the chiefs of the Lower Creeks was successful in finding an amicable resolution between the two parties, and the traders were preparing to return to their posts. The incident
was allegedly sparked by a few headstrong young Seminole hunters who felt that the traders had mistreated them, which Bartram acknowledges was not at all unlikely.
St. Augustine

The drive from Gainesville to St. Augustine takes about two hours, most of it on two-lane state roads. The route passes through the “lake country” between Hawthorne and Interlachen, and on to Palatka and the St. Johns River. Beyond Palatka, the drive winds through an area where vegetable farming – mostly potatoes – takes place. Along the route are a number of small towns. Or are they towns? Some, like Spuds and Francis, seem to be only markers on the side of the road. There are no businesses or even intersections with other roads to represent them.

As I enter Putnam County, increasing numbers of handmade signs planted along the road advertise that “Jesus loves you” or simply state “Jesus.” One home even has a trio of ten-foot crosses in its side yard. The town of Hastings has a large sign with a portrait of Jesus that says in large letters “Jesus saves” and in small letters at the bottom, “Welcome to Hastings.” I also pass many vegetable stands. Some are semi-permanent wooden structures surrounded by signs spray-painted on raw plywood: “GA Peaches,” “Cold Watermelon,” “Sweet Corn.” One stand, not far outside of Palatka, has an additional spray-painted sign: “Crackhead Bring Back the Honor Box.” Other stands are more transient in nature. One man has
parked his pickup at a crossroads and advertises his merchandise by standing solemnly by a road sign, a cantaloupe held high above his head.

St. Augustine begins with a sprawl of suburbs, the first planned neighborhood displaying its landscaped signage a few miles before the I-95 overpass. State Road 312 takes me into the suburban business district, across US 1 and to Anastasia Boulevard, which also in some places is also A1A, and when it crosses the Intracoastal Waterway, it becomes Kings Boulevard, in the heart of the historic district of America’s Oldest City. The streets here are lined with cars. I am surprised that it is possible to drive on most of the historic streets. Traffic on these streets is quite light, as most people prefer to park and walk along the narrow sidewalks to better partake of the historical attractions and the shopping. I am also surprised how, without any apparent transition, it is possible to find that you have left the historic district and are instead in a residential area. I park on one of these residential side streets, feeling as if I am intruding upon the quiet neighborhoods, but seeing no signs posted that suggest that what I am doing is unwelcome.

Today I have a special mission in Old St. Augustine. I bypass the tours of the Oldest Store Museum, the Victorian House, and the Thomas Kinkade Gallery. My destination is the St. Augustine Historical Society’s
gallery, which adjoins the Oldest House (which of course also has tours and a gift shop of its own). I know that the Historical Society is lucky enough to possess a collection of oil sketches by artist Martin Johnson Heade, who lived in St. Augustine from 1883 until his death in 1904 (Stebbins 1999: 1, 8), and I am hoping that it will be possible to see them. Alas, the gallery proves to be a tiny, one-room affair, and the Heades are not on display. I ask the gallery attendant if he knows about the oil sketches, and if it would be possible to see them.

He does know about them, but they are packed in crates, so it isn’t possible for me to take a look at them. He says that they haven’t been on display for six years, not since they were in a traveling exhibit that toured a number of museums. He tells me that they are by far the most valuable pieces that the Historical Society has in its collection, a gift from a student of Martin Johnson Heade who donated all but one of unsigned sketches to the Historical Society in the 1940s (Eaton 1992: 8). However, in December they will come out of the crates at last, and be on display here in this small gallery.

I express disappointment in not being able to see these samples of Heade’s work here in St. Augustine, the only town the consummate traveler ever called home for more than two years in his adult life. He tells me that I
am not completely out of luck, as there are two Heade paintings on display at another historic home nearby. He gives me directions and I walk the few blocks to the de Pena-Peck House.

The tours of the de Pena-Peck House are run by an organization called the Women’s Exchange, which also has a small gift shop selling handmade items there. I stop in the gift shop and ask if it would be possible for me to see their Martin Johnson Heades. I tell them that I am a student, and that someone at the St. Augustine Historical Society suggested I come by. The two women say that yes, since I am a student, they don’t mind taking me to see the paintings. I follow the tour guide beyond a red velvet rope and up a dark wooden staircase.

The upstairs is dim. Several rooms open off a short hallway, and I can see dark antique furnishings and paintings beyond the open doors. The guide tells me that most of the paintings that are part of the de Pena-Peck estate are copies of Spanish paintings, but they are extremely good copies, dating back to the 18th century, and noteworthy in themselves. We stop at a door at the end of the hall. This one is closed, and locked, and the guide has to disable an alarm system before we can enter.

Inside are the Heade paintings. One, called simply “Orchid and Hummingbird,” was actually purchased with funds raised by the Women’s
Exchange. It is a small but gorgeous painting, full of the crisp detail and ethereal lighting for which Heade is known. A small hummingbird hovers over a few large orchid blooms, a misty jungle landscape all around. The other painting is a shocking contrast to the first. Unlike the hummingbird and orchid painting, this second work is darkened and dull, and there are abrasions that reveal bare canvas in a few places. It is a painting of a magnolia on velvet, one of many of this subject matter that Heade painted in his later years, but these magnolia blossoms are an unlikely shade of pink. This has led to some confusion as to what to call the painting, which is called either “Magnolias,” because clearly this is the type of flower represented despite the color, or “Lotuses,” because of the pink hue.

As far as I know, there are no other Heade paintings of imaginary pink magnolias, which would seem to make this an interesting and important work by the artist, so the sorry state of the painting is all the more shocking. I ask the guide why this painting has not been restored as the other painting has, and she says it is because as part of the de-Pena-Peck estate, it is forbidden for the work to leave the premises for any reason, even for restoration. They once had someone come to the painting and attempt to work on it, but the effort was ineffective and might even have caused further damage. Though the guide agrees with me that the intention of the estate
restriction was certainly not to prevent improvements that could only increase the value of the estate holding, she says that there is nothing they can do, at least for now.

In search of more information about Heade’s time in St. Augustine, I visit the St. Augustine Historical Society’s Research Library, located in yet another whitewashed historic home. I request their Heade files, and they present me with two large folders of material. Once contains articles on Heade clipped from newspapers and art magazine over the years. The other file is thicker, and contains several sub-folders. One folder contains copies of correspondence Heade sent to his friend, Professor E.J. Loomis in Washington between 1883 and 1888, years Heade lived in St. Augustine. (The originals reside in the Yale University Library.) Another contains correspondence with Wilma E. Davis, the woman who donated the oil sketches. There is also correspondence between the Historical Society and Stebbins of the MFA in Boston, the preeminent Heade scholar and author of the catalogue raisonné of Heade’s works; and correspondence between the Historical Society and the general public about their Heade paintings. Finally, there is a folder of photocopies of Heade’s contributions to the magazine *Forest and Stream* (later to become *Field and Stream*) which he
penned under the pseudonym Didymus, on topics such as "Taming Hummingbirds" (Stebbins 1999:1).

The librarian also brought me a stack of books in which Heade’s work was included, including a small softcover catalogue of the exhibition that had included the 24 oil sketches owned by the Historical Society. The color plates of the oil sketches reveal that these studies, though of course not as detailed as Heade’s finished work, are nonetheless exquisite. The uneven application of gesso and the arbitrary juxtapositions of the quickly but precisely rendered flowers are extremely compelling, even in reproduction.

All but one of these oil sketches were donated by Wilma E. Davis, the daughter of H.W. Davis, a successful local storeowner. In a letter to the Historical Society dated October 12, 1944, she states that Heade, a family friend, gave her the oil sketches in the hope that they would help her in her studies as an art student at Stetson University in nearby Deland, Florida. (Davis 1944) Heade invited her to visit his studio, where he showed her his work and some of the things in his garden from which he made sketches before giving her the studies. She says in the letter that the date of this visit must have been in the fall or winter of 1909 or 1910 – impossible as Heade died September 4, 1904 (Eaton 1992: 9). Nevertheless, the style of the unsigned studies is unmistakably Heade’s.
Heade had one of the longest careers of any American artist: he exhibited regularly for over 60 years. His mastery of a variety of subjects and styles also made him unique among his peers. However, he was not much of a critical or commercial success during his lifetime, and was in fact mostly forgotten until 1944, when Maxim Karolik, a major American art collector, and Robert McIntyre, head of the Macbeth Gallery, rediscovered Heade's "Thunder Storm on Narragansett Bay" in a New York area antiques store. The painting was included in the "Romantic Painting in America" show at the Museum of Modern Art (Feagin 1986). Since that time, the diverse works of this impressively productive and fiercely independent artist have become increasingly popular (Stebbins 1999:1-9). Currently, 632 of Heade's paintings have been catalogued, but he probably did a thousand or more (Smith-Favis 2002). This is due in part to the many different styles he mastered in his lifetime, and the fact that often his currrent mode of painting was not the one in vogue at the time (Stebbins 1999:1-9).

Martin Johnson Heade was born Martin Johnson Heed in Lumberville, Pennsylvania, in 1819. His father was a well-to-do farmer and lumber dealer who encouraged his son's art studies, even sending him to Italy. Heade also studied with Edward Hicks (best known for his painting "Peaceable Kingdom") in nearby Newton. Heade's early work shows the
influence of his teacher’s more primitive style, and consisted mainly of conventional portraits, genre scenes, and copies of famous works of art. In his 20s, he learned from his grandfather that the spelling of his family’s name had been changed, and he returned to the older spelling of Heade, the only one in his family to do so (Stebbins 2000:7).

In 1843, at age 24, he moved to New York City and obtained studio space at the new 10th Street Studio building, workplace of leading Hudson River painters such as Frederic E. Church, who was to be a significant influence on Heade. During this time, Heade’s style was transformed, and he developed unique approaches to the traditional subjects of landscapes and still lifes. A trip to Europe during these years is also thought to have made an impression on his developing body of work (Stebbins 1999:3).

Heade was inspired by the Hudson River style of landscape painting employed by Church and others at that time, but ultimately he moved away from the traditional landscape conventions and began to develop his own approach. He took elements of the Hudson River style and incorporated them with what he had learned during his training as a folk painter, and also began to do increasing numbers of marine paintings, a subject that would hold his interest for the rest of his life (1999:3-4). He also began to keep a sketchbook, as Church did, and spent every summer between 1858 and 1863
travelling, in search of interesting clouds, trees and topographic features to sketch (Stebbins 2000:24-25).

Between 1863 and 1870, Heade made three trips to Latin America, including visits to Brazil, Colombia, and Jamaica, and his experiences in these places resulted in three decades of work (Stebbins 1999:7). One of the projects that Heade was inspired to pursue based on his travels in Latin America was a book, entitled *The Gems of Brazil*, which would be produced as a limited edition of chromolithographs of his colorful and detailed paintings of hummingbirds. The book never came into existence, presumably because he was unable to get the 200 paying subscribers required, or because the reproductions did not meet with his exacting standards (Stebbins 1999:73).

Heade also completed many other paintings inspired by these three trips, including a series of complex compositions of hummingbirds and enlarged flowers, usually orchids and a number of tropical seascapes. It has been suggested that these enlarged orchids – a notoriously erotic flower -- visited by tiny hummingbirds were Heade’s way of painting sex during a sexually repressed era (Updike, 1995; Quinn 1999:109-110).

In 1883, at the age of 64, Heade married for the first time, and settled in St. Augustine with his bride, Elizabeth Smith, who was 20 years his
junior. Heade had spent his life up until this point in constant motion, and his letters indicate that he was easily irritated, nervous, and restless (Stebbins 2000:30). It has been suggested that Heade spent his whole life looking for his own true place, and he finally found it in St. Augustine (Eaton 1992:36). He developed a fortuitous friendship with Henry Morrison Flagler, a partner of John D. Rockefeller in the Standard Oil Company, and when Flagler built the stately Ponce de Leon Hotel (now part of Flagler College) he included seven artists’ studios and invited Heade to occupy one. Flagler continued to support Heade’s art career by both encouraging potential customers and purchasing more than a dozen of his works until Heade’s death in 1904 (Comey 1999:123).

The Florida-inspired works Heade completed were mostly either landscapes or floral still lifes, especially of magnolias but also of Cherokee roses and orange blossoms. The landscapes, as described by Stebbins, were mostly unimpressive, usually done on commission for tourists (1999: 8). However, others would disagree. Florida presented Heade with the kind of subtle, simple landscapes that Heade excelled at, and while all may not be equally successful, he was able to capture the quiet beauty of Florida.

Because much of Heade’s work was purchased by tourists, his paintings have been dispersed around the nation, and are still being
discovered in attics and at yard sales. Most of the works that have been
discovered have been of his more distinctive floral still lifes, such as the
magnolia paintings that are Heade’s signature. Some of his other work is
not as easily identified, if it still exists at all. For example, there are
indications that he painted a number of still lifes of yellow jasmine, but very
few are known. The fact that the jasmine is a less voluptuous flower would
make these paintings harder to recognize (Smith-Favis 2002).

Heade painted a good many floral still lifes during his Florida years,
and they are perhaps the best work of his career, representing a climax of his
considerable skills, which were in no way dulled by his advancing age.
Unlike the tropical orchids, which he had preferred to paint in their natural
setting, magnolias, he felt, looked best indoors. He often painted them
arranged sensuously on a piece of dark velvet, accenting the pearlescent
whiteness of their delicate petals. Stebbins calls these works “some of the
most remarkable still lifes in our history” (1999:9).

It would seem that the years Heade spent in St. Augustine were
among his happiest. He often extolled the virtues of the place in his letters
to his friend, scientist Eben J. Loomis (Stebbins 1999:1). Accounts state that
he and his wife) enjoyed a warm and loving relationship (Feagin 1986). It is
said that Heade was often seen bicycling through town even when he was in
his 80s (Feagin 1986) and that visitors were always welcome in his studio at
the Ponce de Leon Hotel (Comey 1999:123).

Heade and his wife tamed hummingbirds that wandered into their
garden, feeding them sugar water from vials they kept in their pockets, and
allowing the birds to enter their home, through the windows, which were
always kept open. In a letter to his friend Loomis, Heade, writes of one
hummingbird so tame that it followed him everywhere but then it left with
all the other hummingbirds when it was time to migrate. When the birds
began to return, he immediately began taming another, and then tried to
tame a second bird as well. He found that this was not possible, as the two
birds quarrelled, and the younger bird, which they’d begun taming first, was
getting chased away by the second bird. Heade says he was “forced to
shoot” the second bird, commenting, “isn’t it so strange that such little
things should be so full of human nature!” (Heade 1884). This might seem
like strange behavior from a man who has professed himself an
environmentalist, but it would not be so out of place during the time he
lived. He took an anthropomorphic view of these little birds, perhaps borne
of spending so much time studying them. When he shoots the bird, it is a
sort of punishment for being bad. He expected them to meet human
behavioral standards (Smith-Favis 2002).
Heade and Bartram, both consummate travelers, held a special love for Florida. For Heade, who had spent most of his life traveling throughout New England and South America (Stebbins 1999:1-8), St. Augustine provided a nexus of domestic tranquility, artistic inspiration, and a fortunate friendship with Henry Flagler. Unlike so many artists, whose works dwindle in both quality and frequency, Heade was inspired by the natural beauty of his surroundings. His paintings of Cherokee roses and magnolias on velvet are considered to be among his best work (Stebbins 1999:9). He wrote often to his friend E. J. Loomis in Washington D.C. of the beauty of the St. Johns, the abundance of fruit, the temperate weather, and of course his tame hummingbirds (Heade 1883, Heade 1884, Heade 1885). Like Bartram, who expressed his love of the Florida landscape through his eloquent writings, Heade leaves us the delicate, crystalline beauty of his paintings as evidence of the peace he found along the St. Johns.
Bartram's Travels

By noon the next day, Bartram reached the fort at Picolata, and was dismayed to find it abandoned. However, he still takes a few paragraphs to describe the appearance of the fort, which was built long before by the Spaniards. As he continues up the river, he notes the appearance of swarms of a small flying insect of genus *Ephemera*, and he poetically describes their indeed quite ephemeral existence:

"Solemnly and slowly more onward to the river’s shore, the rustling clouds of the Ephemera. How awful the procession! [I]numerable millions of winged beasts, voluntarily verging on to destruction, to the brink of the grave, where they behold bands of their enemies with wide open jaws, ready to receive them. But as if insensible of their danger, gay and tranquil each meets his beloved mate in the still air, inimitably bedecked in their new nuptial robes. What eye can trace them, in their varied wanton amorous chaces [sic], bounding and fluttering on the odoriferous air! With what peace, love and joy, do they end the last moments of their existence?" (Bartram 1996:87).

Bartram is fascinated by the delicate beauty and complexity of these creatures, and supposes that they likely are only capable of experiencing joy during this all-too-short period in the fly state. Of their one year of life, they spend 360 days as grubs, buried in muck and scarcely able to move – clearly a way of life too depressing for Bartram to bear contemplating.
He continues upriver along the western shore, which he also calls the Indian shore, noting the large size and number of alligators he sees. He describes the terms crocodile and alligator as being interchangeable, the latter being the "country name" (Bartram 1996:93 n.) for the same beast. He also mentions several times during his account that their bellowing often keeps him awake at night. Though for most of us the bellowing would be the least of our worries where alligators are concerned, clearly Bartram did not consider them a serious threat and was happy to sleep with alligators disturbingly nearby.

Bartram passes a small Indian settlement on the bank of the river, inciting the curiosity and perhaps concern of its inhabitants. He notes that they have cleared several hundred acres of land around their village in order to grow a variety of crops, including corn, beans, squash, melons and tobacco. A bit further upstream, he anchors briefly at Charlotia (also known as Rollestown), a town founded by Denys Rolle that has not fared well. Bartram speculates that the town was poorly planned, neglected and populated with a bad choice of citizenry. By this last, Bartram refers to the fact that Rolle purposely filled his settlement with the less desirable elements of society: vagrants, beggars, debtors and prostitutes. The town, founded in 1764, had already emptied of settlers, who drifted elsewhere, by
the time Bartram reached it ten years later. At the time of Bartram’s visit, the only remaining inhabitants are an overseer who keeps up the main mansion, and a blacksmith who lives with his family near his shop. The rest of the town is “mouldering to earth” (Bartram 1996:97).
Palatka

State Road 20 is the way to Palatka. Having driven it several times already, since Palatka is on the way to St. Augustine, I am already finding my own landmarks along it. Some of these, of course, are intentional landmarks: the flashing light marking the turnoff for Melrose, Interlachen and its lakes that are separated from the road by only a hundred yards of grass, and stores and restaurants like the Pig’n’out (sadly, closed for business). Others are smaller things, things that perhaps didn’t register on my first trip on 20, but are now things I look for. These “non-places” include Deano’s produce, a roadside fruit and vegetable market with so many poorly made signs advertising their selection that they only hinder each other, a weatherbeaten sign that hangs in a tree just past Hawthorne that reads “Breezy Acres” in a barely discernable cursive script, and a faded confederate flag that hangs high among the skinny pines near Palatka.

I also notice that I pass six cemeteries on 20, starting with two in Gainesville and ending with two in Palatka, with Hawthorne’s and Interlachen’s cemeteries in between. That’s about one cemetery every seven miles. This is not completely surprising, when you consider that all these towns are fairly old by Florida standards. Palatka, for example, saw its first
permanent settlers in the early 1820s (Morris 1995:189), from which point it settled rather quickly, being the southernmost point on the St. Johns River still reachable by oceangoing vessels. In the late 1880s it as important as Jacksonville as a transportation hub, with five railroads and seven steamship lines using the city as a base of operations (Belleville 2000:143).

My first stop in Palatka is the Ravine State Gardens, a state park situated on a large ravine. The ravine is a result of erosion from the movement of water from beneath the sandy ridges that border the west shore of the St. Johns River. According to the park’s brochure, it started as gardens created by the Federal Works Project Administration in 1933, and became part of the State Parks system in 1970. Much of the 59 acres in and around the ravine are heavily wooded, and the steep slopes are threaded with hiking trails. A narrow paved road traverses the 1.8-mile circumference of the ravine, allowing a breath-taking view from the comfort of an air-conditioned automobile. An additional 94.6 acres of the park is river swampland bordering the St. Johns.

I enter the park from (appropriately enough) Twigg Street and pay the usual State Park fee. I am handed a Xeroxed pamphlet containing a map of the park and a brief synopsis of its history in return. There is a small parking area, occupied by only a few cars on this hot weekday. Nearest the parking
area is a large oval-shaped arbor. Vines grow up the 50 columns that represent the 50 states, and at the head of the arbor is a tall stone monument, similar in shape to the Washington Monument, though much smaller and of rough stone construction. The growth of the vines is sparse, and they have not yet grown up to cover the wooden slats that arc over the footpath, and the red clay-like soil radiates stored heat. The shade-less grassy area at the center of the arbor is not much cooler. After stopping momentarily to read the Bartram Trail sign posted near the Palatka Garden Club’s cypress clubhouse, I retreat to the gardens on the edge of the ravine itself.

The best time of year to see the park is Spring, according to the brochure, and the peak blooming season is March and April during the Palatka Azalea Festival. It is nearly summer when I visit, but I still find a number of blooming things in the formal, terraced gardens, and lush greenery all around. A stone pathway winds through the gardens, and stone steps lead from one terrace level to the next, disappearing behind ruin-like stone edifices. The gardens are beautiful, but the shade of the hiking trails, plus the promised adventure of exploring the ravine, beckons.

Despite the shade, the trails prove not to be much cooler, but I forget about this as I descend into a world that seems far from the park gates. The trails are rough, and at times even quite difficult. They are wide and smooth
at some points only to dwindle to barely visible root-infested tracks, with an incline that has me clutching at saplings to keep my balance. Here and there stone steps appear, and surrounded as they are by tall trees and tangled undergrowth they are even more reminiscent of lost cities than the steps and ledges in the formal gardens were. Stone steps aside, this is as close as I have or perhaps will come to what Bartram’s trip through the area must have been like (though he wisely traveled during cooler weather!). The trails are not extensively marked, but there are many outlets onto the paved road that goes around the rim of the ravine, so I can allow myself to get pleasantly and safely lost. Most of the wildlife I encounter seems to be insectoid in nature, but I do encounter a raptor of some sort, and hear birds calling and other animals among the trees. Once or twice I hear human voices, possibly from the golf course that borders the park property on one side, or park officials who pass along the road in buggies regularly. When I’ve had enough adventuring, I return to the roadway and take an easy stroll back to the head of the park.

Palatka proper proves to be much harder to quantify. On the surface, it seems like a pleasant enough small town. I drive through in-town neighborhoods of well-kept homes, both large and small. There are also several areas of historic homes, dating back to the 1800s, and while these
areas are much more unevenly cared for from house to house, they still seem like pleasant neighborhoods. As a town of approximately 10,000, (Murth and Murth 2002:295) shopping is limited, but along State Road 19 there seems to be a nice complement of the usual suspects: Walmart, K-Mart, fast food, etc. Downtown is a bit deserted, with many storefronts vacant, but that isn’t so unusual these days. The public buildings – the courthouse, city hall, a center for the arts – seem solid enough, but I can’t find a person anywhere who will extol the virtues of Palatka.

I talk to one woman, who works in Ralph’s World of Flowers. Ralph’s also happens to sell men’s and women’s clothing, and has a Hallmark store too – the woman, who owns the clothing part, said these stores used to be separate, but there was no point in paying “all that rent” when they didn’t really need that much space. She says she tries to sell stuff that “you wouldn’t expect to find in Palatka,” though I have to say I don’t see what among her wares – which tend to be brightly colored and often appliqued -- would be considered extraordinary. She travels to Gainesville and St. Augustine regularly, she says, and is still exploring those cities. When I ask where an interesting place would be to go in Palatka, she enthuses about a small coffee shop that just opened on the corner a few blocks away, because it isn’t like… well, something you’d expect to find in Palatka. She thinks
for a few seconds and concludes that it’s maybe sort of European. (I walk
down the street afterward, and while the place isn’t actually a Starbuck’s it is
an awful lot like one, with a décor of wood, brass and dark formica, with a
scowling bored looking teenage male staffing the counter. The only
different thing is that it isn’t very crowded.)

After attempting to visit the Larimer Center for the Arts (closed, and
no indication of when it might be open), I drive a few blocks west to the
Palatka Chamber of Commerce and Tourist Welcome Center. It’s housed in
an attractive new wooden building near the Amtrak station. I briefly
capture the attention of one of the employees, who, upon hearing my
request, declines to share her personal opinions, if any, about Palatka. She
quickly selects about half a dozen brochures from the racks on the wall and
places them in my hands, then ignores me. I accost her once more, which
prompts her to reel off a few of the facts available on the “Putnam County
Profile,” then she turns abruptly back to her computer terminal.

I drive aimlessly though town for a while, hoping to spot a place that
looks a bit more friendly. A bookstore looks hopeful, but it’s closed. It
seems that there aren’t many places where you’d hope to find a little local
color, idle consumers, or a chatty proprietor. Eventually, I stop at the
Palatka Mall.
The faded, seventies-style logo of the place should have been fair warning. The heyday of this place, if it ever had one, is decades past. The mall itself consists of one wide corridor done in dark faux-stone tiles. Two department stores – some of the few stores open for business, anchor each end, and at the center is a concrete fountain consisting of several attached circular reservoirs. Or it would have been a fountain, had it been on. It was actually more like three conjoined stagnant pools of water.

Many of the mall's occupants are government offices – the Social Security office, Department of Revenue, Health Department, and the Department of Juvenile Justice, as well as recruiting offices for the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines. A number of them require you to press a buzzer for entry. Some spots are vacant, doorways shuttered. But there are a few bona-fide stores in the mix (including an education supply store called "Hand’s On [sic]"). I attempt to strike up conversation with a few salespeople. Many, it turns out, are not from Palatka, they just work here, and as such apparently couldn’t possibly have any comment on the place. One woman tells me that she isn’t allowed to talk to people while she’s on the clock. Another is a student at the St. Johns River Community College, but she isn’t from Palatka proper, and since she’s only 17, she says she can’t really comment on what sorts of things there might be to do here. "It’s just a
small, boring town, with lots of old people. The old people are very nice, though," she adds.

I detour into East Palatka, on the other side of the St. Johns to search for the site of Rollestown, a settlement that was failing even when Bartram visited it in 1774. Rollestown was founded by Denys Rolle in 1765 as Charlota, named after the English King George III’s queen Charlotte. Rolle populated his town with debtors who arrived periodically on ships from elsewhere, vagrants who usually didn’t stay long, drifting instead to parts unknown (Morris 1995:208).

Today, the Rollestown site is a small park with a few concrete picnic tables next to a power plant a mile or so from the St. Johns. Two metal signs are all there are to mark the historical significance of the spot: a Bartram Trail sign, now quite familiar to me, near the highway, and in the back, near the power plant’s fence, a sign commemorating Rollestown itself.

Back in Palatka, I make one last stop: the Florida School for the Arts, which is attached to the St. Johns River Community College. It’s after 5 o’clock now, and few students are about, but I catch a faculty member who teaches drawing, painting, and printmaking. He tells me that the school is unique, attracting students from all over Florida. There are about 140 students enrolled in the two-year program, and they are able to fulfill their
general education credits at the community college next door while taking their art classes here. The instructor doesn’t live in Palatka, though: he drives in every day from St. Augustine. He assures me that there are interesting people in Palatka, though, and wishes me luck finding them. That’s a task I’ll save for another day.

By the time I return, I know the twists and turns of State Road 20 as it heads east to Palatka quite well. This trip, however, I have a destination located on it – the home of a second cousin on my mother’s side that I didn’t know I had until a week ago. Her home is located on Crill Avenue, which is what 20 is called when it passes through Palatka, and I had probably driven by her house about ten times on previous trips. Once you know to look for it, though, it’s easy to find – a small white home, probably built around 1950 or so, two driveways past Jerry’s Drive-In.

When I turn into the driveway, my cousin Edith is out in the yard waiting for me. I stopped at a grocery store before leaving town to pick up some flowers to bring, and this made me a bit later than the noon arrival time that I had suggested, so she had been wondering where I was, I think. I apologize for my lateness.

The first thing she asks me is whether I think she looks just like “Mama Graham”. At first, I am confused. Then I remember that Great Aunt
Sally's last name was Graham, and that of course my Great Aunt Sally was Edith's mother. But then I realize that my memory of Great Aunt Sally is much hazier than Edith might anticipate: I only met Great Aunt Sally a couple of times in my life, and those were both more than twelve years ago. All I can remember for sure is that Great Aunt Sally had curly white hair. Edith does too, so I eventually come out with, ".... Uh, yes you do resemble her some."

I guess this would be a good time to get into a little pertinent family history. Great Aunt Sally was my grandfather's older sister, who died about three years ago at the age of 99. Not only was Great Aunt Sally a good bit older than my grandfather, but she had her first child (Edith is number three) at age 14. Therefore, though normally you might expect a second cousin to be a generation different in age, my second cousin Edith is 80, almost the same age as my maternal grandmother. Though my grandmother is Edith's aunt, their similarity in age has resulted in their being much closer than an aunt and niece would be normally. In fact, my mother had already heard about my visit to cousin Edith from my grandmother when I talked to her only a few days later.

Cousin Edith takes me inside and gives me a quick tour of the premises. We enter the house from a door off the carport, which opens onto
a long narrow sitting area, with a console TV and shelves containing a set of Encyclopedia Britannica from the 1950s at one end. The front door is at the other end, with a sofa and easy chairs in between. The living room is mostly blue, with a few green armchairs for accents. A mirror on one wall makes the room appear bigger than it is. In the dining area, some of Edith’s extensive collection of tiny cups and saucers are on display, and a few more are in a small curio, which hangs in the kitchen above the table. Off of the kitchen is a small room, which looks like it may have once been the back porch. It has windows on three sides, and the Venetian blinds are open to let in the light. A newer TV is here, and an easy chair, along with a small round breakfast table and two chairs. A twin bed is tucked into a corner. Edith says she spends most of her time in this simple but inviting space.

Edith asks me if I’m ready for lunch. I say sure, and she collects her purse, and we walk down the narrow street behind her house to Jerry’s Drive-In. Despite the name, they seem to do a pretty good sit-down business as well. When we arrive, we get the only free table left in the place. Before we actually get to the table, cousin Edith spots another relative, Libby Morris. Libby is related on Edith’s husband’s side, I think, and is a now judge here in Palatka. Later, Edith will show me the newspaper clipping from the Gainesville Sun about Libby’s abduction from the Oaks Mall in
Gainesville, which happened in about 1990. Eventually she was released, and though something happened to cause her to lose her memory, she knew enough to seek help and was reunited with her family. She never did regain any memory of the abduction, though. Coincidentally, William Bartram’s aunt and uncle were abducted for a time by Indians in North Carolina. A ransom was paid for their return (The Bartram Trail Committee 2002).

Edith and I have a quick, pleasant lunch at Jerry’s. I order a turkey sandwich with a side of hush puppies, and Edith has a patty melt. My sandwich is on the sort of white bread that melts in your mouth like cotton candy, and the turkey meat is like the super-thin-sliced packaged lunchmeat that my Dad likes, rather than the usual sort of deli-style turkey that I’m used to. At tables nearby, there are several women with their children (it’s summer, so the kids aren’t in school) and also a pair of police officers, one of which has his arm in a cast. The décor is dark wood paneling, with a wooden lattice separating the front dining area from the back. All in all, it’s definitely not like restaurants in Houston, or even Gainesville, for that matter.

Later that day, Edith cooks up some ham, which we eat in sandwiches, again on that strange white bread. Edith calls it a “poor dinner,” but for me, anything that involves actual cooking is pretty elaborate.
We catch the end of the local news, and I am surprised that there is a segment on Danny Rolling, the Gainesville mass-murderer who gruesomely killed five students when I was a freshman at UF in 1990. The Ocala-based TV station was also running old ads I remembered for the Bo Williams auto dealership that feature an old woman wearing a bonnet and apron who screws up her face and hollers, “Don’t’ yew buy no ugly truck!” Edith says they just recently started running these ads again – she remembers them as well.
Bartram's Travels

After gathering information from people in the area, Bartram is able to reach the island where his belongings were hidden during the raid on the trading post. He collected his chest from the men encamped there, and was happy to see that its contents were intact. From there, he proceeded on to the lower store, as the trading post was known, located at what is now known as Stokes Landing. There, he took a few days to rest. While at the trading post, he learned of expeditions being planned to the two other trading posts, one of which was at Alachua, about 50 miles west, and the other further up the St. Johns. Since he planned to visit both sites before returning to Georgia in the fall, Bartram took advantage of the opportunity to travel with these expeditions so that he might more easily carry his gear with him.

Bartram chooses to arrange his narrative in order to make it appear that he traveled first to the upper store, further up the St. Johns, and then later to Alachua. It is actually the case that he made these trips in the reverse order, and furthermore the trip to the upper is a composite of two trips he made to that area, one in May and June and the other in August and September of 1774. The report he submitted to his benefactor, Fothergill, and a letter written to his father, John Bartram, reveal the true chronology,
but not why Bartram saw fit to change it in the *Travels* (Bartram 1958:353 nn. 97-98). I will respect Bartram’s reorientation of the chronology here.

The expedition headed for Spalding’s upper store heads out across Lake George on a fine day in mid May, and spent their first night at Mount Royal, or present day Fruitland Cove. Bartram notes that they passed a site known as Mount Hope, a shell mound named by Bartram’s father some 15 years earlier when he passed through the area. After spending the night with a former Indian trader named Kean, the group heads out onto the wider part of Lake George. Bartram is awed by the vastness of this body of water, and admits to some apprehension as he perceives his boat to be but “a nut-shell on the swelling seas” (Bartram 1996:102). Bartram also describes the two islands at the north end of Lake George, Hog’s Island and Drayton’s Island. The group camps on the latter island that evening, and Bartram describes the remains of an old Indian settlement as well as the fauna that interests him when he tours this “princely island” (1996:105). Then he retires for the evening, “lulled to sleep by the mixed sounds of the wearied surf, lapping on the hard beaten shore, and the tender warblings of the painted nonpareil and other winged inhabitants of the grove” (1996:105). What wakes him at dawn the next morning is however the “dreaded voice of the alligators,”
which “shook the isle, and resounded along the neighboring coasts, proclaiming the appearance of the glorious sun” (1996:105).

They sail across the lake, reaching its southern edge by evening. The group camps at Cedar Point (now Zinder Point), and with one more day’s travel they reach the upper store, where Bartram remains for several days before making a trip approximately 60 miles upriver to make use of an invitation to visit a plantation situated there. He takes with him a young Indian to help him man his boat, the agreement being that the Indian will accompany him to a particular bluff where he will then leave Bartram to go in search of the camp of his relation, who was known as White Trader.

However, the Indian requested to be put ashore before the end of the first day after repeatedly expressing his displeasure at having to row the boat under a hot sun. Bartram complies with his wishes, “knowing the impossibility of compelling an Indian against his own inclinations, or even prevailing upon him by reasonable arguments, when labour is in the question” (Bartram 1996:112). Since the Indian had taken his gun with him, Bartram thought it possible that he intended to hunt some game and return, so he spent the night at the spot, but come morning the Indian had not returned and Bartram set sail once more.
Welaka, Lake George, and The Bartram Highway

I leave to explore the east side of the St. Johns after a breakfast of plain buttered waffles at my newfound cousin Edith’s in Palatka. The sun is shining as I cross the bridge over the St. Johns that connects the towns of Palatka and East Palatka. There are relatively few places to cross the river, and the Palatka bridge is one the most convenient to Gainesville – one of the reasons I seem to find myself here over and over again. I have heard from Charlotte Porter that one of the Burger Kings in Palatka has a mural that features William Bartram wearing blue jeans. There is a Burger King in Palatka and one in East Palatka, but I don’t find the mural at either one. Surprisingly, the Burger King in East Palatka has a boat dock on the St. Johns. Vines have almost taken over the stairwell up to the parking lot, but the Burger King logo is proudly displayed from a deck overlooking the water. One boat is tied up at the dock, its owner no doubt inside enjoying a Croissan’wich.

County Road 309 takes me south along the east side of the river, through San Mateo, which I guess you could call suburban East Palatka, and on to Welaka. Welaka (an Indian name meaning something like “river of lakes,” (Morris 1995:251) which is not a bad description of the St. Johns) is
a one-stoplight town. There are a couple of churches built of whitewashed wood, a bait and tackle store, a convenience store (a Handy Way, which appears to be the only franchise in town, unless you count the Post Office), and a few other small stores. The sign for the town as you drive north on 17 says, “Welcome to friendly Welaka,” but I don’t find many people to talk to. The woman working at the convenience store is from Cross City. She says that most of the people out this way are fishermen, a fact that is confirmed by a man who comes up to the counter just then to make a purchase. A few people coming and going at the Post Office confirm that people who live—or visit, for that matter, since there are lots of people who come from “up North,” especially in the winter—like to fish, and outdoors-y activities in general. No one I talk to wants to tell me much more than that, either because they are in a hurry, or because they just don’t want to talk to some stranger who asks inane questions about a place they view as obvious and self-explanatory.

Just south of town is the Welaka National Fish Hatchery and Aquarium. It is composed of several sites, which are spread out along the road for a few miles. I reach the aquarium first, which is in an old concrete block building painted a sort of peachy band-aid color. Nobody is there but me. Not just nobody visiting—nobody at all. The sign on the door says that
they are open from eight to three, and indeed, the door is open. I go inside and sign the guest book. Looks like I am today’s first visitor (or the first to admit to visiting), though it is almost noon. Flipping back a few pages, it looks like there may eight or ten visitors on one day, then no entries for three days or more. Most are from Palatka or other nearby towns, but I see some from Ohio, New York, and other states scattered through the pages.

The aquarium is just one smallish room with tanks set into the wall. It is quite dark inside, with the only illumination coming from within the aquariums. The carpet smells mildewed, as if it gets damp often, and has a number of stains that are visible even in the dim light. A carpeted step runs around the edge of the room, perhaps to allow small children to climb up to see the fish. There are labels above some of the tanks, but some lack labels and the information on others is clearly inaccurate. One describes the contents of a tank as “blue crabs,” but the sole occupant is a very large fish. In fact, many of the fish, generally housed one to a tank so that they would have adequate room to move about, were quite large. The biggest fish was at least eighteen inches long. He would follow me when I walked from one end of the tank to the other, and when I stood still he hovered in front of me, staring.
The tank occupants that I could identify included channel catfish (a "normal" one and an albino, in separate tanks), small turtles (who shared their tank with two baby alligators), and striped bass (I chose to believe that particular sign because the fish did indeed have stripes). There was also an aquarium full of garbage, labeled with a warning about the dangers of polluting rivers and lakes. There was also a tank of small fish, presumably striped bass hatchlings.

I left the building and walked across the grass to an information board that was posted by a separate outbuilding that contained restroom facilities. This provided a brief history of the Welaka National Fish Hatchery, which opened in 1926, originally as a state-run operation until it was transferred to the care of the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 1930. It is a warm-water hatchery, which is less common than cold-water hatcheries. Not surprisingly, the fish here are most productive in the summer, when the 41 ponds reach the 75 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit the fish prefer.

About 45 million fish are raised here annually, including native fish such as the Gulf Sturgeon, Striped Bass (which can reach 200 pounds), Largemouth Bass, Channel Catfish, Bluegill (nicknamed "Prince of the Panfish," though why wasn’t mentioned), and the Redear Sunfish (or "Shellcracker"). Of special concern to the hatchery is the Striped Bass,
whose numbers have been declining since the 1970s due to a combination of factors including loss of habitat, pollution, and overfishing. The hatchery aims to increase the populations of the fish they raise through restoration stocking. Restoration stocking consists of taking eggs and milt (sperm) from adult fish caught in local rivers and then released in their native waters after they have made their contribution to the process. The fish hatchlings are then grown in the hatchery’s ponds for 25 to 40 days, by which point they will have reached a size of about two inches. Some are restocked, or released in local waters, at this size, while others are released later, after they have reached four to six inches in size. These older fish have been fed a special diet, and generally released in specially selected areas where above-average success rates have been reported.

I stop for a look at the hatchery ponds at the Beecher Point Station, about three miles further down the road. There really isn’t much to see from my above-water level perspective, though there are plenty of egrets and herons nearby who are ready and waiting for a chance to make a catch. The ponds form a grid of rounded rectangles, each perhaps 50 feet by 100 feet, with strips of grass in between them. Each pond has some sort of device in the center of it, perhaps for filtration or monitoring water quality, though I can only guess, since there are no markers of any type at the site where the
ponds are. There is a dirt road that goes along one side of the ponds, and as I walk down that, I see that someone has driven a car over some poor egret. The poor bird is completely flat.

I get back in my car and look for the observation tower that is reputed to be somewhere along this stretch. Sure enough, a positively huge tower appears around a bend in the road – so tall that I can imagine that it would afford a view of the faraway Atlantic Ocean. I pull into the parking area beside it. There are also a few picnic tables under the trees, and even restroom facilities. But when I get to the fenced area around the tower, it turns out that this tower isn’t open to the public. I guess it belongs to the forest service, because the gate is padlocked and there are lots of “No Trespassing” signs. Disappointed, I get back in my car and continue my search for the real fish hatchery observation tower. It turns out that the real tower that the information at the aquarium mentioned is the tiny wooden thing barely two stories high. After the other tower I’ve seen, this one doesn’t even seem worth stopping for.

I drive further south, passing through Fruitland and Georgetown, which are each represented by a few buildings, until I reach an area where the road takes a sharp turn and then dead-ends at the North end of Lake George. Sitting at the bend in the road is Hudson’s Superette, a small
grocery store featuring “Western Meats.” I go inside and chat for a moment with the shopkeeper who tries to interest me in some meat – the last thing I want to be traveling with on a hot summer day. He tells me that though the population of the area increases dramatically when the “snowbirds” arrive in their RVs to hunt and fish in the area from approximately October through May, his business doesn’t really change much, because these vacationers don’t buy much from him anyway. “They bring everything they can, even meat,” he says. “They just buy bread and milk, that’s it.” I say that’s rather strange, and he agrees. He attributes it to their being cheap. I privately wonder if it isn’t because they drive up to Palatka to shop at a more appealing supermarket chain store: this place smells like an unsavory combination of seafood and unwashed armpits. I thank the man for his time and head back out, sans meat.

At the end of the road is small marina of sorts – a series of weathered wooden docks house a few dozen small boats, and there is also a restaurant/beer joint with a deck that overlooks the water. Across the water I can see Drayton’s Island, where Bartram once camped. (Bartram 1958: 354 nn 101-105) It is now exclusively private residences, reachable only by boat. I spend some time out on the long dock behind the restaurant, feeling as if I’m trespassing but nobody bothers me. The water is dark and gently
flowing, and the channel widens as it passes the island on the way into Lake George. Looking at the map, there are few roads that go to the edge of the lake, and much of the land around it belongs to either the National Forest (on the western side) or private owners. Georgetown is the closest municipality of any kind to the lake itself – there are none on the lake’s shores, as I would have expected.

After enjoying the peace of the lake’s edge, I get back in my car and head north again, retracing my route to East Palatka and then continuing north along through Hastings (where “Jesus Loves You,” as the sign says) to Highway 13, or Bartram’s Highway. At the turnoff just past Hastings, there is a special sign marking the beginning of the route. As I made the turnoff, the inevitable afternoon rain began, first in light spurts, then eventually smacking my windshield with torrential force, making it hard to see where I’m going. Even with the rain, the route is truly scenic, following the St. Johns, first past potato fields and small farmhouses, then through wooded areas. When it gets close to the lake’s edge, small residential clusters appear, and the further north -- and closer to St. Augustine and Jacksonville – the road gets, the newer and more expensive the homes get. Many of these newer homes are actually across the street from the river, with a private dock on the river side of the road. Apart from a home where daycare was
provided and some large farm-related buildings at the southernmost end of the road, the road is completely residential, with few connecting roads. The “towns” along the road, like Toco and Picolata, are merely historical markers now, with clusters of homes located fortuitously at these rare intersections. At Picolata, there is a sign commemorating the fort that was once somewhere nearby – the exact spot where it was located is not known, and even in Bartram’s time the fort had already been abandoned.

As I retrace my route, the rain lets up enough for me to stop and read the commemorative marker at Picolata. There was once a boardwalk to the river’s edge here, but it is barely visible through the trees and undergrowth that have barricaded this area from the waterfront, and what of the wooden planking I can see is in very poor condition, with boards twisted or missing altogether. I drive down a bit further to a grassy shoulder I can safely pull off on, and enjoy the river’s edge near some privately owned docks. There is a surprising amount of garbage, old tires and so forth, in shallow edge of the river, but I look past it to enjoy the view of the far side of the river. As the rain starts again, I retreat back down Bartram’s highway to Palatka, and from there to my temporary Gainesville home.
Bartram’s Travels

Bartram reaches Lake Dexter, a much smaller lake than Lake George, and camps on an open plain on its western shore near what is now known as Bartram’s Mound. As evening arrives, Bartram notes that there are an unusually large number of alligators in the river and along its shores, all of which seem to be roaring at maximum volume. His campsite, fortunately, affords him a good view of the riverfront, as he fears that the alligators might launch some subtle attack given the large number of them there competing for real estate.

He goes about his business, deciding to try and catch some trout for dinner as his provisions are running low. Later in his travels, he will give his would-be dinner its literary due, describing it thus:

“What a most beautiful creature is this fish before me! [G]liding to and fro, and figuring in the still clear waters, with his orient attendants and associates; the yellow bream or sun fish” (Bartram 1996:140).

But soon he will have more pressing matters to deal with. While fishing, he beholds a skirmish between two alligators:
“His enormous body swells. His plaited tail brandished high, floats upon the lake. The waters like a cataract descend from his opening jaws. Clouds of smoke [!] issue from his dilated nostrils. The earth trembles with his thunder. When immediately from the opposite coast of the lagoon, emerges from the deep his rival champion. They suddenly dart upon each other. The boiling surface of the lake marks their rapid course, and a terrific conflict commences. They now sink to the bottom folded together in horrid wreaths. The water becomes thick and discoloured. Again they rise, their jaws clap together, re-echoing through the deep surrounding forests. Again they sink, when the contest ends at the muddy bottom of the lake, and the vanquished makes a hazardous escape, hiding himself in the muddy turbulent waters and sedge on a distant shore. The proud victor exulting returns to the place of action. The shores and forests resound his dreadful roar, together with the triumphing shouts of the plaited tribes around, witnesses of the horrid combat” (Bartram 1996:114).

It would seem that Bartram’s fear got a bit in the way of his usually careful description of nature’s panorama, given the presence of smoke issuing from the beast’s nostrils and the drawing he later made of the event, which shows alligators that look amusingly serpentine in nature.

Nevertheless, it is this description that is cited by believers in the Astor Monster, a local Loch Ness-like legend originating in the nearby town of Astor. The legend has it that it was this thirty-five foot horned beast that Bartram witnessed battling on this fateful evening (Wass de Czege 1982:59-61).
Things only get worse for Bartram on this evening, no doubt the most memorable of any on his trip. He determines that given the restlessness of the natives he just witnessed, he should make haste to the lagoon to catch his dinner before he loses the opportunity entirely. So, armed with a club (he leaves behind his trusty fusee for fear of losing it overboard in case of attack), he rows his canoe out into the lagoon. The alligators allow him to pass, but several large ones pursue him toward the entrance of the lagoon. Unable to paddle fast enough, he is attacked from all sides. With jaws snapping shut about his ears, he beats them back sufficiently to attempt to make his retreat to the shore where he assumed (probably incorrectly) that he would be assured a successful escape. Fortunately for Bartram, when he reached the shore the beasts declined to follow.

It would seem that Bartram was mighty hungry, because instead of retreating the high ground of his camp, upon noting that he was now quite close to the lagoon, he resolved to complete his trip there and secure his dinner. Though the alligators attempted to block his entrance to the lagoon, they did not follow him into it, and he was able to catch more trout than he could eat before following the shore from the lagoon back to his camp with alligators in hot pursuit. Bartram tells of one in particular:
"... I was opposed upon re-entering the river out of the lagoon, and pursued near to my landing (though not closely attacked), particularly by an old daring one, about twelve feet in length, who kept close after me; and when I stepped on shore and turned about, in order to draw up my canoe, he rushed up near my feet, and lay there for some time, looking me in the face, his head and shoulders out of water. I resolved that he should pay for his temerity, and having a heavy load in my fusee, I ran to my camp, and returning with my piece, found him with his foot on the gunwale of the boat, in search of fish. On my coming up he withdrew sullenly and slowly into the water, but soon returned and placed himself in his former position, looking at me, and seeming neither fearful nor any way disturbed. I soon dispatched him by lodging the contents of my gun in his head, and then proceeded to cleanse and prepare my fish for supper ...." (Bartram 1996:116).

However, another alligator had followed his nose to Bartram’s dinner. He looks up just in time from cleaning his fish in the sand by his canoe to jump back as this second alligator lunges out of the water and swats away a portion of Bartram’s catch with his powerful tail. Bartram is now convinced, if he wasn’t before, that safety in his camp this night is out of the question. He secures his boat and moves its contents to his camp, but he doesn’t move the camp itself, which he tells us is only a few yards from shore. Alligators aren’t his only concern, as bears and wolves are known to be on the small isthmus where he is encamped. So he plans some escape routes and is about to settle in for the evening when a loud crashing from the harbor alarms him yet again.
Rushing to the shore, he is astounded to see what appears to be “a solid bank of fish” (Bartram 1996:117), which he estimates number in the hundreds of thousands, are trying to force their way into Lake Dexter from the St. Johns. There are so many, he says, that it would be possible to walk from shore to shore on their heads. What this means for the alligators is a feeding frenzy, and though horrified by the crashing of hundreds of jaws on thousands of fish, Bartram is relieved, as busy and well-fed alligators will be far less likely to decide to choose him for a late-night snack.

At last, he returns to camp and eats his hard-won dinner. As he is going over his notes for the day, a noise from behind him has him on his feet in an instant. Two bears are advancing toward his camp. He shoots, but his gun misfires. Fortunately the bright flash is sufficient to frighten the bears, and they hightail it for safer parts. The rest of the night passes uneventfully, but we can’t imagine that Bartram got much sleep.

The next morning Bartram sets out again. He admits that the events of the night before have dampened his spirits considerably, but he resolves to travel at least one more day. Sure enough, he has to fend off an especially aggressive alligator that “rushed out of the reeds, and with a tremendous roar came up, and darted as swift as an arrow under my boat, emerging upright on my lee quarter, with open jaws, and belching water and smoke that fell
upon me like rain in a hurricane. I laid soundly about his head with my club and beat him off; and after plunging and darting about my boat, he went off on a straight line through the water, seemingly with the rapidity of lightning, and entered the cape of the lagoon.” (Bartram 1996:119-120). As he makes his way along the shore of “Battle Lagoon,” as he has named it, he also reports seeing a mother alligator with a hundred or more hatchlings following her. Whatever the state of his facts on the matter, it’s safe to say that Bartram has been thoroughly spooked by the alligators. Nevertheless, he can’t resist inspecting some alligator nests, which he describes as “buildings” about four feet high, before departing the area.

When travel is somewhat less eventful, Bartram waxes poetic about the plants and animals he sees. He has many fine things to say about the Carica papaya, a tree that he says “claimed my whole attention” (Bartram 1996: 123) when it came into view, stating that “[t]his admirable tree is certainly the most beautiful of any vegetable production I know of; the towering Laurel Magnolia and exalted Palm, indeed exceed it in grandeur and magnificence, but not in elegance, delicacy, and gracefulness” (1996:123). Of the snake bird (or anhinga, a bird commonly found along waterways in Florida), he says: “I doubt not but if this bird had been an
inhabitant of the Tiber in Ovid’s days, it would have furnished him with a subject for some beautiful and entertaining metamorphoses” (1996:124).
Astor

The drive to Astor should have been a stress-free scenic trip with a stop to get a look at Lake George on the way, but I had to make most of the drive in a summer monsoon. Rain was coming down in sheets, making it hard to see the car ahead of me, and the semi behind me was uncomfortably close. I tried slowing down a few times to take one of the turnoffs that leads to the lake, but every time I braked, the semi didn’t, and I was afraid that if I didn’t pick up the pace again -- pronto -- I was going to be road kill. So I gave up on enjoying the scenery and just hoped I’d be able to make out road signs in the downpour and make it to Astor in one piece.

As I passed through Astor Park, the rain finally let up some, and when I got to Astor itself, it was light enough that I was able to take a few photos. What you’d call Astor’s business district is all right there on State Road 40, and nowhere else. There is a small grocery store, the florist’s shop I’ve come to expect even the smallest of towns to have, a bait shop, a place that sold boats, a bank, the water utilities office, and a few restaurants. There are a few other shops, and that’s about all. The locals I encounter at the grocery store and florist’s shop can’t give me an estimate of Astor’s population,
though a teenager working at the grocery store summed it up pretty well with, “it’s about as small a place as you can imagine.”

My tour of the side streets around the main drag turned up an impressive catalog of mobile homes representing several construction eras. I had never really thought of mobile homes as having styles that would date them, but on this day I learned that clearly they do. The ones from the fifties and sixties were sort of rounded, or finny, like the cars of the era. Seventies models might still have shaped edges, but they weren’t as elaborate as the earlier models. Those from the eighties were just like the cars of the era: boxy and economical looking. And the newest models tended to have details that made them more house-like, like slatted siding and sloping house-style roofs. Most of the homes in Astor seem to be mobile in nature, but every now and then, a lot might contain a house of thoroughly modern construction sprawling across it. The further off of Highway 40 you get, the less improvement the roads have seen, and in places the muddy pits in the road were more than my little economy car could handle. Though Astor’s buffer of state and national forest lands protect it from ever being absorbed into the urban sprawl of Orlando and the East coast of Florida, it seems inevitable that more people will find their way here. For now, Astor
remains a part of the hinterland, though it seems that newcomers have packed up their suburban lifestyle and brought it with them.

Astor and the surrounding area between Lake George and Lake Dexter on the St. Johns has a long and occasionally colorful history. The Spanish were the first Europeans to arrive in the area in 1596. They remained until 1761, when they were forced to flee Florida after losing against the English in battles fought further north. Two years later James Spalding established his two trading posts on the St. Johns, one of which was known as the Upper Store and was located along the river at a place where three Indian trails crossed. John and William Bartram arrived in the area in 1765, and it was John who gave Lake George its name, in honor of England’s King George III. Spain reoccupied Florida during the American Revolution, but had difficulty governing the area and returned it to the United States in 1821, making Florida a United States territory (1996:9-13). Florida became a state in 1845.

In 1874, William Astor, grandson of famous fur tycoon and the United States’ first millionaire John Jacob Astor I, purchases nearly 13,000 acres of land from Moses E. Levy’s heirs. Astor, along with two business partners, lays out a town, to be called Manhattan, over most of the tract. Much of the land was divided in to 20-acre lots and advertised at
competitive rates. Astor built a church and a school and set aside land for a free cemetery to make the area more attractive to potential settlers. He also added two hotels and a general store, and built his own railroad from Astor Landing, one of two docks in town, to Lake Eustis, where it connected to the Central Florida Railroad. By 1884, the name of the town had been changed to Astor, and William Astor had added a botanical garden to his kingdom. The community was thriving, with steamers from Jacksonville stopping twice a day. A small community also sprung up on the east bank of the river, known first as Volutia Land and later as Volusia Township. Many of the residents however considered themselves to be members of the Astor community, as do the residents of Volusia today despite the fact that the two towns are in different counties (1996:23-27). What I saw of Volusia did indeed seem like an extension of Astor. On the map I have it appears to only be a few streets, and the only business I saw was a long-abandoned restaurant. The sign commemorating Bartram’s visit is on this side of the river, though, next to a large oak by the Astor bridge.

The year 1894 brought two blows to the town of Astor: William Astor died, and there was a devastating freeze that killed both the botanical garden and the orange groves by which many in the community earned their living, greatly damaging the local economy. William Astor’s son, John Jacob Astor
IV, tried to compensate for the losses by increasing logging and turpentine production on his land (1996:28). However, he went down with the Titanic in 1912, and Astor went to his son, William Vincent Astor, who had no interest in his grandfather’s Florida dream. In 1916 he sold the entire tract on which Astor was located to the Duluth Land Company, based in Minnesota. The new owners promoted the area as “the richest farmland in the country”, boasting ten foot tall corn and harvests year round. (Their advertising failed to mention that settlers would have their work cut out for them clearing away all the stumps left behind from where John Jacob Astor IV had cleared out the pine forests for lumber.) The newest wave of immigrants drawn by the advertising were mostly Finns who had been working in Minnesota factories, and if they were dismayed by what they saw when they arrived in Astor, they nevertheless remained and soon the area was covered with small productive farms. Martin Hendrickson, the real estate broker for the Duluth Land Company, was among the new arrivals, and some of his grandchildren still reside in the area (1996:28-30). Edith Hendrickson, who I met at the Astor Community Library, which had only been open a few weeks when I visited, is one of his descendents. She considers herself a sort of keeper of local history, and has set up an “Astor Room” at the library. She quickly located all sorts of articles on Astor’s
history, and told me where you can buy a copy of the small, locally published, book on Astor by Albert Wass de Czege that seems to be the main source for most of them. That place is the local bank, and, as the bank lobby had already closed by the time I got there, I purchased the book from the drive-through teller.

After the Second World War, Astor began to gain a reputation for the excellent fishing the river and the two lakes provided. Fish camps began to spring up as northerners traveled to the area to fish. Around the 1960s, the population of the area began to rise as the tranquil setting attracted both permanent residents and long-term vacationers. The increase in population necessitated a Volunteer Fire Department, and in 1968 the Astor-Astor Park Water Association. (1996:35-59). The Water Association still provides water utilities to the area today, which Edith Hendrickson tells me is unusual for such a small town.

Most of the original William Astor’s Astor is long gone. The boats I see on the river are mostly pleasure craft, not steamships bringing goods and tourists. The famous Astor House Hotel burned down way back in 1925, and the railroad station and other hotels are gone as well. The dense Florida forests that surround Astor seem as if they might reclaim the area at any
time. The town itself is not beautiful, but the landscape engulfing it makes it a beautiful place to be.

Astor has its own monster legend in the style of the Loch Ness monster. It is believed that the legend originated when the Tallahassee Gazette made the humorous suggestion that the “something big” that turned over a fishing boat on Lake Dexter in 1896 was the “Monster of the St. Johns.” The reference was meant to imply that the story of the incident might have been embellished as part of some resourceful land developer’s scheme, but once the idea was planted it seems that it was hard to shake. Over the years there have been several other supposed sightings of the monster, and some claim that the great alligator battle that William Bartram describes in the *Travels* was really the first Astor Monster sighting. A local fishing guide reported seeing the beast in 1949, and a sketch based on his description was published with the story about it run the Jacksonville Times-Union (Wass de Czege 1996:60). Several other sightings were reported during the 1950s in Astor’s own short-lived newspaper, the Astor News (1996:60), and Astor resident and fishing guide Buck Dillard also reported seeing it in the late 1960s (Burdette 1982). In 1987, two men in a speedboat on Lake George claimed that something large and greenish-gray with spikes on its back overturned their boat. Their story was scoffed at, but those who
saw the damage done to their boat said that it looked like it could have been
done by something like a bull’s horn or a walrus’ tusk. The monster is
described as being about 35 feet long and more than 2 feet wide, with a foot-
long horn in the center of its forehead, two eyes and four legs. Sightings of
what some believe to be the beast’s footprints suggest that its foot is reptilian
in nature: slightly webbed, and with two-inch claws (Reed 2002).

While no sightings have been reported lately, pages featuring an
artist’s depiction of the monster are available at the Astor Community
Library are available for kids to color. I picked up a copy of it while I was at
the library, and the Monster is depicted with a jaunty, toothy grin. He props
his chin on one of his large clawed “hands”, and his long curling tail ends in
a fish fin. The addition of the large horn atop his head makes him
“mythologically correct.”. I guess it’s no surprise that he’s so happy – after
all, despite his relative scarcity and the terror he’s supposed to induce, he’s
very much a part of the greater Astor community. The locals I asked about
the monster might not have been willing to claim they believed in it
themselves, but they like the story and the color it adds to the area’s history.
Bartram’s Travels

When he camps for the evening he again has alligator trouble, though this time with a single beast. He is awakened several times, once when the alligator attempts to bash his canoe to bits to get at his leftover fish, and again when the screech of an owl alerts him to it sneaking up on him from a mere two yards away. The following night, he is not able to locate a campsite until after dark has fallen, and when he wakes in the morning he finds that he has camped on top of an old Yamassee burial ground. However, there are no alligators in the area and he has the first night of decent sleep since leaving the upper store.

The following day he crosses Lake Beresford in a terrible thunderstorm and at last reaches Beresford plantation, his southernmost goal. His friend was shocked to see him arrive by boat. Bartram described the storm as a hurricane, making this likely an excerpt from the later of his two trips to this area, as the earlier trip in May and June would be well before Florida’s hurricane season (Bartram 1958: 358 nn. 140-142). In any case, the storm did a great deal of damage to the plantation, flattening some of the buildings. Bartram spends three days at the plantation, attempting to dry
out his books and specimen collections, most of which he reports being able to save.

His friend at Beresford plantation takes him to Blue Spring, which Bartram calls "a vast fountain of warm or rather hot mineral water, which issued from a high ridge or bank on the river" (Bartram 1996:133-134). However, this seems a somewhat strange way to classify the constant 72 degrees that Blue Springs is today. Bartram describes the quality of the water as "perfectly diaphanous," and fish as appearing "as plain as though lying on a table before your eyes, although many feet deep in the water" (Bartram 1996:134). The taste of the mineral-rich water is not to his liking, however, and he likens it to "bilge water or the washings of a gun barrel" (1996:134).
Blue Spring

My trip to Blue Spring coincides with a trip taken with my best friend Gina to visit her mother in Sanford, which is located in neighboring Seminole County. Though I’ve known Gina since college, this is the first time that I’ve visited her childhood home. We make the trip from Gainesville predominately on back roads that Gina knows well. She points out local points of interest, like a stretch of road where every other house seems to have a beautifully restored classic car parked by the road, and the home of a local eccentric who has built an earthen barrier in front of his home because he believes the world will soon come to an end.

I ask, as we near her neighborhood, if she misses Sanford, a place she has not lived since leaving for college in 1990 and an eight and a half hour drive from her current home in Slidell, Louisiana. “Not really,” she says. “I miss the place I grew up in, but that part of Florida is pretty much gone now.” When she was young, her father, a Florida Highway Patrolman, sometimes brought Gina and her brother with him as he drove around Sanford, but because this was not permitted they had to lie down in the backseat of the car. There was a time, she says, when she could recognize the top of every tree along the roads in the area. Now, however, many of the
trees have been removed as the roads were widened and new neighborhoods and businesses sprouted all over the area. Sanford, once an autonomous small town in its own right, is increasingly thought of as part of suburban Orlando.

We turn off the county road, which is being widened from two to four lanes, into her neighborhood. The homes here are older, but neatly kept, with a profusion of greenery in nearly every yard. The streets are named for types of oranges, giving it a particularly Floridian character. There is a small lake nearby and here and there ducks wander through front lawns.

Before we go inside, Gina warns me of the two cardinal sins in a Thai home: “no shoes, and under no circumstances can the rice spoon touch anything else!” Gina’s mother is Thai, and Gina herself lived in Thailand the first few years of her life. Her father, who passed away a few years ago, came from a family that has been in the Sanford area for several generations.

Gina’s mother has been preparing dinner in anticipation of our arrival. We sit down to an early dinner of yum, a Thai dish of spicy beef with mint leaves eaten with lettuce and sticky rice. We eat it the Thai way, using our fingers to make balls of the sticky rice and wrapping the rice and meat together in bits of lettuce to make bite-sized morsels. After the table has
been cleared, we make the short drive to Blue Spring, a state park recreational area.

As we travel, Gina points out local landmarks such as the zoo and Lake Monroe to me, and her mother fills her in on what stores have opened or closed and updates her on family friends and neighbors that live nearby. We reach the park not long after 5 o’clock and pay the modest $4 per car admission fee. Like at Paynes Prairie State Park, there is a long winding road to be followed to the recreation area at the spring itself. We park the car in the small lot and follow a short path between the trees.

Near the place where Blue Spring Run meets the St. Johns is Thursby Mansion, built on a shell mound near the spring in 1872. It’s only open to the public at certain times, and now is not one of them. Remains of a steamboat dock at the mansion date back to this same period of the spring’s history (Florida Department of Environmental Protection 2002).

We come first not to the spring but to a grassy area covered with brightly colored blankets and inflatable objects in a variety of shapes. There are many more swimmers and park-goers than I had anticipated. It takes a moment to get my bearings in this unexpected crowd. We pick our way through the moving bodies to the boardwalk at the far side of the grass, which offers a pair of educational billboards about the spring and several
access ways to the water. One billboard describes the geology and biology of the spring, and the other gives a brief history of the area. The two topics covered primarily in the history are the Timucuan Indians, who made their home here for centuries and who left behind many shell mounds along the St. Johns that later became landmarks for John and William Bartram’s visit to the area on January 4, 1766. Blue Spring is the furthest point upstream on the St. Johns that William Bartram chronicled in the *Travels*, though he went as far south as Lake Harney on the earlier trip with his father (Bartram 1958: 358 nn. 145-146).

Gina, her mother, and I take a metal gangway covered with scuffed rubber matting out to the spring’s edge. Screaming children run past us, and more shouts come from the water where a dozen or more people float on inner tubes or splash around. Others, fully dressed like us, enjoy the view or keep an eye on small swimmers. A group of teenagers, speaking rapidly in Chinese, makes as if to throw one member into the water fully clothed. The “victim” screams with terror and delight. This area is known for its manatee community – at least 40 to 60 return every year refuge in the constant 72-degree water temperature of the spring during the winter months, and some live here year round (Belleville 2000:80). None, however, are in evidence today. The water is quite clear, and slightly greenish-blue in appearance,
giving the spring its name. It’s not particularly deep, but it flows steadily away from the head of the springs, so a weighted line crosses the water to keep swimmers from getting farther from the access stairs than they intended.

Gina and her mother reminisce about a family trip here, but they say the place looks totally different now. "There weren’t all these boardwalks, I think," says Gina’s mother, trying to find a spot where they might have entered the water back then. Problems with erosion at the water’s edge caused the Florida Parks department to add the boardwalks and to impose a $125 fine and ejection from the premises on anyone who enters or leaves the water at any place other than the metal access stairs. There are similar penalties for littering. These are not the only problems that Blue Spring faces, though: the water quality has steadily declined, and nitrate levels are on the increase. On Labor Day 2000, the springs were closed due to sewage-related pollution. Blue Spring is the largest spring feeding the St. Johns, with a flow of 162 cubic feet per second, or 105 million gallons per day (Marth and Marth 2002:46).

Gina suggests that we go look at the head of the spring, visible from a pair of viewing platforms off the boardwalk a few hundred yards further on. The boardwalk curves through the woods along the bank. Metal plaques
mounted along the boardwalk at intervals provide names and short botanical biographies on the sabal palms and sawtooth palmettos that are mixed among the more common Florida hardwood trees that border the path.

The view from the platform, about 20 feet above the water’s surface, is idyllic, even with half a dozen snorkelers circling the opening where the spring ejects its water from deep within the earth. It is possible to see a “boil” of water on the surface over the cavern where the spring exits the earth. A sign mounted on the platform gives a cutaway view of the underwater cavern, which opens up to a large area which, according to the plaque, contains all manner of debris, including junked cars and old railroad ties. There is graffiti on the rocks at the edge of the crevice. At the bottom of the cavern is the tunnel from which the spring flows, but it is partially blocked by a large rock, and the water entering the cavern from around the rock is under so much pressure that it has not been possible for divers to explore further.

On the wooden railing of the overlook, a small plaque provides an excerpt from John Bartram’s description of the spring. He reported seeing alligators sunning and large schools of fish, and that the water was foul tasting, something which William Bartram will also remark on later (Bartram 1996: 134).
We spend a long time on the two platforms at the spring’s head, mesmerized by the view. Finally a father bellowing repeatedly for his children to “get out NOW!” shakes off our reverie and we join the trickle of families who are heading back to their vehicles.


Bartram’s Travels

Bartram takes leave of his friend and makes his way back upstream, passing by Battle Lagoon uneventfully, making at stop at what he calls the “Isle of Palms,” a little island almost entirely covered with palm trees at the southern end of Lake George. He camps for the night on the western shore of the lake, “alone in the wilderness of Florida” (Bartram 1996:144). He finds himself once again awakened, however, at the sound of some large animal in the brush. Looking up, he finds that the fish he had hung in the bushes above his head have been carried off. Bartram takes a few lines at this point to thank his lucky stars that the creature, which he speculates was a wolf, takes only the fish and not a chunk of his own hide.

According to Harper, Bartram’s narrative at this point gets a little bit confused in his geography as he tries to weave two separate trips into a single narrative. It seems that he has swapped the locations of “Six-Mile Springs,” or present day Salt Springs, and “Johnson’s Springs” now called Silver Glen Springs, near which the above story about the wolf is assumed to have been set (Bartram 1958:361 nn. 157-168). Therefore it is Salt Springs that Bartram explores the following morning, taking many pages to give a detailed description of the plant and animal life he finds there. He describes
the spring as an “amazing crystal fountain, which incessantly threw up, from
dark, rocky caverns below, tons of water every minute” (Bartram 1996:150).
Though Bartram describes the limestone around the edges of the fountain as
being above the water, this is no longer the case, and water is no longer
expelled at the force that Bartram described (Bartram 1958:362 n. 165).

The place as Bartram finds it sounds like a perfect tropical oasis:

“Behold ... a vast circular expanse before you, the waters of
which are so extremely clear as to be absolutely diaphanous or
transparent as the ether; the margin of the bason [sic]
ornamented with a great variety of fruitful and floriferous tress,
shrubs, and plants, the pendant golden Orange dancing on the
surface of the pellucid waters, the balmy ail vibrating with the
melody of the merry birds, tenants of the encircling aromatic
grove... At the same instant innumerable bands of fish are
seen, some clothed in the most brilliant colours; the voracious
crocodile stretched along at full length, as the great trunk of a
tree in size; the devouring garfish, inimical trout, and all the
varieties of gilded painted bream; the barbed catfish, dreaded
sting-ray, skate, and flounder, spotted bass, sheeps head and
ominous drum; all in their separate bands and communities,
with free and unsuspicuous intercourse performing their
evolutions: there are no signs of enmity, no attempt to devour
each other; the different bands seem peaceably and
complaisantly to move a little aside, as it were to make room
for others to pass by” (Bartram 1996:150-151).

Bartram is also amazed to see fish swimming in and out of the
spring’s vent:
"But behold yet something far more admirable, see whole armies descending into an abyss, into the mouth of the bubbling fountain: they disappear! [A]re they gone for ever? [I]s it real? I raise my eyes with terror and astonishment; I look down again to the fountain with anxiety, when behold them as it were emerging from the blue ether of another world, apparently at a vast distance; at their first appearance, no bigger than flies or minnows; now gradually enlarging, their brilliant colours begin to paint the fluid" (Bartram 1996:151).

For Bartram, this scene is so beautiful it is as if it is part of some "piece of excellent painting" (1996:151), in which you imagine you could touch the scale of a fish or the eye of an alligator deep under the perfectly clear waters. But Bartram is quick to remind his reader that this is but an illusion of the perfect water; the fish are the same as those found in Lake George, which Salt Springs feeds, and they do indeed eat each other when no one is looking. He does however seem to be convinced that the clarity of the water putting all on display does alter the behavior of those who dwell in the spring, suggesting that this is perhaps due to "the consciousness of each others safety, or some other latent cause” (Bartram 1996:152).
Salt Springs

Salt Springs is in the heart of the Ocala National Forest, so no matter what route you take, you’re going to see a lot of trees on the way. I enter the forest on County Road 316, which I pick up near Ocala. It’s not much of a road. Narrow and heavily patched, it takes me past small homesteads and horse farms (of which there are many near Ocala). Then it heads into an area of dense forest, where there is only the occasional man-made structure. It seems as if I am on National Forest lands long before I actually am. The two little towns I pass through, Fort McCoy and Eureka, are barely more than crossroads dwarfed by forest that surrounds them.

I enter the true National Forest when I cross the bridge over the Ocklawaha River, just east of Eureka. Up until then, the road has been pretty flat, so when the bridge rises up in front of me, it seems like a mountain. The bridge carries me up and over the very tops of the trees, so high I never even get a glimpse of the river itself. I feel as if I am driving in the sky. When my wheels are back on solid ground again, I’m finally on government-owned land.

I think I know what to expect from a forest – after all, I’ve already driven miles through one. However, not long after I reach national forest
land, I enter a stretch where not a single tree grows straight up. Though these trees are of the same species as the ones that have lined the road for a while now, but they lean crazily at every angle, as if a very large hand reached down and crumpled them. Some are slightly twisted, and have a withered, blasted look. I wonder about the sorts of fertilizer they might be using, and think of the bombing range that I have heard about that’s on the eastern side of Lake George, relatively nearby.

Eventually (it takes a while because for miles I am behind some earth-moving vehicle that is going 25 mph, which I cannot pass on the curvy road), I reach Salt Springs National Park. There are a few buildings in the area around the park where the actual spring is located – hardly enough to call a town, but this indeed seems to be the town of Salt Springs. I spot a small shopping center and several signs for camping and RV communities before turning in at the gate for the park.

Salt Springs is a National Forest Service park, and as such it differs slightly from the state parks I have become used to. The entrance fee is slightly less than what I’ve paid at state parks, but I am not given any maps or literature about the park. The park official gives me only a parking permit, good for the day, to attach to my windshield with Scotch tape. It quickly becomes apparent why the map isn’t necessary: also unlike any state
park I’ve been to, the drive to the spring site is quite short. When I get out of my car, I can already hear the splashing and screaming of children.

Beyond a concessions area and restroom facilities the spring beckons. Here again there is a marked difference between it and the two state park springs I’ve been to – the spring is edged with concrete walls and the area around the spring has obviously been landscaped rather than kept as natural as possible. Most of the area is clear and grassy with tall palms here and there along the edge of the water. Further away, there is an area scattered with live oaks and picnic tables. Clearly there is no mission to restore the area to the way it was when Bartram described it. In fact, there is no mention of Bartram’s visit here at all on the information board posted between the water’s edge and the picnic area. The posted tale of Salt Springs history goes straight from the various tribes of Indians thought to have been in the area to the early 1900s when many people made pilgrimages to the spring because it was believed that the spring’s mineral-rich water had healing properties.

Salt Springs, as its name suggests, has a high salt content, allowing marine animals such as blue crabs to live there and also in nearby Lake George, into which the waters of Salt Springs Run flow. This salinity is due to the massive underground marine deposits through which the spring water
flows on its way to the surface. These deposits date back eons, to a time when the St. Johns River basin and the parts of Florida that lie to its east were a part of the Atlantic Ocean floor (Belleville 2000:108-109). Most of the area at the head of the spring is very shallow at approximately three feet in depth. This makes it an excellent swimming hole for the throngs of kids who paddle about in the water and clamber up and down the concrete walls and stairs around the water’s edge. The spring flows out of seven large fissures and two smaller ones, the deepest of which is approximately 19 or so feet deep according to the Florida Geological Survey. The pool into which the water emerges is about 110 feet in diameter, and about four feet deep on average, with much of the bottom being covered with grass (2002).

I don’t spot any blue crabs, but when I make my way to the far side of the spring I do see a few wary fish hiding near the clumps of tall grasses that grow out of the water here where fewer concrete “improvements” have been made. Doubtless the fish are here not only for the shelter of the grasses but also because the humans are concentrated on the far side of the spring’s headwater, nearer to the picnic tables, concessions area, and the spring’s mouth. The grasses hide me from the rest of the spring, but I can’t pretend I’m alone due to the constant ruckus coming from the other side. I’m taking a few photos of the fish from the bottom of a concrete staircase that
descends into the water when a woman’s head pops around the clump of
grasses for a second, then disappears.

 Returning to the more populated side of the spring, I attempt to take a
picture of the water where it boils up from the vent. However there are
always three or four kids paddling around its edges, and since the vent isn’t
all that big in the first place, I never get a chance at a shot that isn’t partially
obscured by arms, legs, fins or snorkels. I’m beginning to think of this
spring as a big naturally occurring swimming pool.

 It’s starting to rain, yet again. This doesn’t seem to deter the kids in
the water, though, or even the parents scattered around the water’s edge. No
doubt they intend to stick it out after making the long trek out here, and after
all, most came to get wet anyhow. I detour through the picnic area, where
the trees offer some shelter from the rain. Folks have spread their coolers
and other gear on several tables, and vultures hop around on the ground
among the tables farthest from the spring. Nobody’s actually eating lunch
yet, as it’s just now noon, but the big black birds hover in anticipation, and
seem to already be marking their territories. More than once, I see one
vulture chase another further away from a choice table. Squirrels also dart
around the tables, and now and then a squirrel or a vulture will find an
intriguing piece of debris from some previous picnic and take it up into a
tree to examine. When the piece of trash is found lacking, it is let go, so an occasional paper plate or piece of tinfoil joins the rain sifting though the treetops.

After leaving the park, I stop by the National Forest visitor center, located in the strip mall I passed near the park’s entrance, in hope of finding the informational brochure that I’ve become accustomed to receiving when I visit a nature park. This visitor center features an unexpected display of taxidermied animals in glass cases. The creatures are posed in ways that are supposed to make them appear lifelike, but instead emphasize that they are very, very dead. The glass cases house a Sherman’s Fox Squirrel, Eastern Screech Owl, Florida Weasel, Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake, River Otter, Florida Barred Owl, Chuck-will’s Widow (a small bird) and even a small bear. Some of these animals are new to me, but I think I would have preferred a drawn or photographic introduction. There was also a display on the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker that featured a sketch of the bird rather than a carcass, though I’m sure had it not been relatively rare I would have not been spared the experience of seeing one of those stuffed as well.

The visitor’s center does have some books and pamphlets, including ones on Florida parks and local flora and fauna, but not the Salt Springs-specific document I was hoping for. I head back out into the rain. On a
whim, I stop at Blondy’s Creations, the florist’s shop catering to the Salt Springs area. Like other small town florists, the store is packed with all sorts of knick-knacks that you could consider giving as gifts, depending on the eccentricity of the person you were giving the gift to. The store’s proprietor is in the back preparing a flower arrangement, but is kind enough to stop his work for a few minutes to tell me about the community of Salt Springs. When I express surprise that there would be a town in the middle of a huge national forest, he says that there are small parcels of private land scattered throughout the area. Salt Springs itself was once a privately owned: it was a campground before the National Forest Service purchased it in 1970. Only about 500 people live in Salt Springs year round, making summer a slow time at Blondy’s. In the winter, however, the campgrounds, RV parks and upscale retreats fill up, along with hundreds of houses tucked away throughout the forest, and the town’s population swells to four or five thousand. Since there are only a handful of local employers in the area, most of the year-round residents commute to Ocala or even Jacksonville, at least 70 miles away.

As I leave, I purchase a small necklace that is in a basket by the register for my sister, who I am on my way to visit for her birthday. I select it because it has what seems to be a mother-of-pearl giraffe on it (the thing is
so crudely formed that it is hard to tell just what it is supposed to be). My sister likes giraffes and will be amused by it despite its obvious cheapness. The tag on it gives a price of three dollars, but the storeowner charges me two and thanks me for stopping in. Later, when I reach my sister’s house in Winter Springs, I give her the necklace. The foam that held the chain on the back of the card is sticky with age, and we have to get her husband to pry the clasp open. Then, when she finally puts the thing on, the chain is barely long enough to go around her neck. We have a good laugh over it and wonder just how many years that necklace sat in that basket by the florist’s cash register, waiting for someone like me to pass through and buy it.
Bartram’s Travels

As Bartram’s story goes, he returns to the lower store in time to make the journey with the delegation traveling to Alachua. Before departing, he readies the specimens he has collected thus far to be shipped with the next trading schooner, in case it were to make its trip to Savannah before his return. The Alachua trip has been planned for a special reason: to meet with Chief Cowkeeper and other Seminole chiefs in the Indian village of Cuscowilla, in order to discuss the re-establishment of trade in the wake of the recent St. Augustine treaty regarding the raids on the three Florida trading posts.

The group travels westward, across a level plain of grass, low shrubs and palmetto, dotted with “low spreading pine trees” (Bartram 1996:153). They cross a small stream and enter a glade of palmetto, then what Bartram calls a “bay-gale” (1996:155), an area of hard white sand covered with a black slush. Eventually the land rises and they enter a pine grove, then a pine forest. At last they stop for the night at a place Bartram calls Halfway Pond. The exact location of Halfway Pond was a mystery to Bartram scholars for many years, but it is now known to be Cow-pen Pond, situated
along Highway 20, which I traveled so often, between Hawthorne and Interlachen (Bartram 1958:364 nn. 174-179).

Here Bartram describes how the waters of lakes and ponds in this area tend to empty during summer and dry seasons, as water moves toward sinkholes, (in this case Drummer’s Pond, a small pond situated right next to Cow-pen Pond) and into the water table. Bartram is credited with being the first to notice this phenomenon, so important to the ecology of Paynes Prairie:

“This lake spreads itself in a spacious meadow, beneath a chain of elevated san hills: the sheet of water at this time was about three miles in circumference; the upper end, just under the hills, surrounded by a crescent of dark groves, which shaded a rocky grotto. Near this place was a sloping green bank, terminating by a point of flat rocks, which projected into the lake, and formed one point of the crescent that partly surrounded the vast grotto or bason [sic] of transparent waters, which is called by the traders a sinkhole, a singular kind of vortex or conduits, to the subterranean receptacles of the waters; but through the waters of these ponds, in the summer and dry seasons, evidently tend toward these sinks, yet it is so slowly and gradually, as to be almost imperceptible. There is always a meandering channel winding through the savannas or meadows, which receives the waters spread over them, by several lateral smaller branches, slowly conveying them along into the lake, and finally into the bason [sic], and with them nations of finny tribes” (Bartram 1996:156).
Hawthorne

The drive to Hawthorne from Gainesville is a quick one, down Highway 20. The roadside is lined with tall, skinny pines as you leave Gainesville, but it becomes a denser, more varied forest as few miles out. Once outside of Gainesville, there are few buildings along the roadside, and few roads of any size intersect with it. Hawthorne is in an area called the lake district, known for its excellent fishing. Cowpen Pond, Bartram’s “Halfway Pond” (Bartram 1958:364 nn. 174-179) is also in this area, further east on 20.

Hawthorne itself is a small grid of streets. It has two business districts: the new business district is along US highway 301, and the old is a sleepy two-lane road known to locals as Johnson Street, though it is now officially named SW 221st Street. I find that when asked to give directions, the locals are often unable to help me despite how tiny their town is. They try, but the old names, no longer on the street signs, are the ones they know, and they haven’t had any use for re-learning the new numbered street names. So I get lots of responses like, “Go to this building, and turn left, and there will be a street that goes right, and their house is near the church, a Baptist church I think – its either green or brown – can’t remember which.” I am
told that the street name changes were mandated recently because of concerns that 911 operators would not be familiar with these outlying areas and that the number-names, used in almost all of Gainesville and much of Alachua County already, would make directing emergency assistance a simpler task. However, having seen the consternation that the name changes have caused for the locals, it seems even more likely that someone calling 911 from Hawthorne would be unable to recite their new street address correctly in a time of stress.

I arrive in town at about 2 o’clock in the afternoon and drive around a bit. It doesn’t take long to cover the entire business district. It would have taken even less time than it did, but I had to stop and wait on a train. It seems that trains pass through Hawthorne about every half-hour or so. The tracks crosscut the town, seeming to be everywhere at once. You see the train cross the street up ahead of you, and while you watch the train cars go by, you’re surprised when the engine of the thing suddenly appears directly behind the building right next to you. Between the vigorous blowing of the horn by the train conductor and the thundering of the train itself along the tracks, the whole town shakes.

For no reason in particular, I stop in the florist’s shop to see if I can get a feel for what Hawthorne is like. It turns out that most of the floral
shop’s merchandise is actually gift-y sorts of knick-knacks: stuffed animals, candles, scented soaps, and lots of stuff that would break if you dropped it. In the back is a cooler with three glass doors that is nearly empty save a few tasteful arrangements and some single stems of a beautiful orange-gold rose. The shop’s owner, Freda Frisbee, comes out of the back room to see if I need assistance. She’s happy to chat with me for a bit about the town.

Frisbee and her husband are not native to the area but moved here in 1987 when her husband retired from his job at the post office in Middleburg, a Jacksonville suburb. He wanted to have a place where he could do a lot of fishing, but they couldn’t afford the steep prices for property along the St. Johns River. They were, however, able to get a nice lakefront property about six miles south of Hawthorne. Frisbee opened the floral shop when they first moved to the area and saw that the previous florist’s shop was going out of business. She figured that must mean that the town had at least supported one florist’s business for a while, and she would give it a try. So far she has been able to stay in business, but says she doesn’t really turn a profit, making perhaps $100 in take-home pay for herself each month after the shop’s bills are paid. With a laugh, she says, “if someone walks in here and offers me $20,000 for the place, it’s theirs!”
I ask her about how she feels about Hawthorne. She says she enjoys living here, but has some reservations about what the majority of the town’s denizens seem to want for the town’s future. The problem as she sees it, is that locals don’t want to see Hawthorne change for fear that it might lose the quaintness which is currently its main selling point. But if the town does not grow, she says, it will rot away. Currently, most folks go to Gainesville or Ocala for their shopping, which is bad for local businesses like hers, that are trying to survive here. A little growth could result in a business community better able to serve its own needs, though she admits it can be hard to be loyal to local businesses no matter what. She and her husband often drive to Ocala when they want to eat at a restaurant, because “there is only so many times that you can stand to eat at Sonny’s [the barbeque chain]” – it’s practically the only restaurant in town right now.

Presently, customers enter the store to make a floral order, and I thank her for her time and head down the street to the local branch of the Alachua Public Library. It is in a newish red brick building, and the asphalt of its parking lot is still a rich-looking black. Inside, the entire library fits into one room. It’s about the size of your average high school’s library. Near the circulation desk, which is just inside the front door, there is a circle of four computer terminals, and beyond that several card catalog cabinets. The rest
of the room, maybe two thirds, is home to the books, plus a few comfortable places to sit. I chat with the librarians for a few minutes, and they tell me about how much they like the place, and they encourage me to visit Frank Moore, a local artist whose family has been in the town for several generations. They point out the hotel across the street, which was built by Moore’s grandfather, and they try to give me directions to his house, but these turn out to be unintelligible to me since they lack a single street name. I leave and drive around in vain. The sky is growing dark, although it’s only 3:30—a storm is on the way.

I drive along back roads in what I guess you could call metropolitan Hawthorne, not quite lost but realizing that I’m not going to get anywhere with the directions I’m working with. The rural roads with their dense foliage with small houses and lawns tucked in here and there are beautiful, even in the oppressive gloom of the coming storm. Tall trees covered in vines sway in the strong wind, and ahead I can see lightning etch the dark clouds where the trees part to let the road through. Then the sky opens up and rain and pea-sized hail pour down. I pull off the narrow highway into the parking lot of some abandoned business and wait it out.

On another day, I visit the Hawthorne Museum and Cultural Center. I am to learn from Vivian Burton, longtime Hawthorne resident and today’s
museum attendant, that even the museum’s building is historically notable. It is housed in the former New Hope United Methodist Church building. The church had outgrown the building, which was constructed in 1907, and needed a larger structure. They donated the old wooden building for the museum, and it was moved to its current location on South Johnson (now officially known as SE 221st Street), near where the tracks for the Atlantic Coastline and CSX railroads cross.

It is a rather new museum, having been in “business” less than six months. The interior of the place is immaculate, and the exterior sports a fresh coat of glowingly white paint. The windows, which are pointed on top and contain large panes of stained glass in Easter-egg hues, provide a cheerful contrast to the stark white of the rest of the building.

When I arrive promptly at 1 o’clock, the museum’s posted opening time on Saturdays, I find Burton opening the museum for business, which on this day commences with a struggle with the museum’s front door locks. After a few minutes, she is able to get the door open and shut off the alarm system. I sign the guest book, and flipping through the previous pages I see that almost all the visitors so far have been from either Gainesville or Hawthorne, though I do notice a few others from farther afield.
The hope of Burton and the other Hawthorne residents who envisioned the museum and labored to bring it to life is that its presence will help attract some of the people who travel past Hawthorne on US 301 to perhaps stop in the town rather than speeding by on the busy highway. The project has been nine years in the making. Jane Segal, a local realtor who Burton and others have described as Hawthorne’s foremost community activist, secured a state grant of $50,000 for the project in 1996, and the church was jacked up and moved to the site donated by the city in April of 1997. The renovation and remodeling of the building has taken until the beginning of this year, since it was undertaken exclusively by volunteers in the community, all of whom happen to be senior citizens. The result is an impressive example of community involvement, though as a museum it is a fairly tentative beginning.

The museum’s exhibits consist mainly of eclectic collections of old photographs and newspaper headlines. These are either mounted on pieces of heavy chipboard and propped up in the pews that line the room or else collected in binders lying on the seats of the pews. In the center of the room are several glass cases which contain collections such as the drains and cups used to collect turpentine from the trees at the old turpentine mill and implements from the office of Dr. Floyd, who was for many years the only
physician in town. Burton tells me that when Dr. Floyd retired, they had a
“baby party” for him: many of the people who he had delivered came to
honor his years of service to the community.

This historical material is not presented as a narrative, but rather as a
series of collections: old homes here, members of the black community here,
members of the white community over there. (Although, Burton is quick to
say, the blacks and the whites have always gotten on very well here.)
Somewhere among the clippings is an article that explains that the original
settlement in the area was known as Waits Crossing and also as Jamestown,
but was renamed “Hawthorn” in honor of James M Hawthorn in the 1880s.
Hawthorn is described as a “two-fisted Indian fighter” and was recognized
for encouraging growth in the area by giving the railroad land to run its line
west of Johnson Lake. The spelling was later changed to Hawthorne
because so many were already spelling it that way.

Along the walls, above the scrapbook-like collections, hang paintings
by Francis Moore, whose family has been in the area for a few generations.
Moore’s grandfather, W.S. Moore, built the Hawthorne Motel (now the
Hawthorne Apartments) in 1882 to serve the hunters and fishermen who
passed through the area. The Moore family also owned the local Ford
dealership from the 1930s through the 1950s, when they sold it to another
owner. Edgar Leo Johnson, for whom Hawthorne’s main street of Johnson was named, was Moore’s uncle.

Moore has been called the “Grandma Moses of Hawthorne”, according to Burton. Moore’s painting career began when he was in his 50s, when his wife signed him up for a painting class at the local community center so that there would be enough students to hold the class. He paints the landmarks of Hawthorne as he remembers them, in a naïve yet charming style.

Burton tells me of the Town Hall meeting held just today, in which community members discussed changes which are about to begin in the town which they hope will allow Hawthorne expand its resources to better serve its current community as well as attract new residents. Two things are about to occur, which will open up possibilities. In the next 18 months, State Road 20 will be widened to four lanes and a new overpass will be put in, which should bring more traffic through the area. At the same time, the sewer system will finally be expanded, which will allow for construction of new businesses. Already planned are a motel and a Cracker Barrel restaurant. Once a bustling small town when the turpentine mill was open, and when vegetable farming faced less competition from foreign markets, in recent years Hawthorne has stagnated, a trend many locals hope to reverse.
Bartram’s Travels

Continuing their journey the following day, they cross Lochloosa Creek and pass through a marshy area (crossing the River of Styx, a creek that runs through the marshes) on the edges of Orange Lake. From there, they make their way to Tuscawilla Lake, upon the shores of which Cuscowilla is situated. On their ride into Cuscowilla, Bartram notes the presence of an Indian mound left by some earlier tribe.

In Cuscowilla they are welcomed and escorted to the home of Chief Cowkeeper. Cowkeeper greets them with the Indian custom of shaking arms, rather than hands, stating, “You are come.” They are taken to an area in the house prepared for guests, and share a pipe and a bowl of what the Indians call “thin drink.” After they have relayed the tale of their journey, Bartram’s presence in the group is explained to Cowkeeper. Upon hearing that he has come to collect natural specimens of the area, Cowkeeper grants Bartram permission to travel freely over his lands, and gives him the Indian name of Puc Puggy, or “Flower Hunter” (Bartram 1996:165).

Bartram provides a detailed description of Cowkeeper, (though according to Harper his description of the Yamasee slaves is exaggerated (Bartram 1958:366-367 nn. 184-186)): 
"The chief is a tall well made man, very affable and cheerful, about sixty years of age, his eyes lively and full of fire, his countenance manly and placid, yet ferocious, or what we call savage, his nose aquiline, his dress extremely simple, but his head trimmed and ornamented in the true Creek mode. He has been a great warrior, having then attending him as slaves, many Yamasee captives, taken by himself when young. They were dressed better than he, and served and waited upon him with signs of the most abject fear" (Bartram 1996:166).

Cowkeeper led the Cuscowilla Indians, formerly know as the Oconee Indians, from the Oconee River area to the edge of the Alachua Savanna. Cowkeeper was known for leading raids against the Spaniards and Spanish Indians, and held a prime position in the Seminole nation, as did his descendants, until the tribe was removed from the area. Cowkeeper had visited St. Augustine in 1765 to meet with the governor of Florida, who had given him the honorable title of being a “Great Medal Chief” (Bartram 1958:366-367 nn. 184-186).
Micanopy

The town of Micanopy stands approximately on the site of the Seminole Indian village of Cuscowilla, which Bartram describes vividly in the *Travels* (Bartram 1996:165-167, 170-172). Micanopy these days is known mainly for its strip of antique stores and perhaps also as the home of the family of deceased actor River Phoenix. Like Hawthorne, Micanopy has its own museum. The Micanopy Historical Society Museum is located on the one main street, Cholokka Boulevard.

The museum resides in an old warehouse built in the 1890s by John E. Thrasher to house farm equipment and supplies, items he carried in his mercantile and grocery business in “downtown” Micanopy. It is metal-roofed and has a rough-hewn appearance both inside and out. The interior consists primarily of the one large room that houses the museum collection. The weather has been surprisingly temperate for late May, and both front and back doors are open, letting a breeze pass though the museum. After pausing to look at the antique hollowed-tree canoe displayed on the wide front porch, I step inside and fish out $2 (suggested donation) to put in the metal urn by the door.
The museum is divided thematically into two halves. One half is devoted to the history of the area, and the other showcases everyday items from old Micanopy. Prominently displayed on the history side is a William Bartram exhibit, which offers a biographical sketch of Bartram, plus several reproductions of his illustrations from the *Travels* paired with quotes of his description of this area, displayed in picture frames. Otherwise, the Spanish get a brief mention and the rest of the history section is devoted to the Seminoles who inhabited the area, the earliest descriptions of which are of course provided by Bartram himself (Andersen 2001:53).

The Indians’ story begins with Chief Cowkeeper as Bartram remembered him in 1774, then moves on to his son, King Payne, who gave his name to Payne’s Prairie. Of greatest prominence here, however is Payne’s nephew Chief Micanopy, for whom the town is named, and who was also to be the last Seminole chief at Cuscowilla. The display fails to mention that Micanopy was regarded as a dim-witted and unimpressive leader, who gained his position by inheritance, not might (2001:69). Chief Micanopy and what remained of the tribe were relocated to a reservation in Oklahoma in 1837.

The first white settlement in this area was Wanton’s trading post, founded around 1821 when Florida became a US territory. It was located
near the site of Cuscowilla. As whites began to arrive in the area in larger numbers, negotiations began between the new arrivals and the Seminoles. Chief Micanopy went to Washington with other Seminole chiefs from Florida, Georgia and Alabama to attempt to negotiate a treaty in 1826. However, the Indian Removal Act was passed in 1832 and the Second Seminole War began with Osceola leading his people into battle at the Battle of Black Point at Miconopy on December 18, 1835. In 1836, Fort Defiance, which had been built nearby, was blown up, but as the tide of the war turned, it was rebuilt as Fort Micanopy the following year. That year was also the year when Chief Micanopy, who had gone to Fort Mellon under a flag of truce to negotiate with General Jesup, was instead captured and put on a ship out of Tampa. He, along with the rest of his village, was sent to Fort Gibson, Oklahoma, where he died in January, 1848. As the exhibit points out, he never surrendered, but no mention is made of the irony of naming a settlement for him that exists because of the very fact of his defeat.

The rest of the museum provides a piecemeal representation of a daily lifestyle long gone. There are old photos from the late 1800s and early 1900s that depict the original occupants of some of the area homes that are now on the historic register. Samples of the other mundane aspects of life of the early part of the century – old tools, old clothes and the like – are also on
display, as are artifacts from the J. E. Thrasher General Store that this warehouse once serviced. There are also a few displays covering the town of Micanopy’s more recent history, including the fact that three movies have been shot here: *Cross Creek* in 1982 (where a number of locals filled in as extras), *Doc Hollywood* in 1991, and *Miracle at Clemons Pond* in 1992.

I pick up a copy of the Micanopy walking tour on my way out of the museum. It’s actually quite impressive that a town of only a dozen or so streets (not all of them even paved) has 38 significant structures listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Most of them are to be found along Micanopy’s main street, Cholokka Boulevard, and a few are nearby on Ocala and Smith Streets. Along Cholokka Boulevard, in fact, they are the rule rather than the exception, making the street itself an outdoor museum. And of course, there are the tourists. There are several restaurants and bed-and-breakfasts, but these are low-key, and housed in old if not always historically notable buildings.

A small park in a median area between Cholokka Boulevard and a parallel street has as its centerpiece a metal sign in the usual style commemorating Bartram’s visit to the area. Nearby, another park with a small gazebo has a similar sign honoring the departed Chief Micanopy. Surprisingly, even though it is a beautiful, temperate day, these parks are
deserted. The tourists, a dozen or so visible on the street on this weekday afternoon at any given time, are intent on combing the antique stores for which the town is best known.

I venture into a few of the antique stores myself. A row of nearly a dozen antiques shops occupy a closely spaced row of eight historic buildings in what was known as the old business square. Other antique stores are scattered up and down the boulevard, but this seems to be the heart of the antique district. The newest buildings in this “business square” were built in the 1920s, and the oldest is the Benjamin Building, originally a dry goods store, which according to the tour pamphlet has been in continuous use for more than 100 years. Appearance-wise, the most impressive is the Feaster Building, dating back to 1906, a Gothic Revival style brick building, which at three stories is the tallest building in the square. My copy of the walking tour guide tells me that it was originally a general store, and also once housed Micanopy’s first telephone office and had a theater on the third floor (Smyth 2001:18).

“Antique,” of course, is a relative term. One shop has a baseball cap featuring the slogan “Gators National Champions 1996” for sale. Also, it turns out that there are a heck of a lot of ceramic, glass and plastic bird figurines in the world, and most them must be in Micanopy. Every shop, no
matter what the specialty, seemed to have a selection. Many of my fellow shoppers were here to browse, but some of them had special missions in mind. A woman and her adult daughter sighed over a child-sized wooden rocker in one store. “It’s exactly what I’m looking for,” the older woman sighed. “But $250 … I don’t know.” Others handled old glass milk bottles bearing the names of various dairies or sorted through old linen tablecloths.

The stores’ proprietors varied significantly in the attention they gave their customers. One woman, carefully stacking the old china that made up the majority of her merchandise, greeted each person warmly at the door. In another shop, a woman was making phone calls, trying to find the name of that pilates place on Archer Road (in Gainesville), while at another, a teenage girl alternated between whispered conversations on a cordless phone and makeout sessions with her boyfriend behind the front counter. One old gentleman broke up the monotony of his solitaire games by asking his customers where they were from. When I told him I was from Houston and explained what had brought me to the area, he replied “Bartram… don’t think I’ve heard of the guy.” Ironically, his store was directly across the street from the Bartram sign in the little park. However, I have been surprised by how many people in the area do know who Bartram was.
At the end of this antiques pseudo-stripped mall, Cholokka Boulevard takes a sharp turn to the left. Ocala Boulevard, a narrow paved street goes right, and according to the Historical Society’s literature, this is approximately where Cuscowilla was situated. There’s no sign of it now – only old homes in deeply shaded yards filled with a plethora of Florida foliage. Joe Aufmuth, who works at the University of Florida’s library, has used GIS mapping to pinpoint a spot that he thinks is the actual site of Cuscowilla. The technique he uses shows depressions in the earth where buildings might once have been which are not visible due to the vegetation now covering the site. He won’t divulge the exact location, though. It is on private property, and the owner has not yet been informed that there might be a historical site on his land, for fear that he might choose to destroy it rather than risk losing his land to the government (Aufmuth 2002). So for now, the exact location of Cuscowilla remains theoretical and secret.

Interestingly enough, the location for Cuscowilla was located based on Bartram’s description and Francis Harper’s re-tracing of his path in the 1940s. Harper, a well-known Bartram scholar, has offered estimated corrections for Bartram’s notoriously bad sense of distance (and occasionally even direction) (Harper 1958). The mound, now known as Cameron’s Mound according to the Florida Division of Historic Resources’
Archaeological and Cultural Record, was supposedly a quarter to half a mile from Cuscowilla, which was by Lake Tuscowilla. This information, plus the use of GIS helped Aufmuth pinpoint the site. It’s also noteworthy that the Archaeological and Cultural Record maps show another mound in the area, which they have labeled Bartram’s mound. Aufmuth is fairly certain that this is a deliberate subterfuge in order to protect the true Bartram’s mound, where artifacts dating back to as early as 800 AD have been found. His reasons to believe this include the fact that the location is on the north rather than the east side of the lake as in Bartram’s description, the fact there is no evidence of a mound there now, and oral histories given by families that have been in the area since the 1800s, which indicate that there is no local memory of a mound of any sort at the site (Aufmuth 2002).
Bartram’s Travels

The delegation makes their camp on the edge of the Alachua Savanna, or Paynes Prairie as it will later be known, and agree to return to town for the planned council meeting the next day. Bartram tours the savanna with the trader who is leading their delegation. Paynes Prairie is an unusual landscape for Florida, and it is also rich in diversity. Bartram has his hands full trying to chronicle and catalog its plant and animal inhabitants, among which he includes his Indian hosts, who herd cattle on the prairie. The trip takes place in several segments during the course of their stay at Cuscowilla. Bartram makes a map of the area, though sadly his compass directions are off by a full 90 degrees (Bartram 1958:366-367 nn. 184-186).

In the course of cataloging the savanna as he finds it, Bartram again mentions the role that sinkholes, of which many are present here, play in the ebb and flow of waters on the land here. Indeed, there are periods in the savanna’s history where it has been completely underwater for years at a time, at one point deep enough that steamboats were run across it. It is also interesting to note that Bartram’s description of the behavior of the fish indicates that he feels a kinship with these fellow “adventurers from other lakes” (Bartram 1996:181).
“It is astonishing and incredible, perhaps, I may say, to relate what unspeakable numbers of fish repair to this fatal fountain or receptacle [by which he means sinkholes], during the latter summer season and autumn, when the powerful sun beams have evaporated the waters off the savanna; where those who are so fortunate as to effect a retreat in to the conductor, and escape the devouring jaws of the fearful alligator and armed gar, descend into the earth, through the wells and cavities or vast perforations of the rocks, and from these are conducted and carried away, by secret subterranean conduits and gloomy vaults, to other distant lakes and rivers. And it does not appear improbable, but that in some future day this vast savanna or lake of waters in the winter season will be discovered to be in a great measure filled with its finny inhabitants, who are strangers or adventurers from other lakes, ponds, and rivers by subterranean rivulets and communications to this rocky, dark door or outlet, whence they ascend to its surface, spread over and people the winter lake…” (Bartram 1996:181).
Paynes Prairie

As I reach the stretch of State Road 441 that runs through a two mile stretch of Paynes Prairie, the first thing I notice is the beautiful view. Then there follows a sudden barrage of love bugs against the windshield. Love bugs, Latin name *Plecia neartica*, are a species of the March fly found throughout the Gulf States. Twice a year, in May and November, they mate, which for their species involves being joined at the end to end until death do they part. Actually, even after the male dies, the female can’t be shed of him and must drag him around behind her until she too dies.

There is a small turn-off in the middle of 441’s intersection with the prairie where a boardwalk allows you to stroll a short way out into the vegetation. I park on the gravel shoulder behind another car with Volusia County plates and read the signs posted at the beginning of the boardwalk. To the right is a metal sign, one of many posted by the Garden Club of America proclaiming this to be part of the William Bartram Trail and giving a brief summary of his visit to this place. The larger sheltered billboard to the left of the trail has a display about “ecopassages,” of which there are eight along this stretch of 441. Ecopassages allow animals to cross under the roadway rather than on it to get to other parts of their habitat, thus
allowing motorists to get where they need to go without having to risk collision with the local fauna. It would seem that ecopassages are a relatively new idea, as there are only a few other places in the nation listed as having them.

As it turns out, ecopassages can also have the side effect of eroding the mutual fear between animals and humans. Motorists often pulled off onto the shoulder anywhere along this stretch of 441 to try and catch a glimpse of an alligator. I saw someone doing so almost every time I passed through the area, until a few weeks after my own visit, when stopping anywhere but at the boardwalk and its adjacent gravel parking area was made a fineable offense. It seems that, at these ecopassages, tourists didn’t stop at merely attempting to spot an alligator – they would try to feed them as well. The stretch was becoming increasingly cluttered with debris, and officials decided that such interactions with humans reduced the alligators’ fear of them, and it was just a matter of time before the alligators came up onto the road in search of a better snack than Fritos or leftover sandwiches (Independent Florida Alligator staff writer 2002).

The backside of the billboard, facing away from the road provides a short biography of William Bartram with a focus of course on his trip to the “Alachua Savannah,” as Paynes Prairie was once known. There is also a
page listing the botanical specimens in the area that he is credited with discovering. Unfortunately, this part is faded and hard to read, and based on what I have read, likely incomplete. Botanists are often not sure which specimen in a particular group Bartram was referring to, so there are many cases in which Bartram isn’t credited with a discovery of a species even though it was possible that he was the first to document its existence. (Perkins 2002) There is also table of dates and sunset times on the billboard, for since sunset is the posted closing time for this scenic overlook, the time is slightly different every day. I consult the chart, and find that the closing time for today, May 20, is 8:18 p.m.

As I head out onto the boardwalk, I pass an older couple coming back from the observation deck at the end. “You might not actually want to go all the way out there,” they warn me. “The love bugs are really bad!” I smile, and say thanks. I’m a North Florida native, and have dealt with love bugs in the heat of mating season before. They’re annoying because they are as happy to land on you as they are any inanimate object that might be around, but it’s entirely tolerable. When I reach the end of the boardwalk, I realize this situation is far worse than that. Love bugs fill the air, hang in clusters along the railing, and quickly settle on every inch of my body as well. I
can't breathe without getting a lung-full of love bugs. Apparently love bugs, like Bartram, love Paynes Prairie better than any other spot on earth.

I intended to take my time at the end of the boardwalk, studying the plants and keeping an eye out for animal life. The term "prairie" may bring to mind empty monotonous grasslands, but nothing could be further from the truth here. Looking off the boardwalk I can see a startling array of plant species, many unlike what you'd find elsewhere in the area. Unfortunately, I can't stay long, because I can't draw a love bug-free breath. And the creeping of literally hundreds of love bug pairs on my skin is beginning to drive me nuts.

I run back down the boardwalk to the roadside in order to shake off as many mating pairs as possible. Standing for a few minutes in the stiff breeze knocks off most of the rest. However, there are still plenty of the annoying bugs flying around down here too. Several pairs land in my notebook as I try to jot down a few things before leaving, and later when I open my notebook again, I find that I had inadvertently shut it on one of the hapless insects.

This is just one place from which Paynes Prairie can be accessed, though. Paynes Prairie State Park is just down the road. I drive there, and pay my $3.75 entrance fee (per car). A park ranger supplies me with a map
of the area, which shows the locations of the various recreational facilities and the many hiking trails. About two miles of winding and scenic roadway takes me to the parking area for the Visitor’s Center. There are only a few other cars there, it being a Monday. I leave my car here (looks like it’s not going to get much entertainment for its $3.75) and follow the path to the Visitor’s Center, which is about a five minute walk into the woods. A gray-haired gentleman is seated at the front desk, near a rack of various pamphlets. I collect a handful: “Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park … More of the Real Florida,” “Plants not to Plant to Save our Parks,” “Conservation Easements: Protecting Florida’s Archaeological Sites,” “Rancho de la Chua”, two called “Alligators,” one specifically about the Paynes Prairie alligator population and one more general one.

A sign posted on the rack says that a bird checklist is available upon request, so I ask for one. I am surprised to find that it lists hundreds of birds, though some are only present during certain times of the year, and others are extremely rare. Also near the information desk is a table with rocks, fossils and various other natural specimens. A sign on the table reads “Please Touch.” A small boy of South Asian descent is doing just that. He throws a jawbone on the floor.
I have just wandered over to the back part of the Visitor’s Center where museum-style displays are set up, when the man from the information desk appears at my shoulder. “Would you like to see the video? It’s about 20 minutes.” I join the boy and his family in the viewing room. The video is humorous and geared for children, but also reasonably tolerable for adults. I overhear the mother of the boy I saw earlier telling him and his brother the Hindi names for the animals found on the prairie as they are shown on the screen. An actor portraying William Bartram also appears briefly in the video. He is dressed in a Revolutionary War period ensemble with a tri-corner hat, all in an unlikely spotless shade of white. He seems to be making his drawings on a modern-day spiral-bound sketchpad.

After the video, I return to the exhibit. I am able to quickly glean the basics about Paynes Prairie. It covers approximately 21,000 acres (though in one place the figure is 15,832 acres), running about 8.5 miles from east to west and varying from 2 to 4.5 miles in width from north to south. It’s about 55 to 65 feet above sea level. The portion of it that is below the water table forms Alachua Lake. Scientists believe that Paynes Prairie was formed by the dissolution of the limestone layer in that area, causing many small sinkholes that joined together. As Bartram had astutely noted on his visit, the area goes through a yearly cycle of change, and the water level of the
area also fluctuates over the years. Unusually high water was documented in
the 1820s and 1860s, and starting in 1871, for about 20 years there was so
much water it was possible for small steamships to make regular runs
between Micanopy and Gainesville.

Paynes Prairie was named for the Seminole Indian Chief King Payne,
son of Chief Cowkeeper of Cuscowilla with whom Bartram met in 1774.
King Payne’s village, Paynes Town, was located midway between
Cuscowilla and the eastern end of the prairie basin (Andersen 2001:60). The
first hostilities that led to the Second Seminole War occurred on Paynes
Prairie in June 1835, when a small Indian hunting party was attacked by a
group of men from the white settlement in nearby Spring Grove. Then, six
months later, in December 1835, it was the site of the Battle of Black Point,
where Osceola led the Seminoles in the first battle of the war (2001:79-83).

While King Payne may not sound like a typical name for an Indian
chief, for a Seminole this was not atypical. Even Oscola, leader of the
Seminoles during the Second Seminole War, was known to many whites by
his father’s last name of Powell. (Mahon and Weisman 1996: 193) A few
miles down the road from Paynes Prairie is the town of McIntosh, named for
the Seminole Chief McIntosh who was of Creek and Scottish descent.
Another well known Seminole from this area is Abraham, a black man who
was an important advisor to Chief Micanopy, who was thought to have been not too bright (Andersen 2001: 81).

Another museum exhibit at Paynes Prairie covered the dominant flora and fauna of the area. The most common plants, the soft rush, pennywort, smartweed, American lotus, pickerelweed, cattail, willow and maidencane, were represented by hand-done watercolors labeled in pencil, and their area of dominance marked on a map of the prairie. The most common creatures, including the mudfish, two-toed Amphiuma (a large salamander), pig frog (named for its grunting call), Eastern mudsnake, American alligator, Anhinga (or snakebird), Florida duck, American coot, Great Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, Green Heron, White Ibis, Sandhill Crane, Red-Tailed Duck, Marsh Hawk, Southern Bald Eagle, Florida Water Rat, raccoon, and White-tailed deer, were pictured as well, each with a brief description.

Near the Visitor’s Center is a three-story lookout tower at the edge of the prairie. The first level of the tower has a plaque quoting Bartram’s description of the area. On the second level is a similar plaque, this one stating the Florida Park Service Philosophy on Management of Paynes Prairie, which is “to restore and preserve the area in the state in which it first existed when European man first saw it.” The plaque goes on to say, “Thus its management is based on the descriptive observation of William Bartram
in 1774, the earliest account of its landscape and inhabitants. Of interest is
the fact that this renowned naturalist even then noted the existence of annual
cycles of low and high water on the basin, a basic requirement for a marsh to
maintain a dynamic condition.”

After leaving the tower, I explore a few of the trails that wind through
the woods and along the edge of the prairie. Though it seems that I am
utterly alone, I imagine that this might be as close as I can hope to come to
the sort of experience that Bartram had. Like him, I am skirting the edge of
the prairie. I am traveling via marked trails, but many of the paths Bartram
followed were known by the Seminoles or by early white settlers. However,
I know that the area outside the park is not more untamed Florida wilderness
but an urban world of a shape that Bartram probably couldn’t have
imagined. Nevertheless, it is a rare opportunity to be completely alone. The
only animals of any size that I encounter along the trails are a few wild
turkeys and a disturbingly large water moccasin.
The Life of William Bartram

By all accounts, Charlotte Porter is the person to talk to about William Bartram in Gainesville. After some scheduling difficulties, I am finally able to interview her. I meet her at Dickinson Hall, and we talk in an unused conference room, rather than her office, which is buried somewhere deep in the bowels of the building. Bartram, she tells me, is her favorite subject, and she knows his history intimately. Our discussion is wide-ranging, and covers many Bartram-related topics that could be whole dissertations on their own, such as the life of Cowkeeper and the story of William Bartram’s short-lived Florida plantation. To understand what she has to say, it’s necessary to know a bit about Bartram’s life.

William Bartram, along with his twin sister, Elizabeth, was born April 9, 1739, in Kingsessing, Pennsylvania, not far from Philadelphia. His father, John Bartram, was appointed King’s Botanist by King George III in 1765. The elder Bartram, who was a naturalist himself, planted a botanical garden filled with specimens from his travels. This environment influenced William to develop similar interests. From an early age, he showed talent at drawing plants and animals, and drawing and botany were his primary hobbies (Waselkov and Braund 1995:2). During his youth, William worked
in his father’s gardens, and had an opportunity to meet the famous people who came to visit them (Kastner 1977:80). John Bartram, though self-educated, was a charter member of the American Philosophical Society along with fellow Pennsylvanian, Benjamin Franklin (Berkeley and Berkeley 1982:114).

Seeing the son receive the formal education the father never had was a priority for the elder Bartram. He sent William to the Academy in Philadelphia, where among other things he learned to hone his writing skills. It is not known if anyone taught him to draw, but even his earliest drawings show skill that surpasses that of his father. The fact that he drew animals in their natural context was unusual for the time and may show his father’s influence. At the age of 14, William sent some of his drawings to his father’s friend and patron Peter Collinson, who praised his work and intended to show it to the well-known English botanist George Edwards. And so, William Bartram achieved recognition as a novice botanist (Slaughter 1996:111-113).

John took William with him on an expedition to the Catskills in 1753 (Slaughter 1996:116) and again in 1755 (Elman 1977:33). However, John was beginning to be concerned about what sort of a career his son might have. He proposed that his son take up surveying, medicine, or printing.
Benjamin Franklin was willing to take him as an apprentice in his engraving shop, but William was unwilling to pursue any of these paths (Waselkov and Braund 1995:2). John was frustrated with William’s refusal to take up any of these rare career opportunities. He saw William as stubborn, unreasonable, and unrealistic about his future, despite the fact that he had always encouraged his son’s interests in drawing and botany (Slaughter 1996:121). Finally, John apprenticed William to a merchant in Philadelphia in 1756, but this lasted only until the following year. In 1761, William was sent to Cape Fear, North Carolina, where he was to work under the supervision of his Uncle William Bartram, John Bartram’s half brother. He would remain there for four years (Waselkov and Braund: 1995:2-3) with only a brief summer visit to Philadelphia to settle affairs. During much of his time in North Carolina, he refused to send the seed and plant specimens his father requested, and he rarely wrote. When he did write, his letters to his father were full of bad news about poor markets, debts, and other problems. It was as if he wished to punish his father for forcing him onto a career path he clearly did not enjoy (Slaughter 1996:127-129).

When John’s appointment as Royal Botanist came through in 1765, it made possible an expedition to Florida. Accounts vary as to why John took William on this trip: it may have been an effort to mend fences (1996:130)
or simply that he didn’t have money to hire a manservant (Porter 2002). Whatever the reason, William did not need to be asked twice and departed Cape Fear to join his father (Slaughter 1996:131). The mission of their trip was to find the source of the St. Johns River (Elman 1977:37).

During the course of their journey, the Bartrams encountered and documented a number of new species, though unfortunately many of their discoveries languished in the collections of British botanists while other people published and received credit for them (Ewan 1969:34). One of the most famous discoveries on this trip was that of *Franklinia*, named in honor of Benjamin Franklin. This large tree with large white blossoms has not been seen in the wild since 1790, but it lives on as a popular ornamental plant. Every *Franklinia* alive today is a descendant of those from William Bartram’s botanical garden in Kingsessing (Elman 1977:38).

William did not return to Pennsylvania with John, choosing instead to try his hand as a plantation owner on the banks of the St. Johns River in Florida. John disapproved of the venture, but nevertheless supplied his son with supplies and six slaves. John, a devout Quaker, also disapproved of slave ownership, but he forced his son to take on slaves because he felt that without them the venture could not possibly succeed (Porter 2002). The soil at the site was poor, and the plantation was doomed from the start. A family
friend, merchant Henry Laurens, visited William’s Florida home (which he described as a “hovel”) several times and wrote to John telling him that his son needed either more provisions or to be convinced to abandon his Florida venture (Schafer 1995:2). John wrote to his son, telling him that he would pay for more supplies, but if William did not return home immediately, he would never give him charge of the botanical garden, by now a profitable family business. The botanical garden was William’s birthright, and taking it away was a very serious sanction, almost unheard of in Quaker circles (Porter 2002). Though William was forced to admit failure in just a few more months, he did not obey his father’s directive to return home immediately. John ultimately gave the family home and charge of the garden business to his son, John Jr. (Peck 2002), who according to John’s letter is a “worthy, sober industrious son” (Slaughter 1996:130). The stigma associated with John’s decision, which branded William a failure according to the standards of his society, might have been devastating if John Jr. had not allowed William to remain at the family home and if John Sr. had not passed away only a few months after William completed the journeys that led to the Travels. However, it is also possible that William’s circumstances put him in a position to be more sensitive and sympathetic to the disenfranchised Indian groups he met on his journeys (Porter 2002).
Charlotte Porter states that the location of William Bartram’s Florida plantation has not been pinpointed (2002). However, Daniel L. Schafer has located documents that have led him to conclude that it was on the inlet of the St. Johns River now known as Little Florence Cove, with his “hovel” being located between Little Florence Cove and Florence Cove (1995:8-9). Whatever the case, nothing is known of what became of William’s slaves when he left the area. It is possible that he left the property to them, or that they simply fled the deplorable conditions (Porter 2002).

William returned to his father’s house in 1767, where he spent three more years. During this time, he worked as an agricultural laborer in order to pay off debts – no doubt a great disappointment to his father – and continued to improve his drawing skills. Collinson, up until this point the Bartrams’ greatest patron, passed away during this time. However, before his death he had encouraged Dr. John Fothergill, a wealthy Quaker physician in England, to commission some drawings from William. Fothergill proves to be a most generous patron, and ultimately it is he who will fund William’s expeditions recounted in the Travels (Slaughter 1996:169-172).

From 1770 until 1772, Bartram lived in North Carolina in order to escape his creditors in Pennsylvania and ostensibly to collect on old debts from his days as a merchant in Cape Fear, though he had no luck in that.
During that time, he wrote to his father, suggesting a return trip to east Florida. He father responded that it would be better for him to return home, saying that William should spend no more money on Florida ventures. Undaunted, William wrote to Fothergill instead, proposing an expedition to study the plants and animals of the "southern colonies." Fothergill ultimately agreed to fund the venture (Waselkov and Braund 1995:9-10).

Fothergill requested that William send him seeds and bulbs that could survive the cooler climates of England and Europe and encouraged him to focus primarily on the more temperate climates in Cherokee territory rather than tropical Florida. It is not known if Fothergill requested that Bartram report on his observations of the Indians he met, but William made this one of his primary objectives. William considered the Indians to be equals, and felt that their way of living was as valid as his own (Bartram 1995:11-12). Bartram advocated cultural relativism, environmental appreciation, and animal rights: values no doubt stemming from his Quaker beliefs (1995:17).

One of the most important Indians William Bartram met on his journey through Florida is Chief Cowkeeper. He first met Cowkeeper during the trip to Florida with his father, at a meeting held between the Florida governor and Indian representatives concerning land allotments. Later, when he met Cowkeeper again at Cuscowilla, he gave a detailed
description of the man and his dealings with him. Cowkeeper granted him free range over his lands, and it is likely his protection that kept Bartram alive during his travels in the area. Very little has been written about Cowkeeper, and a study of his life would be a worthy dissertation in itself (Porter 2002).

William Bartram’s writings predate the genesis of anthropology as a formal discipline by several decades. Though he casts himself as a neutral observer rather than an active participant in his encounters with Indian groups, his writings nevertheless represent important ethnographic contributions, not only in content but methodology as well. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he argued that there was a cultural continuity in Indian traditions. Where others of his time claimed that the Indians lacked history, Bartram documented mounds, sites of abandoned villages, artificial lakes, and myths of battles fought and tribes lost (Waselkov and Braund 1995:209-210).

William returned to Kingsessing in January 1777, just a few months before his father’s death. However, the Travels were not published until 1791, with a print run of a thousand copies. The book did not receive a strong response in America, but when a pirated edition was printed in London the following year it instantly became immensely popular. A
decade later, nine foreign editions, including German, French and Dutch, had been printed. Both Samuel Coleridge and William Wordsworth were inspired by Bartram’s poetic descriptions of fountains, rivers, plants and animals in the *Travels* (Kastner 1977:110-111).

After returning to the family home after his four-year journey, he rarely traveled again. Despite being offered further opportunities to both teach and explore, he chose to remain at home, helping his brother manage the botanical garden business. It seems that his failing health kept him at home in these later years: he was quickly losing his sight, and he sustained a severe broken leg when he fell from a tree in the garden, keeping him bedridden for almost a year. However, he was visited by many prominent figures, such as Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, James Madison, Andre Michaux (a French botanist), Alexander Wilson (an ornithologist), and Thomas Jefferson, who lived just across the Schuylkill River from the Bartram residence for a while. William Bartram passed away on July 22, 1823 in his garden, at the age of eighty-five (Waseklov and Braund 1995:19-23).
Bartram’s Travels

When the meeting of the council arrives, Bartram describes the extensive feast of various beef dishes provided them. He also describes the town of Cuscowilla, with its thirty residences consisting of paired buildings, one for living and the other for storage of provisions as well as the nearby plantation shared by the town’s citizens.

When it is time for the group to depart the area, they take a slightly different route back to Halfway Pond, taking an old Spanish highway for part of the journey. They again camp for the night at the fortuitous halfway point of the pond, before returning to the St. Johns and the lower store.

Next, according to the version of his itinerary in the Travels, Bartram joined the traders preparing to journey from the lower store to the store on the “Little San Juan’s” River, which we now call the Suwannee River (Bartram 1958:553). (Bartram also knew the St. Johns as the San Juan (1958:617).) They travel on horseback, reaching Half-way Pond and once again camping there for the night. Bartram complains that the mosquitoes were especially bad that evening. On the second day, they travel through the savanna near Cuscowilla, eventually reaching the pine forests on the other side. Bartram describes this forest as “a level, open, airy pine forest, the
stately trees scatteringly planted by nature, arising straight and erect from the green carpet, embellished with various grasses and flowering plants” (Bartram 1996:188). Leaving the forest, they come upon the old Spanish highway to St. Marks, which is approximately the road to their destination, the trading post at Talahasochte.

They camp that night about five miles beyond the Alachua savanna on the banks of “a beautiful little lake” (1996:188), which will later be known as Lake Kanapaha. The little grove of live oaks under which the group slept may well still have been there as late as 1940 when descriptions of that area include mention of ancient live oaks on the shores of the sinkhole pond (Bartram 1958:370-371 nn. 216-218).
Kanapaha Botanical Gardens

Kanapaha Gardens is just outside of Gainesville, on Archer Road. I turn in at the large wooden sign for Kanapaha and follow the winding road for a half-mile or so until I reach the small parking area and a wooden building topped with a cupola. This “Summer House” serves as the entrance to the gardens. A few cars and trucks are scattered through the parking area, most with Alachua County plates. One truck has a bumper sticker that reads “Alachua County forever!”

The carefully laid out flower beds and small pond in front of Summer House are attractive, but they don’t tell the story of what sort of a garden Kanapaha is. The real Kanapaha on the other side of the building is not a place of ordered rows or neat edges. I imagine it is something like John and William Bartram’s own botanical garden, packed with a profusion of plants both local and exotic, with a beauty built from excess rather than order.

The interior of Summer House is all polished natural wood. It has doors oriented to the compass points – North, South, East and West – and the center of the building soars up through wooden crossbeams to a windowed gable. Coming in from the parking lot, or south side of the building, I present myself at the information counter to pay the admission
fee and get a map of the gardens. The volunteer working there, an older woman with straight, severely cut, gunmetal gray hair and large glasses asks me if I have been to Kanapaha before. I tell her I have, but that it was eight or nine years ago. “Well,” she says, “I better tell you a few things about the map then!”

The door to the left, she tells me while pointing to the map, leads to the newer part of the garden, a half-mile tour of the Azalea/Camellia Garden, the Rose Garden, and the Water Gardens. The Rose Garden, she tells me, won’t look like much, since most of the plants just finished blooming. In the Water Gardens, I am to watch for the alligators. It’s daytime, so they probably won’t be active, but she explains that it’s also mating season, and they’ve been doing a lot of “horsing around.”

All the water in the Water Gardens is artificially treated. Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU) has provided “reclaimed” water for a spring and a small waterfall to the south, which flows toward a pond at the north end of the area. This reclaimed water is one of the gardens’ biggest assets, and came about sheerly by luck. There is a wastewater treatment plant nearby, and they wanted to find a way to get rid of reclaimed but still non-potable water that allows it to be a part of the water cycle. (Whatever water they cannot get rid of it put into a thousand-foot deep hole, where it goes below
the aquifer. Though it eventually makes its way to the ocean, it is lost in terms of surficial systems, and in a drought-prone place like Florida, this is a significant issue.) Kanapaha Gardens is strapped for resources in many ways, because unlike many botanical gardens they receive no significant funds that they do not generate themselves. However, they are rich in water, which in this business is priceless (Goodman 2002).

Lake Kanapaha, which Bartram described as “a beautiful little lake” (Bartram 1958:371 nn. 216-218), is completely dry now, though the volunteer tells me that it was full enough to flood part of the trail on the east side about three years ago. The east side of the gardens is older: a mile and a half long, densely forested loop with many specialty gardens tucked in along it, including a winery, a bamboo garden (the largest publicly accessible one in the state), a herb garden, a wildflower area, and a carnivorous plant garden.

The sinkhole area that I remember from my previous visit is no longer accessible, though it is still shown on the map. The woman tells me that she’s not sure if it’s because someone slipped on the often moss-covered stairs leading into the sinkhole or because someone thought that such a thing might happen. Also, she says, there used to be a sign marking “Bartram’s trail,” which ran through an area between the Fern Cobble and the
Carnivorous Plant Garden, but that too is gone. She draws a double line where it used to be for me on the map.

Thus prepared, I head through the west door to the Water Garden: I am eager to see alligators “horsing around.” Alas, though I watch the water carefully, I don’t spot any. I stop for a while at the gazebo (one of many scattered throughout the gardens) near the waterfall. I’m surprised to see a guy in Bermuda shorts wading through the water. He’s scooping up handfuls of pond scum and dumping it on the bank. He doesn’t seem concerned about alligators.

The man, I am to find out, is Don Goodman, the founder of the gardens. When I talk to him later, he tells me that he takes on the job of keeping the water’s surface clean so that none of his employees will have to risk the alligators. He doesn’t feel that there’s a huge risk in having them there, and in fact he enjoys their presence. They are fairly recent additions to the place, having abandoned the rapidly shrinking Lake Kanapaha for the more reliable reclaimed watering hole the gardens provides. One alligator has been there for almost two years, but the others are more recent arrivals. One of these new arrivals is quite large, and Goodman has named him MoJo (Goodman 2002).
I ask Goodman how he feels about having alligators in his gardens, and he says he’s not concerned about them at all. He, having a doctorate in zoology with a specialization in reptiles and amphibians, is in fact quite excited to have them around. He says that they aren’t a threat, and he has no qualms about going into the water with them. If they are there when he goes in, they simply go somewhere else and watch him from there. And if he moves to their new location, they simply swim back to where they started. He knows that alligators won’t come up out of the water and grab anybody: if he thought that was possible, the gators would not be there. He does have a few concerns about human behavior around alligators, which is not always responsible. For that reason, he has had bamboo fences put in around the areas where the alligators like to come out and bask, and has abundant signage posted warning people not to get too close. He knows that many of the gardens’ visitors, about half of which are non-local, may never have seen an alligator in the flesh before, and that is what they will remember most about their visit (Goodman 2002).

About six months after I talked to Goodman, MoJo will make national news when he bites off Goodman’s arm. Goodman had been removing algae from the water, and accidentally stepped on MoJo. Presumably MoJo was startled, and did what comes naturally to a seven-foot alligator: he
attacked (Citola 2002). Despite Goodman’s pleas for the alligator’s life as he was loaded into the ambulance, MoJo was killed so that the arm could be removed from his stomach, but the arm was too mangled and could not be reattached (Blomberg 2003).

Downstream, I spot a heron balanced on a rock in the center of the stream, almost at the mouth of the pond. He stands so still, I’m not sure he’s alive, until he begins to scratch his neck with a long set of toes. Though signs warning about the alligators are posted every 20 feet or so along the water’s edge, there’s still no sign of them. I reach the perennial garden at the north end of the trail and follow the wood-chip path among the profusion of blooms. It’s about four o’clock now, the hottest part of the day. Locusts hum in the nearby trees. I head back to the main trail past the roses, azaleas and camellias, to Summer House, in order to access the longer, older trail on the opposite side. Technically, I could just walk through the picnic area on the north side of the building, but I am happy to pause for a minute in the air-conditioned cool to examine the watercolors and photographs, presumably by local artists, which are on display.

Back outside in the heat, I follow the loop in a counter-clockwise direction. Once past the winery, the trees are quite thick, making things dimmer, if not noticeably cooler. As I near the area where the sinkhole is, a
red-headed woodpecker flies out of a tree on the right side of the trail and nearly collides with me. Startled, he swoops ahead to a dead tree further up the trail. I get out my camera and attempt to approach close enough for a good shot, but he is wary of me and flies to a tree further off the trail. After that, I keep my camera out, in my hand, but I don’t have another wildlife encounter quite like that one.

When I approach the part of the trail nearest to Lake Kanapaha (illustrated on the map with clusters of reeds attended by dragonflies and a man and a woman in a canoe with a crane flying overhead), I strain to see it through the trees. It seems to now be an open area filled with tall grasses and even some trees. According to the helpful volunteer, there was a sign commemorating Bartram’s trip through the area out here at one point, but I can’t immediately spot it. But I look again, and there it is, embedded deep in the undergrowth.

The trail is now looping back toward the starting point. Just past the carnivorous plants, I see a pair of college guys, the first people I’ve met on the trail: one is plucking a few leaves from a plant and putting them in a paper sack while the other makes a note of the plant’s name and origin. I note a few of the more interesting plant names for myself: Devil’s Backbone, Crown of Thorns. Devil’s Tongue, or Snake Arum, from
Thailand, which according to the plaque beside it produces one umbrella-like leaf each year. After a decade it produces a bulb weighing about ten pounds. It flowers — its bloom is four feet high — and attracts insects to pollinate it by giving off a tremendous stench. Then, it dies.

I visit Kanapaha again on a late Saturday morning. A different volunteer is at the front desk. I pay my fee and ask if it would be possible to talk to anyone on staff at Kanapaha. The woman tells me that Craig is around, but that he had to go up to the site where this morning’s wedding is being held and fix some things that were blowing around. He has the golf cart, she says, so look for that.

I thank her and head out the west door to the Azalea/Camellia, Rose and Water Gardens. Rose petals are strewn along the walkway in the Water Gardens, so I know I am heading the right way. Beyond a gazebo anchoring the end of a long, curving walkway, a picnic blanket community has formed. This is what remains of the morning wedding. The guests are casually dressed, and many are barefoot. One man is in the process of launching a kite, getting a running start in the open area beyond the gazebo. Others linger over picnic basket. A woman with a viola leafs through her sheet music. A girl of about ten, dressed in white, meanders along the path, blowing bubbles as she goes. I intrude on the fringes of this gathering for a
few minutes, watching the group as if they were part of the garden’s flora and fauna.

There is no sign of a golf cart, though, so I don’t intrude upon the scene. Instead, I take this chance to meander off the path myself in order to find the carefully hidden edges of this artificial world. At this end of the path is an open field, occasionally planted with trees and shrubs. Curiously, despite the signs admonishing visitors to “Stay on the walkway,” plants that are well away from the walkway are marked with placards indicating their name and origin.

Once off the walkway, the boundary of the property is easily reached. Once I have seen it, the illusion of a wild and fantastic space is destroyed. The relative artificiality and smallness of the gardens is revealed: their lush profusion is in some sense a ruse which comes to light when one sees that what lies beyond is a dirt road, a chain link fence, and the back of a housing subdivision. The plants hidden back here at the property line are not intended to be seen and have not been tended carefully. They are leggy and brownish, a strange thing for an area so evidently lush. Curiously, in several places there are circles of small trees or bushes. Untended, they have grown unevenly, and gaps have formed that leave the circle incomplete.
Traveling along the property line for a while, I reach other places in the Water Garden with startling suddenness, as my unorthodox path reveals the supposed distance between them as an illusion dictated by the walkways. These walkways control the visitor’s encounter with the natural construction of the gardens, the twists and turns feeding “snapshots” of small collections of carefully orchestrated plant matter, while occasionally providing a strategic opening for a larger “panoramic” view, also carefully cultivated.

Viewing points are also pre-selected for the garden wanderer in the placement of the various gazebos and park benches. Without exception, each is a small monument in honor of some person who has died, as indicated by a metal plaque attached to the structure. Ironically, the views of the garden, this profusion of living things, are in fact predetermined vistas selected for commemorating the dead.

These ideas of strategic vantage points and monuments to the departed remind us again that a garden is merely an artificial structure, a replica or re-capturing of some idea of the natural. In particular botanical gardens are “textbooks of plants,” presenting “all climates and places harmonized with each other, all history overlapping”. (Harbison 1994:3) But it is a shifting, schizophrenic history, more fantasy than reality, that places the South American papaya next to the pagoda plant of Southeast Asia and the Snake
Arum from Thailand deep in a North Central Florida thicket. A botanical
garden isn’t so much an education in natural history as it is a lesson about
the constructions of man.

At the wooden footbridge over the man-made stream, children begin
shouting. Three or four kids go shooting down the trail to tell their parents
the news. An alligator had been floating, log-like, near the bridge all
morning had caught and eaten a turtle. “You could hear the shell cracking
and everything!” one girl states cheerfully. By the time I reach the bridge,
the carnage is over, and the alligator is once again doing his log act, though
the silt from the stream bottom now clouds the water around him.

The wedding partygoers at the far end of the garden are folding their
blankets and collecting their picnics. The woman with the viola has been
joined by another who has a violin, and together they play an up-beat
version of some hymn I vaguely recognize. The bride has reappeared as
well, wearing a tight strapless floor- (or in this case, ground) length satin
sheath dress, that seems like a strange choice for a garden wedding. She
chats with departing guests while little girls in poofy white dresses twirl in
the grass and a few barefoot men do some exaggerated hoedown steps to the
amusement of their wives.
Returning to Summer House, I manage to catch Craig Hepworth, the weekend supervisor, before he leaves for lunch. He tells me that he has been working at Kanapaha since 1997. His job duties are quite diverse. Because he is the only staff person here on the weekends, when visitors are most numerous, he often spends time assisting them and answering questions about the garden. He also manages any volunteers who might be working, which includes less willing volunteers who have been assigned by the court system to work off their community service hours at Kanapaha. Today, for example, the three people working on digging a trench on the north side of Summer House are doing community service. Hepworth also finds himself doing weeding, mulching, and brush clearing or whatever might be the most urgent task for the day. He also selects and places plants in the gardens (Hepworth 2002).

Unlike many botanical gardens, which come into being when a wealthy patron dies and bequeaths their property for such use, along with a generous endowment for operating costs, Kanapaha is the brainchild of a few enthusiastic individuals, and lacks the extensive resources available to many botanical gardens. Therefore, Kanapaha depends more heavily on donations and volunteer work. It is also a little “rough around the edges”
compared to many similar gardens, though some would say that this only adds to its charm (Hepworth 2002).

Don Goodman has spent the last 23 years developing Kanapaha Gardens. He had been running a nursery with his wife in their back yard, but though it was successful, he was not satisfied with such a "mercenary" operation (Goodman 2002). What he really wanted to do was be involved with an educational project, like a botanical gardens, and there was no such thing nearby. In 1977, with his wife and three other people, he formed a botanical society, and thus having the minimum number of members needed to form a corporation in Florida, they approached Alachua County about a 33-acre parcel of land on Lake Kanapaha. After approving their plan for the gardens, the county agreed to a 90 year complimentary lease, in which the gardens pays one dollar a year. Later, in 1982, they requested and received an additional adjoining parcel from the county, both because they found they needed the extra space and because the area would have been developed as a recreational facility, which would have made a poor neighbor for the garden (Goodman 2002).

Kanapaha Gardens did not open to the public until 1986. It took nine years of hard work to reach the stage where Goodman felt they had something that could actually be called a botanical gardens. However, it
was many more years until Goodman felt that they were taken seriously by the public. He feels that started to happen in 1991, when they had the first Spring Garden Festival, now the gardens’ largest annual event, drawing 10,000 visitors over the weekend it is held. While the first one was not nearly so large, it was large enough to let Goodman know that the community was interested in the gardens. With the recent additions of a paved road and the new Summer House, completed just a few months ago, he feels that the gardens is truly an established entity (2002).

The name Kanapaha roughly translates to “the lake of the Indian village”, formed by a combination of two Indian words meaning house and palm leaves, which together describe the dwellings of the Timucuan Indians who once lived on the west side of the lake. Kanapaha Gardens is on the south side of the lake, and over the years many artifacts such as arrowheads and pottery shards have been found on the property. All the land around the lake used to belong to a man named Carlos Proctor, who used the area for cow farming. The City of Gainesville and Alachua County together took the land by eminent domain in order to have a large area that they could use for the water purification plant (2002).

The two parcels of land that ultimately became the gardens are about as diverse as you could hope for in this area – a meadow, fairly mature
second-growth hardwood forest, and the escarpment over the lake. Goodman attempts to develop the garden while preserving the natural state of the area as much as possible, taking advantage of the abundant sunlight in the meadow area and thinning areas of the forest only when necessary to make them accessible to the public (2002).

Embedded in the gardens is a sort of dichotomy. The older part of the trail on the eastern side, closest to Lake Kanapaha, keeps more closely to the local ecosystem. Much of what surrounds the trail there is naturally occurring North Florida forest, with exotica like the Aluminum plant (Vietnam) and the Resurrection Flower (Tropical Asia) tucked in along the edges. The Water Gardens, which were built in 1993 or 1994, have been highly manipulated, right down to the creation of a water source. Both however, reflect Kanapaha’s mission statement to “showcase the diversity of our planet’s flora,” to be a “zoo for plants” (Hepworth 2002).

The gardens have a cycle of planting and blooming through the four seasons. Lake Kanapaha, too, has its own cycle. Currently, it is dry or nearly so, but only a few years ago it overflowed its banks. Hepworth says that this is typical for lakes in this area. Because they are so shallow, they are affected dramatically by meteorological trends. The gardens too are affected by these changes: in the past few months there has been a surge in
the alligator population in the Water Garden as the lake evaporates. A few years ago, the flooding led to trail closures (Hepworth 2002).

Back in the older part of the gardens, I wander off the path again, following a trail to the greenhouse area where dozens upon dozens of plants await some future in the garden. On the ground, I spot a label for a plant purchased at the Home Depot. Once again, I find myself behind the scenes, where the illusion that the garden seeks to provide quickly dissolves.

Further down the (sanctioned) path, I stop in the bamboo garden, which is perhaps the most alien part of the garden, because while you are there, all you can see is bamboo. One cluster of bamboo, which the placard identifies as Wong Chuk bamboo, has stems as large as a good-sized tree, and soars every inch of the 40 feet the description says it can reach into the sky. As the wind blows through it, it makes a hollow plinking sound.

As I reach the part of the path closest to Lake Kanapaha, I again strain to see any sign of water through the trees. A light rain has begun, and as it gets harder, I make a run for the gazebo in the Palm Hammock. Birds are chattering angrily somewhere high in the palms over my head. As the rain temporarily slackens, I hurry up the last remaining bit of trail to the Summer House.
Bartram’s Travels

Bartram tended to ride ahead of his companions so as to better observe the wildlife he encountered, so he was alone when he came upon a large hawk in the road. It seemed the animal was unable to fly away, and when Bartram got close he could see that a coach-whip snake had wound itself around the hawk’s body, and the two of them were battling. Bartram dismounted with the intent of separating them, but at that moment they parted on their own, perhaps in response to the greater danger of his presence. The hawk takes to the air and is quickly gone, but Bartram is able to catch up with the snake and takes note of the details of its form and behavior. The latter Bartram conveys in the form of an anecdote about one coach-whip snake that had kept pace with him along a road, drawing itself up to take a good look at his face as they traveled at a fast trot.
Greathouse Butterfly Farm

Heading roughly east, University Avenue in Gainesville becomes State Road 26, and about 20 miles of winding tree-lined road brings you to the turnoff for the Greathouse Butterfly Farm. A winding dirt track leading to the establishment itself is bordered on the left by thick woods, and on the right by a richly green field studded with the occasional small tree and scattered liberally with cows, many of which graze complacently only a few yards from my car as I pass. A low wire fence prevents them from wandering onto the butterfly farm, but its wires are so narrow that they are difficult to see, and it seems as if somehow the mere presence of the widely spaced row of fence posts is keeping the cows in place.

The track bends left, away from the fence, into an open clearing. A small cottage surrounded by flower beds is the first building visible, but a small sign with an arrow indicates that parking for the butterfly farm is straight ahead, so I continue past the house and pull into a grassy area next to a school bus. I can see that the school bus has disgorged its contents onto the path ahead of me. I later learn the children are from a daycare in nearby Keystone Heights. The tour is already starting: though I called ahead to make reservations, it seems that I was not expected. I attach myself to the
group of perhaps 15 or so small fidgety bodies and follow the tour guide and
the children’s chaperones past the small yellow and white wooden house that
serves as the office for the butterfly farm and toward the greenhouse-like
structures behind it.

The Greathouse Butterfly Farm is the largest butterfly farm in the
nation, at least as far as they know since there is no official reckoning of
such things. The land it sits on has belonged to the Greathouse family for
generations, and a number of crops have been grown on it over the years, but
none so profitable as butterflies. The Greathouse brothers, Zane and Dan,
entered into the butterfly farming business in 1995. Zane, formerly a fifth
grade science teacher in Gainesville, had been raising butterflies in his
classroom. Pecans, a crop that had been grown by the family on their
property since the Civil War, were no longer profitable, and Zane wanted to
try raising butterflies. It wasn’t long before the demands of the rapidly
growing business pulled in Dan and his wife Kay to assist (Bull 2000).

The farm raises 45 of the 160 butterfly species native to Florida.
Most of these species are native to many other states as well, an important
concern since the release of butterflies requires regulatory permits issued by
each state, which specify what kinds of butterflies the Greathouses can ship
where. At any given time, only a selection of these species will be actively
raised, depending on various factors such as the seasons and customer
demand (2000). While I’m there, I see mostly Monarchs, but also Julias,
Hawkeyes, Great Southern Whites, Tiger Swallowtails, and what I learn is
Florida’s state butterfly, the Zebra Longwing. Monarchs are a perennial
favorite. While many butterflies live only a month or so, Monarchs can live
six to nine months. They also ship well, an important concern for a
company that does most of its business by mail.

I was surprised to find that not only does Greathouse ship butterflies
in the pupal state, they also capture the flying insects and place them in
small envelopes and ship them that way as well. Our tour guide
demonstrates how live, non-dormant butterflies are shipped in a small
styrofoam packing container. First, an ice pack is placed in the bottom, then
covered with a piece of cardboard to keep it from getting too close to the
butterflies. Then on top of this an inner compartment is fashioned using two
more pieces of cardboard. Small envelopes made of glassine, a wax-paper-
like substance, are held upright between the pieces of cardboard, each
containing one butterfly. The ice pack slows the metabolisms of the insects,
which helps keep them alive while shipping. However, if you have to keep
them in their envelopes for more than two days, they need to be fed a 10
percent sugar solution.
Most clients are zoos or museums, such as the Bronx Zoo, St. Petersburg’s Sunken Gardens, and the Museum of Natural History in Manhattan. However, about ten percent of their customers want butterflies for events such as weddings and funerals (2000). At weddings, butterflies are sometimes released instead of throwing rice, though Greathouse cautions against doing so during cool weather, because as the guide tells me, “It’s a sad thing to see little butterflies fall on the ground and break.” Customers pay $5 per Greathouse butterfly, a highly competitive rate.

On the tour, our first stop is an area where butterflies flutter in a series of small, screened rooms containing potted plants. Each species will only lay its eggs on a type of plant its offspring will be able to eat, so it is possible to mix species that prefer different plants in each room. Every two days, the plants are rotated, and plants that hopefully now bear butterfly eggs are taken to another area where caterpillars will hatch out and begin eating. We get to go inside the room where some of the caterpillars are, and the kids get busy trying to spot as many caterpillars as they can. They’re good at it, too, and happy to point them out to me. They’ve been admonished not to touch, and I can tell that this is really hard for most of them.

After spending time with the caterpillars, we next stop at an area with several workbenches with large screened boxes, each containing a piece of
board with rows of pupae attached to it. The pupae are organized by species, and each group is labeled and marked off with a box drawn in black magic marker. Many of the pupae are already hatching: butterflies hang on the mesh, stretching their wings for the first time. The guide tells us the rubber iris-type opening on the front of each box allows them to remove hatched butterflies each day. She demonstrates by reaching into one of the boxes and removing a Monarch gently by its wings. She says that when the butterfly first emerges from the pupa, its wings are wet and feel like a damp paper towel, so what these butterflies are doing is letting their wings dry out rather than stretching.

By this point of the tour, almost every girl in the group has found a butterfly – or part of one -- to hold, either a dead one from the ground or some live one that happened to be passing through. Perhaps because of the gardens planted on the farm, there are a number of butterflies outside of the greenhouses as well, though maybe they are just recent escapees. The boys seem more inclined to step on the butterflies they find, so it is just as well that the girls are picking them up.

The final stop on the tour is the one we’ve all been waiting for – the butterfly greenhouse. Butterflies swarm over rows of plants, awaiting imprisonment in glassine envelopes (though of course they don’t know that).
Some of the butterflies in the greenhouse are quite tattered. In some cases, I am amazed that they can still fly. The guide explains that the shabbier looking butterflies were among those taken on the road as part of the Greathouse traveling exhibit, then returned to the greenhouse after what was clearly too much fondling by an adoring public. Some of the monarchs are flying around attached back-to-back. “Are they doing what I think?” one of the daycare chaperones asks the tour guide. “Yep,” she replies.

I get out my camera to take a few shots of butterflies. One little girl appears at my feet and asks me to photograph the monarch that she has coaxed into sitting on her hands. I do and am instantly surrounded by small arms bearing butterflies. Once again, the little girls seem to be doing a better job getting the butterflies to land on them, though some of the boys are not doing too badly either. One poor kid, though, can’t stay still long enough to entice a butterfly, and he is pretty dejected about it. I try to catch one and hand it off to him, but it’s harder than it looks. I do end up wandering around for a while with a butterfly on my throat, which amuses the kids to no end.

Even though the thermometer by the door of the greenhouse reads 100 degrees, we are reluctant to leave. Though I have had a similar experience at the Cockrell Butterfly Center at the Houston Museum of Natural Science,
here the butterflies, while less varied in species, are more plentiful and far more likely to land on you and sit a spell. If the probing of their little proboscises is any measure, they seem to find sweat a tasty treat. At last, though, we file out though the strips of plastic that keep butterflies from following us to freedom and partake of the water cooler set up on the steps of the yellow house before hitting the road.
Bartram’s Travels

About ten miles from Talahasochte, the group encounters a herd of horses being minded by a black dog. Bartram remarks on the industriousness with which the dog goes about keeping his charges together, and that he was trained to mind the horses of his master, an Indian who lived in Talahasochte, only.

After traveling through yet more savanna and pine forest, they at last reach the Suwannee, or Little St. Juan’s. Bartram describes the waters as pellucid, a description that certainly does not fit the Suwannee today, as it is dyed a deep reddish brown by tannins from the trees. Bartram attributes the clarity of the river’s water has he finds it to the fact that it, like so many bodies of water he has encountered in Florida, is fed predominately by springs rather than tributaries, and to the volume of water pumped from these springs and the swift rate at which this water moves. The fact that the Florida aquifers are significantly more depleted than in Bartram’s time, which causes the springs to pour forth less vigorously (and in some cases, disappear altogether) would fit with the increase in tannins and slower water flow we find today. Bartram is well aware of Florida’s underground water
reservoirs, and the manner in which surface water percolates through the porous limestone layers to reach them.

They spend the night at Talahasochte in the trading house formerly belonging to the chief trader at this trading post, who was returning to lead the delegation. An Indian family had been living there in the trader’s absence, but they clear out and make the group welcome. The exact location of Talahasochte is not known, but Bartram tells us that it was on a bluff three or four miles upstream from Manatee Springs on the Suwannee. The Indians travel the river in cypress-wood dugout canoes, and sometimes extended their trips as far as Cuba to trade for coffee, sugar, liquor and tobacco.
Chiefland

Once you get out of the traffic around the suburbia of Gainesville’s western side, the drive to Chiefland is a pleasant one, along relatively empty two lane highways. Densely packed North Florida forests increasingly give way to open fields of crops or grazing cattle. There are still a few fields of neat rows of identical pine trees, no doubt awaiting harvesting by Georgia-Pacific, but it seems that rather than the ubiquitous log trucks, the truck I have to contend with on this trip is one filled with some other sort of plant matter. The semi has a mesh screen back panel, and either through the spaces in the screen, or from some space in the top of the container, its cargo, which I cannot identify, comes out in little bits and pelts my windshield. It reminds me of the rain, which I have become quite accustomed to driving in, but unlike the rain it’s getting my windshield pretty dirty. The narrow two-lane road makes it impossible to get around the truck, so there’s nothing to do but hope that it will take a different route than I when we reach Newberry.

Chiefland is a town of about 2,000 people, and it seems like a virtual metropolis compared to some of the places I’ve driven through or visited on this trip. There are multiple red lights, and business district covers several
Looking about the town, it becomes apparent that this isn’t a place that revels in its own history. Sure, there are a few older buildings, but I spot no historic markers. What Chiefland specializes in are fast food joints and strip malls. Not only is there the expected Dollar Store and Huddle House, they’ve got a Super Walmart and a Hungry Howie’s too. There are three or four motels, even. After talking to residents in some of these locations, I realize that attracting and keeping such businesses is a mark of success. Chieflanders are proud that they can meet their day-to-day needs right here in town.

At Chiefland’s public library, I learn a bit about the town’s history. The librarian, who has been in Chiefland for ten years, takes a few minutes to fill me in on what she knows of the place. Every minute or so, one of the row of egg timers in front of her will let loose a metallic “ticking.” This prompts her to call out to one of the children gathered around a cluster of PCs that their allotted time is up, then send the next child on the list to the free computer, and set the timer again.

Chiefland, unlike the other small towns I’ve been to, has a thriving local economy, and those who commute to work in Gainesville or Ocala are in the minority here. Many farmers live in the area, raising cattle and growing crops such as watermelons and tobacco. The Levy County School
Board (there is an Elementary, Middle and High School in town) and the Super Walmart are the biggest employers in the county. Tourism is a thriving industry here are well, thanks to the proximity of Manatee Springs and the Suwanee River.

A basic summary of Chiefland’s history was written in 1979, and it appears to have been reprinted in several places as recently as last year. It’s only a couple of pages, but it seems to be enough to satisfy folks around here – an interesting contrast to Hawthorne and its museum. At any rate, Chiefland got its name because of the Creek chieftains that settled in the area in the 1700s and farmed peaceably alongside the whites who also settled there. By 1845, the year in which Levy County was carved out of Alachua and Marion counties, there was a small settlement at Chiefland, which was served by two stagecoach routes (Etheridge 2001).

Most of the land that now makes up Chiefland was probably once part of the plantation of Issac P. Hardee. Hardee also built the first board house (up until that point homes were made of rough-hewn logs) in about 1860. I was told that the structure is still standing, but it is apparently not a tourist destination and nobody was able to give me directions to it. The town was first surveyed in 1913 and chartered in that same year. It officially incorporated in 1929 (2001). Since then, Chiefland’s history has been one
of modest economic prosperity, lately measured by the successes of national chains in the area. Not all have survived, though: Sonic and Dairy Queen are among the recent casualties.

Everyone with whom I spoke agreed that Chiefland, which has a population of just under 2,000 (Marth and Marth 2002:290), is growing, though residents do not look forward to urban growth. One woman, who worked in a local gift shop, said that she had moved to Chiefland from Mount Dora partly because she had family in this area, but also because Mount Dora was getting too big for her taste. Mount Dora has a population of about 9,000 – not exactly a booming metropolis (2002:295). Everyone I talked to seemed pretty satisfied with Chiefland the way it is. Many of the people who live here do so because they enjoy the natural beauty of the area. I was told that lately there has been an influx of people from South Florida who are fleeing the overbuilt urban areas, and also of "immigrants," a term which in Florida almost always means Hispanics. These newcomers are reluctantly accepted, so long as there aren’t too many of them and they don’t upset the status quo.

So, what do people do for excitement in Chiefland? They don’t. I took refuge from the afternoon’s rain in Chiefland’s largest retail establishment, the Super Walmart. The place was doing a booming business
as others like me took refuge from the downpour. This Super Walmart differs from others that I’ve been in, because it is the only one I’ve seen with small brown birds flitting about among the metal roof and calling to one another occasionally. When I ask about them, an employee tells me that there are pretty much always a few birds up there – they can’t seem to keep them out.

Three Walmart employees who are on break tell me that “nothing” happens, ever, in Chiefland, but they didn’t sound too upset about it. One laughingly points out that she’s from Trenton, just down the road, which only has one stoplight, and even less happens there. When asked what people do for fun, all three women quickly agreed that some people seem to enjoy drag racing in the Walmart parking lot. Other people would tell me that the parking lot in front of the Dollar Tree and the Radio Shack, located in the shopping center across the street from the one Walmart is in, is also a nighttime hangout. There’s also a place nearby where one could take in a little go-cart racing of an evening, if one so desired. But for the most part, if people want excitement – or anything else they can’t find in Chiefland, for that matter – they are content to make the 40-minute drive to Gainesville.

I have heard of one unusual thing associated with Chiefland – supposedly there is an “astronomy village” nearby. It’s on a farm of an
astronomer who welcomes others who want to bring their RVs and their
telescopes and look at the stars. I found references on the Internet to annual
star parties, but the last one seemed to be a few years ago. I asked around,
and though people had heard of it, I didn’t find anyone who had an inkling
of where it might be. So I drove south for a ways, along a two-lane highway
whose median was dotted with yellow wildflowers, but I didn’t see anything
promising anywhere between Chiefland and Otter Creek. I did see a number
of “No Trespassing” signs, however, and these, along with the continuing
rain—which at times beat on my windshield so hard that I thought it would
crack—convinced me not to search any further.
Bartram's Travels

Bartram travels with another man from the delegation by horseback to Manatee Springs. He describes his first encounter with the spring as follows:

"This charming nymphaeum is the product of primitive nature, not to be imitated, much less equaled, by the united effort of human power and ingenuity! As we approach it by water, the mind of the inquiring traveler is previously entertained, and gradually led on to greater discovery; first by a view of the sublime dark grove, lifted up on shore, by a range or curved chain of hills, at a small distance from the lively green verge of the river, on the east banks; as we gently descend floating fields of the Nymphaea nelumbo, intersected with vistas of the yellow green Pistia stratiotes, which cover a bay or cove of the river opposite the circular woodland hills" (Bartram 1996:198).

The spring Bartram sees varies intermittently in its forcefulness: "the surface of the basin [sic] immediately over the orifice is greatly swollen or raised a considerable height; and then it is impossible to keep the boat or any other floating vessel over the fountain; but the ebullition quickly subsides; yet, before the surface becomes quite even, the fountain vomits up the waters again" (1996:198). Bartram also reports seeing alligators and manatees at the spring, but these are rarely seen there now, although fish are still present in abundance (Bartram 1958:373 nn. 230-232).
Manatee Springs

I reach Manatee Springs by driving east from Tallahassee, where my parents live. Unlike the drives I have made to places further east in North Florida, where the roadside foliage is packed together in its infinite variety – palmettos, hardwoods, vines, flowering trees and even some pines intermingled – the landscape here includes more homogenous forests interspersed between open grassy areas. In some places, the trees are nearly all robust-looking pines, which differ from the tall skinny pine trees I’ve been seeing further east. In other places, there are fields of not only grass but also wildflowers and other small shrubby plants. Giant live oaks are visible here and there, providing an oasis of shade in the center of a field, or overhanging small concrete block homes along the roadside. Often these great trees have been allowed to remain in the grassy fields where farmers let their cows graze, and the animals can be spotted clustered around these trees, resting in their shadows. Occasionally, kudzu will take over an area, and many of the abandoned buildings I spot as I reach the outskirts of Perry are almost completely covered with the vine. I’ve heard it said that you could actually watch kudzu grow, if you have just a little patience.
The road to Manatee Springs runs six miles east from Chiefland and dead-ends at the park. I am traveling with a vase of roses fresh from my parents’ garden, and I ask the ranger at the front gate if I can leave them there in the air-conditioned office. It takes the ranger a minute to process this: he stands there for a moment with a dazed look on his face, then goes back into the small office to ask the women working there if they’d mind. He returns shortly with their permission, but forgets to give me the park pamphlet I’ve come to expect whenever I visit a state park. I pull over to the shoulder just beyond the park entrance and bring the flowers in their vase, which is carefully packed in a box with newspaper for padding, into the office. One of the women takes them, and tells me that there will be someone there at the office until eight o’clock, when the park closes. She adds without even cracking a smile that I can feel free not to come back for them at all.

Once parked, I must navigate through a forest of open-air picnic pavilions, concrete tables and barbeque pits to get to the spring itself. Then there is a small playground with slides, swings and teeter-totters. The spring is shaded and cool, and lined with cypress trees and cypress knees. Cypress knees are knobs of wood that grow out of the swampy land around the cypress trees. It is believed that the knees help the trees to obtain more
carbon dioxide. The water of the spring is a surprising shade of blue: it is actually bluer than Blue Spring on the St. Johns. Its clearness is especially startling since in this part of Florida pretty much all lakes and rivers are reddish brown from tree tannins. This clearness is possible because (according to the park brochure) the spring pumps out water at a rate of 81,280 gallons every minute – there’s hardly time for the water to collect much tannin as the water flows down a short run to the Suwanee River.

The air is filled with the screams of kids who paddle about in the shallows, accessible from a sandy beach on the far side of the spring. Some have rented inner tubes from the concession area, and either drift lazily with the current or try to knock each other off the tubes into the chilly water. A few older kids equipped with masks and snorkels circle over the spring’s mouth and there are a few adults as well, wearing wet suits rather than swimsuits. A scuba diver in full gear emerges from the water after fighting the strong current to explore the crevice from which the spring flows.

I wander over at the concession area, which sells a limited selection of snacks and souvenirs, and rents the inner tubes as well as canoes. I would love to take a canoe out on the Suwanee, but unlike Bartram, I don’t think I would be able to successfully maneuver one by myself. I overhear the man at the counter grumble to an adult customer that the same noisy kids come to
the spring every day from Chiefland and eat an ungodly amount of ice cream and hotdogs.

A damp and shaded boardwalk takes me from the concession area through an area packed with cypress and past several lookout points on the Manatee Springs run to the Suwannee River. There is a floating dock that extends into the river, and it rocks crazily in its mooring when the occasional motorboat zips by. There is a delay between the stirring of the river’s surface and the dock’s reaction: often the motorboat has often disappeared around the bend when the dock begins its creaking, and then after a minute or so more, the water will begin to slap the cypress trees at the shoreline. There is a houseboat anchored out in the middle of the river, and the occupants appear at the windows whenever the drone of one of these motorboats is heard. A while later, I learn that the houseboat is having engine problems, and the residents are expecting aid in the form of a needed part to arrive by motorboat. A part of the crew, a man and his two young daughters, come down the boardwalk from the springs and untie a canoe from the dock, which they row over to the houseboat. The man expresses disgust that the boat they are hoping for hasn’t yet arrived – apparently they have been waiting for quite some time, and now it is about to rain.
Before long, the rain does indeed come. As the first drops fall, a middle-aged woman dashes to the covered area at the end of the dock where I have been stationed, trying to capture the sturgeon that leap periodically from the water with my camera. However, I don’t really have the lightning reflexes that the task requires, and as the rain begins to come down harder, I put away my camera join the woman on the wooden benches of the sheltered pavilion. We chat a little as we watch the pattern of raindrops on the river’s surface. She is driving back to her home in St. Petersburg after a visit with her sister in Tallahassee, driving the same back-roads route as I did to get here. She said that her husband died a few years ago, and recently she decided that she needed to travel more and do things on her own. Rather than let the dark clouds deter her, she had made her planned stop at the park and was determined to get her $3.25 worth of experience without regard for the rain, which is now a thick curtain on the river.

When the rain slackens, we dodge raindrops back to the main area of the park by the spring. She heads back to her car, having seen what she came to see, but I linger a little longer by the spring itself despite the continuing light rain. I take a few more shots of the beautiful blue of the water, which fades to a light green as it flows over the limestone shelves around the edges of the central vent. I head over to the overlook a little
further down the run, where there is a small plaque with William Bartram’s
description of the place as it was when he visited it in 1774. Before I get
there, a man asks me if I was taking a picture of the snake. “What snake?” I respond, having failed to notice it. He shows me where it is curled up, less
than five feet from where I was standing. It is a fair sized snake, and it keeps one glittery black eye trained on us, though it remains motionless.

I ask the man what kind of snake it is, but he says he doesn’t know. However another man, who is down in the spring with his two teenage kids,
calls out that it’s a spotted water snake, and also it happens to be a female
who is expected to lay eggs soon. I guess everyone saw the snake but me.

This second guy looks like a member of the Hell’s Angels – big and
tattooed, with a beer gut, wild gray beard and longish hair – but it turns out
that the first guy who showed me the snake is the motorcycle rider. He is
from Birmingham, Alabama, and is making a solo tour of the Florida
Panhandle by motorcycle. Last year he had made a motorcycle trip to South
Florida to see the Everglades, and its beauty caused him to want to explore
other Florida nature sites as well.

I visit the park’s Bartram plaque, which has a quote from Bartram’s
Travels that describes the area, and then return to my car. In the parking lot,
the guy with the motorcycle is also preparing to leave. He asks me if I know
how to get back into Chiefland and get on 27A. I get out my Florida atlas, which is far more detailed than the foldout map of the Southeastern United States that he’s using, and we find the route. I follow him back to the park gate, where I collect my roses and head toward my temporary home in Gainesville.
Bartram’s Travels

The following day, the group makes a journey west from the Suwanee River, crossing the river by canoe while holding onto the bridles of their swimming horses. Bartram sees ruins of old Spanish plantations along their route, and spots what he calls the “most extensive Cane-break that is to be seen on the face of the whole earth” (Bartram 1996:200).

They return to Talahasochte the same evening, and following a feast held in their honor, the business of the journey is conducted. At the council meeting, an amicable resolution is reached, and trade will be resumed. Once again, the Indian Chief, the White King of Talahasochte, welcomes Bartram to take whatever specimens he wishes from his territory.

The following day, the group sets up camp in the forest about twelve miles from the river, and the chief trader takes Bartram on a detour en route to see the Alligator Hole, which was created by a recent eruption of water to the surface. The trader, who had been present for the eruption of water, tells Bartram that the water shot up in a jet from the ground with alarming force for several days, but then finally ceased, leaving behind this sinkhole filled with water. The only place in the vicinity that seems to match the
description provided by Bartram is Blue Sink, located on private property near the town of Newberry (Bartram 1958:374 nn. 238-240).

On their way to join the others at the forest camp, which was located at Long Pond, about 10 miles from Talahasochte, they encounter the camp of some Seminole warriors from the town of Caloosahatche. They stop there for a while, and learn that the Indians are in pursuit of a man who had fled the town with one of his women. The leader of the Indian group tells them that he intends to “have the ears of both of them” (Bartram 1996:208) before returning to his village. After Bartram and the trader reach their own camp, these same Indians pay them a visit, and they entertain them with food and liquor. It’s interesting how despite the fact that he’s traveling in largely uncharted wilderness, Bartram seems to be often surrounded by companions.

After more exploration of the area, the delegation heads back to the lower store. One evening they endure another midnight alligator attack, but the beast was fended off, then tortured by the other men in the party before finally being put out of his misery. Bartram, while clearly not averse to living off the land, generally prefers to leave the more exotic animals he encounters among the living. He notes that “within the circle of my acquaintance, I am known to be an advocate or vindicator of the benevolent and peaceable treatment of animal creation in general ... except where
hunger or the rational and necessary provocations of the sensual appetite interfere" (Bartram 1996:224). Likewise, while more than willing to dispatch an animal who is a threat, he seems to have chosen not to participate in the torturing of the alligator for sport, though he does not specifically condemn the other men for doing so. Perhaps this is because he has a healthy fear of the power and aggressive nature of the alligator based on his earlier experiences at Battle Lagoon.

They pass Paynes Prairie once again on their trip home. Bartram’s speculation of a possible future for the area is somewhat surprising:

“Next day, we passed over part of the great and beautiful Alachua Savanna, whose exuberant green meadows, with the fertile hills which immediately encircle it, would, if peopled and cultivated after the manner of the civilized countries of Europe, without crowding or incommoding families, at a moderate estimation, accommodate in the happiest manner above one hundred thousand human inhabitants, besides millions of domestic animals; and I make no doubt this place will at some future day be one of the most populous and delightful seats on earth” (Bartram 1996:213).

It seems strange how in contrast with the fact that Paynes Prairie State Park has been restored based on his description of the area, he would predict and even welcome the colonization of this locale, which he professes to be one of his favorite places on earth.
University of Florida Herbarium

The University of Florida Herbarium is located in Dickinson Hall, which formerly housed the Florida Museum of Natural History’s exhibit space. Dickinson Hall is still the home of the museum’s research and teaching activities, as well as the storage site for the museum’s more than 25 million natural history specimens and artifacts.

The history of the herbarium begins with the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, which was established in March 1888 as a division of the College of Agriculture at Lake City. The University of Florida Herbarium (which still uses FLAS, for Florida Agricultural (Experiment) Station as its international abbreviation) began in 1891 as the Herbarium of the Florida Agricultural College. By 1898-99, a catalogue of the College indicates that the herbarium consisted of 5000 sheets, comprising 1400 species, plus 150 lichen specimens (Perkins 1995).

In 1906, the Florida Agricultural College and the Agricultural Experiment Station were consolidated with the Kingsbury Academy of Ocala to form the University of Florida. The herbarium made the move to its new home in Gainesville via covered wagon. Because of a constantly changing staff, the herbarium grew slowly, and by 1925 the collection had
crept to 6000 sheets of higher plants and 5000 packets of fungi, the latter figure having largely increased due to the addition of 2500 specimens from the Fungi Columbiani set in 1907 (Perkins 1995).

The addition of new staff members Erdman West in 1925 and Lillian Arnold in the early 1930s launched a period of renewed activity and expansion for the herbarium, which grew steadily through the 1950s due to their efforts. Through cooperation in research projects and the launch of a plant identification service as a part of the Florida Cooperative Extension Service, the collection grew from 19,000 sheets of higher plants and 14,300 collections of fungi in 1935 to 138,880 specimens by 1960 (Perkins 1995).

Over the next 20 years, the efforts of Daniel B. Ward, curator of vascular plants, Dana Griffin, III, curator of bryophytes and lichens and James W. Kimbrough, curator of fungi caused the collections to nearly double, and by 1980 the collection had almost 250,000 specimens. In 1981, the herbarium was incorporated into the Department of Natural Sciences of the Florida Museum of Natural History. At the same time, Dr. Norris H. Williams began his tenure as Keeper of the Herbarium, a position he still holds today (Perkins 1995).

The University of Florida Herbarium and the Florida Museum of Natural History’s recently added paleobotany collection together comprise
close to half a million specimens. This includes the 1989 contribution by Angus K. Gholson, Jr. of his entire herbarium of 15,000 specimens, a collection rich in Florida Panhandle flora. The herbarium’s current holdings includes extensive representations of the vascular flora of Florida and the southeastern United States coastal plain and a bryophyte and lichen collection that encompasses Florida as well as some tropical areas such as Costa Rica, Venezuela and Brazil. There is also a large Florida fungi collection and a wood collection containing specimens from around the world, with an emphasis on tropical woods. There are specimens in the collection dating as far back as the 1840s, and new specimens are added all the time as the herbarium assists in research projects, et cetera (Perkins 1995).

In Dickinson Hall, a reception area has been built in the area that was formerly the access-way to the museum exhibitions. I present myself at the front desk and tell the receptionist that I have an appointment. After sorting out the tangled affair of a mystery delivery of five wooden tabletops, the receptionist calls back to the herbarium, located behind a set of glass doors in the hallway to my right. Momentarily, Kent D. Perkins, the herbarium’s collections manager, comes out to greet me.
I am surprised to find that the herbarium is not open to the public, even in a limited fashion. I am asked to document my presence in the visitor logbook before Perkins escorts me to his office near the front of the herbarium’s space. His office is long and narrow with a window overlooking the courtyard behind the building. The space is jammed full of books, tall cabinets, and bright illustrations depicting a plethora of plants. A small sign by the door reads “So many plants, so little time!” Along one of the long walls are two desks placed side by side with a computer at each. He gestures for me to sit at one of the computers, while he sits at the other. Throughout the interview, he will quickly bring up one web page after another to illustrate his statements.

Perkins has been the collections manager for the herbarium since the early 1980s. He came to the University of Florida in 1971 for school, getting a bachelor’s degree in botany in 1976. He began working as a technician at the herbarium after graduation, and stayed in that position until his promotion to collections manager. When he started the position, the focus of the herbarium was on specimen collection, and he often traveled around the state in search of plants that would enhance the collection. Since the herbarium’s move from the School of Botany to the Museum of Natural History and the arrival of Norris Williams, the current curator, Perkins’
focus has been more administrative. He spends his time building the herbarium’s computer database, orchestrating loans between the herbarium and other institutions around the world, ordering needed materials, and overseeing specimen additions and upkeep (Perkins 2002).

In a sense, the herbarium is a library of plants. All specimens are carefully catalogued according to a rigid format, and the herbarium processes materials requests for students, staff and faculty at the university, including sending requests to other institutions for specimens not available here. Similar requests come in from other institutions as well. Perkins estimates that there are about 15,000 specimens out on loan, and 15,000 to 18,000 specimens currently on loan here. Some of these specimens may remain for a long as ten years before being returned to their institution of ownership (2002).

Perkins believes that the life of a specific specimen is indefinite, given proper care, which includes mounting it on archival paper with a special archival glue. Some early specimens where not prepared in this way (many from the 1950s are secured with cellophane tape, a material we now know to be emphatically not archival) and the herbarium’s staff try to move these plants to a fresh specimen sheet as they are found. The oldest specimens in the collection were gathered by Ferdinand Rugel, and were
collected in the 1840s. Some of the earliest herbarium specimens in the world date back to the 16\textsuperscript{th} or 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries, and are still viable. The specimens William Bartram collected are also still around, and are housed in the British Museum (Perkins 2002).

Research involving herbarium specimens is either floristic or monographic. Floristic study involves comparing plants from various regions, describing them and writing keys that help in identifying them. Monographic research focuses on a group of closely related plants and study the difference between them. Much of this work is done on the molecular level: DNA from a plant is extracted and compared to that of other species. This work has resulted in many re-classifications of plants from one genus to another, and sometimes also the creation of new species. Even in Florida, where one would think the approximately 4,000 species on record would be well known, a few new species are discovered every year (2002).

I ask Perkins about the plants William Bartram describes in his writings, and he tells me that it is not always clear what plant he was seeing. For example, when he talks about a red maple, it’s pretty clear that there could only be one plant that he mean. But in other cases, he uses a common name, and it’s impossible to know which species he meant. His drawings,
too, are sometimes too distorted to identify. For this reason, Bartram doesn’t get credit for the discovery of many plants he probably saw first (2002).

After the interview has concluded, Perkins takes me on a tour of the herbarium itself. The place is laid out so that there’s one large room with other auxiliary rooms attached to it. This large room is divided into several areas. At the front, nearest the door, are several long tables that provide a workspace for those using or managing the collection. To the right is a small library containing books that are relevant to the botanist’s work. The back half of the room, however, is given over to several long rows of seven-foot cabinets similar to the ones I have just seen in Perkins’ office. Most are metal, but some older-looking ones are heavy wood models. Perkins moves quickly and efficiently among the rows, extracting a packet of lichen here or plant specimen folder there. In the same way that he reeled of long series of Latin plant names during the interview, he seems to carry an index of the myriad of shelves and drawers in his head.

Next, he takes me to a room where a young woman, possibly a student, makes new specimen sheets at a long counter. A stack of specimens, separated by sheets of newspaper, await her attention. Perkins tells me that this particular stack of plants was brought in by a new graduate student, who had collected 300 plants for 3 hours of course credit. To
receive credit, the student not only had to find the plants but also "key" them – that is, to determine their taxonomic genus and species and provide this information along with other details such as collection locale, the name of the collector, the date, and so forth. This information was neatly typed on slips of paper and placed with the appropriate specimens, and the person assembling the specimen sheet will attach this sheet to the folder along with the plant itself.

Perkins picks up an older sheet from the 1950s, an example of what he had told me earlier about problems with non-archival materials. The paper the specimen is mounted on is quite yellowed, but fresh archival tape has been added instead of what had been used (probably cellophane, which was a relatively new invention at the time). He tells me that if the specimen had been completely loose from the sheet, the entire folder would have been replaced, and the identifying information and collection stamp would have been cut off the old folder and attached to the new one. They try to take care of these problem mountings as they run across them but there are a large number of them in the collection, so like most of the herbarium’s projects, this won’t be completed for a while.

Next door, the small DNA lab is packed to capacity with graduate students and professors at work on research projects. Dr. Norris Williams,
the Herbarium’s Keeper, is among them. He’s in the process of removing a
tray of tiny vials from a refrigerator when he halts abruptly and jerks back
toward the fridge. “I’m missing one!” he announces with consternation.
Perkins introduces us, but Dr. Williams is distracted by the disappearance of
his DNA and keeps glancing around at the chaos in the tiny space. Someone
else in the lab stops working long enough to warn us, “Watch out for that
flask!” I see a large container standing behind us but don’t get a chance to
ask what’s in it as we hustle back out of the room as quickly as we arrived.

The next stop on the tour is a large wooden chest with many drawers
– 208 of them, to be exact. Each contains a particular group of seeds or
seed-related structures, such as pods. Perkins opens drawers containing
pertinent examples without hesitation or miscalculation. In one drawer are
many small vials full of seeds so small they look like coarse grains of sand.
“You can see why seeds are so hard to classify,” he tells me. The next
drawer he opens contains seedpods that have a spiral form, like a snail’s
shell, an example of the diversity within the collection.

Nearby is the room where specimens are dried in preparation for
mounting. “We don’t do it much differently than Bartram did,” Perkins tells
me. Whereas Bartram would have dried the plants he collected over an open
fire, here they are put into wooden frames that keep them flat and placed in a rack over a low heat, but the basic idea is the same.

Next door is a large climate-controlled room that contains more of the large metal cabinets. Older or more delicate specimens are stored here, and there are also oversized cabinets for specimens borrowed from other institutions that use a larger folder size. He shows me an example, on loan from a university in the Netherlands. Though the folder may be larger, the arrangement of the contents: plant specimen at the center, with the institutional stamp with the date on the top right and the typed data sheet at the bottom right appear to follow the same convention.

As we cross the main room once again, Perkins points out a smaller cabinet. This is where he is amassing the type specimens he hopes to be able to make available to members of the general public who request them. Type specimens are not the most exotic plants, but rather the ones that have been chosen as a representative standard for particular categories of flora. Unfortunately, Perkins says, the herbarium has not been keeping track of type specimens as a specific group, so they are mixed in with the rest of the collection. He’s adding them to this cabinet as he runs across them, but there are still many left to be ferreted out of the collection as a whole.
Finally, we visit the small room that houses the wood collection, which is next to the main office. The wood samples are cut into slim blocks of identical size and stored in a large chest. Fittingly, the chest is made out of wood and bears a strong resemblance to a card catalog. In the corner is another multi-drawer cabinet, this one smaller and made of metal, and it turns out that this one really is a card catalog that indexes the wood in the other cabinet.

Next door, in the office where I signed in at the beginning of my visit, he shows me a few rare books on botany kept here. Of particular interest is a multiple volume set from the 1800s. When Perkins removes one of the volumes from the shelf and undoes its clasp, I see that the pages of this book contain slender slivers of wood: the set is an early wood identification guide. The book has an alluring tactile quality, but of course I can’t touch it. The regularity of the squares of wood as Perkins turns a few pages for me seems to underscore the order imposed by man on the collection. Whereas the other samples I have seen are still at least plant-shaped, these have become something else – an artifact of the collector – in the manner in which they are collected. The hugeness of the endeavor that this collection of half a million plants represents is only beginning to sink in as I leave the herbarium.
to return to the blinding mid-afternoon sun and the millions of plants that exist outside the catalog.
Botanical Field Expedition

When I arrive at the front desk at Dickinson Hall and announce myself, I wait only a moment before Dr. David Dilcher appears to escort me back to his office in one of the wings of the building. The corridor his office is on is open to the outside courtyard, and Dilcher unlocks it and leads me back to his office. Though the office is quite large, not an inch of space has been wasted. The place is packed with books. Most of them are on shelves that are built into the walls from desktop level to the ceiling, but some are on the surfaces of the various work areas. Some are in other languages with the English translation of their titles attached to their fronts. Post-it notes are attached to almost every possible surface. There are a few fossil plants, or perhaps fossil plant replicas, lying about, sometimes with Post-it note descriptions attached. There are also enlarged drawings and photographs of plant fossils. There are two computers, a laptop and a desktop version, and a wall calendar, where I see he has marked our appointment for today.

Dilcher doesn’t wait for me to ask questions. He’s an interview veteran, thanks to the media attention that has been given to his recent discovery of the world’s oldest flower. He already has several references in mind that he thinks might help me, and the first thing we do is comb his
office for his copy of John Naisbitt's book, *High Tech High Touch*, which includes a section on his work. Eventually it is located, on the top of a high shelf where he keeps copies of books that have been autographed.

He starts by showing me some photos and line drawings of the fossilized flower he discovered, *Archaefructus liaoningensis*. Archaeofructaceae, the family name of the oldest angiosperms, or flowering plants, which currently consists of two members, *A. liaoningensis* and *A. sinensis*, which Dilcher examined later and found to be different enough from the first fossil to warrant a second species. The first is named for Liaoning, China, where the fossil was found, and the second for China itself. The drawings are enlarged, on tracing paper, and have a beautiful schematic quality. Dilcher tells me that making drawings like this helps in clarifying what the structure of the plant is (Dilcher 2002).

In order to determine that this plant was indeed an angiosperm, Dilcher had to determine what was essential in defining a flowering plant. He says that when he was in school, he learned to identify angiosperms based on 26 different points. However, the thing that really defines the angiosperm from the gymnosperm is that the former has covered seeds, while a gymnosperm’s seeds are naked. And on the fossil, he found carpels enclosing seeds (2002).
Dilcher did not actually discover the fossil itself: it was dug up by a group of Chinese scientists. These scientists had stated that the fossil was from the Jurassic period, based on its correlation with other fossils. When Dilcher examined the fossil and discovered its significance, it caused quite a stir, because no flowers were known in the Jurassic period at all. Later, an American scientist did radiometric dating of the fossil and came up with a date in the Lower Cretaceous, which caused more confusion, and some people even to claim that the fossil was a "paleobotanical mistake," because the original findings had been published with the wrong date for the fossil, and thus rejected the findings altogether (2002).

Dilcher opens a drawer and gets out a brocade-covered box, one of several in the drawer. Inside is the fossil of the oldest known flower. The box is lined with red fuzzy velvety material, with a specially shaped impression for the fossil to rest in. Actually, it's just a copy. I wouldn't know the difference unless the original was also there for comparison. Dilcher takes the photograph of the original fossil and points out some minute differences between the two, saying that it is nevertheless a good copy.

An interesting thing about the earliest flower is that it had no flowers (2002). However one could consider that the arrangement of sets of multiple
carpels and stamens that the *Archaefructus* exhibits could be considered an early "flower." Both species of *Archaefructus* were probably aquatic in nature, as evidenced by long, thin stems that would have required water to support them, and the fact that fossil fish were discovered amongst the plant fossils Sun et al 2002).

Using molecular systematics – taking DNA from living plant chloroplasts or nuclei—at which a three-gene sequence can be taken and used to make comparisons between angiosperms, along with morphologies of various angiosperm groups, a connection can be found between all angiosperms and the fossil *Archaefructus*. Here again, there is controversy, as *Archaefructus* is very different than *Amberilla*, a living plant found in New Caledonia that has been considered basal to all angiosperms for the past six or seven years. Where *Amborella* is a woody plant, *Archaefructus* is herbaceous. *Amborella* has petals, but *Archaefructus* is naked. Some people are unwilling to accept that this previous definition of the most primitive plant is wrong. Others are simply not willing to accept a flowerless plant as an angiosperm. They have suggested that perhaps it had flowers, but had lost them. Dilcher says that this is absolutely not the case: there are no scars (known as bracts) where flowers would have been attached (Dilcher 2002).
We take a trip down the hall to the lab, where he shows me some of the fossils he brought with him when he came to UF twelve years ago. The fossils are kept in huge cabinets, which roll in rows along tracks in the floor, in the back of the large cement-floored room. The sides of the cabinets are labeled according to what era of fossils they contain. Similarly, shelves of reference material also roll on tracks so that they can be compressed to save storage space. The front of the room is a workspace with several tables. I also spot a rather serious-looking piece of equipment that appears to be some sort of magnification device.

Dilcher mentions that he has a short trip to collect some plant specimens planned for the afternoon, and I am welcome to come along if I wish. A student from the University of Arizona working on her PhD in paleobotany needs to collect some *taxodium*, or bald cypress, specimens for study because they are closely related to the fossilized plant she is studying. Because she is unfamiliar with the area and has never seen a bald cypress tree before, the student has requested Dilcher’s help in locating specimens.

Before I leave, he gives me a seed from a baggie he had tucked away somewhere. It is black, hard, and shiny, irregularly round, with only the tiniest of lines to indicate where it was once attached to a plant. He says that he collects these from a tree that grows on the UF campus, and hands
them out to people to carry for good luck. It already has a soft luster, but he
tells me that the more it is handled, the shinier it will get.

The Search for *Taxodium*

At three o’clock sharp, I am in front of the locked hallway to Dr.
Dilcher’s office. It is starting to rain – no surprise since a decent downpour
is pretty standard for a summer afternoon in Gainesville. Dilcher appears to
let me in shortly after I arrive, and I follow him back to his office, where a
graduate student, Prakart Sawangchote, waits for him. Prakart is visiting
from Thailand and is only ten days into his two-month stay. His professor in
Thailand was once a student of Dilcher’s and encouraged him to come to the
US to work with Dilcher.

A few minutes later, Amanda Coleman, the student from University of
Arizona, arrives. Her sister Sara has also come along. They are visiting
relatives on the eastern coast of the state, and decided that this would be
good chance to get a few bald cypress specimens. Amanda has never
actually seen a bald cypress before, so Dilcher’s familiarity with both the
plant and the region makes her task a lot easier. We take a few minutes to
make introductions, and to watch the now torrential rain out the window of
Dilcher’s office.
Amanda left her car in the circular drive out front, so she, Sara, and Dr. Dilcher take her car over to the parking garage where they swap it for Dilcher’s more spacious passenger van. Prakart and I wait with the equipment: a cutting device that can be extended with additional segments of metal pole, used for reaching high branches. We also have a binder full of scanned images of plants found in Dilcher’s Woods, which is where we are headed. Dilcher’s Woods is a large, 70-plus acre area of swampland east of town which contains a rich array of specimens, including taxodium, that Dr. Dilcher purchased about three years ago.

By the time Dr. Dilcher returns with his van to pick us up, the rain has almost stopped. We head east, taking a detour to pick up Thaddeus, who expressed interest in joining us. Thaddeus is a twelve-year-old African-American kid who sometimes does yard work for Dilcher to earn spending money. Dilcher has been out of town, quite a bit lately, and hasn’t had many chores that needed doing, so Thaddeus is hoping that he can earn a little something by helping out on this trip. Thaddeus lives in the southeast part of town, not far from Eastside High School. After picking him up, it’s a short trip out of town on East University Avenue to reach Dilcher’s Woods. As we pass Morningside Park, Dilcher comments that he’s always liked that name, as the park is on the side of Gainesville that sees the morning first.
We pull off the road where a small creek runs through a culvert underneath the road. Dilcher is distressed at all the garbage that people have thrown into the part of the creek where it exits the culvert. We notice two Gainesville Sun newspaper boxes and a car stereo in there, along with other less identifiable objects. A little ways into the woods there is a mesh bag of shells left over from someone’s seafood feast. We leave all this stuff alone and look for *taxodium*. There are several trees nearby, but they are young, and lack the mature cones that Amanda is hoping to find. She does find some leaves with galls attached to it, a lucky find since her fossil specimen also has galls. Dilcher thinks that there will be some more mature bald cypress trees at nearby Newnan’s Lake, so we pile back into the van.

Newnan’s Lake is a rather large lake located directly east of Gainesville and is where University Avenue ends. We take another road a little farther around the lake’s edge, to Palm Point, where there is a parking area and a place from which boats could be launched. It’s a rather scenic spot, and Prakart remarks that there are places that look a lot like this in Thailand. *Taxodium* specimens are spotted almost immediately, and Dilcher, Prakart and Thaddeus work to assemble the extension of the “plant grabber,” which fastens together with wing nuts. The first cutting removed from high in a tree turns out to have tiny immature female cones. (I never
do find out how to tell the difference between male and female cones.)

Dilcher points out the variety among the leaves on the branch: the closer to the end of the branch they get, the smaller they are. This makes this branch a desirable specimen, despite its immature cones.

A short hike through the weeds and grasses along the lake’s edge brings us to some *taxodium* that appear to have larger cones. But the branches are just out of reach of the grabber. There are two additional extension poles for it, but we have not brought them with us. Thaddeus is boosted onto Dr. Dilcher’s shoulders, and when he extends the pole has high as he can, he can just reach one of the desired branches. Prakart operates the rope that pulls the jaws of the cutter closed on the branch, and the cutting falls to the ground. The cones on this one are larger, and the leaves are narrower, and we take a moment to compare it to the sample with the immature cones cut a few minutes ago. A few more branches are selected and cut, and Amanda says that she has what she needs.

Before leaving, we pause to enjoy the beauty of the lake, and also take a few photos for posterity. Thaddeus is reluctant to wade into the long shore grasses to take a group photo – he’s concerned about snakes. Dr. Dilcher tramps out to the spot where he’ll need to stand to get a photo of the rest of the group at the foot of the *taxodium* and stomps the grass down for him.
Thaddeus reluctantly goes to the chosen location and takes the shot, saying that Dr. Dilcher is crazy for risking his feet in the potentially snake-infested marsh. Then Thaddeus and I switch spots, and I take a similar group shot with him in it instead of me. Before we leave, Thaddeus also tries for a shot of some of the large birds that circle above the water in search of food, though they never come very close to us so we can’t figure out what kind of bird they are. A flock of them gathered on the branches of a tree farther down the shore, and we watch their comings and goings for a bit. We also get quite close to a vulture that is interested in something that we can’t see in the shallow area that is used as a boat launch. After a few shots are taken of our vulture friend, it’s time to disassemble the grabber and get back to town.
Bartram's Travels

Since the schooner that was to take Bartram and his belongings back to Savannah was not to leave until autumn, he decided to further explore "this land of flowers" (Bartram 1996:214). He makes a return journey to Salt Springs, where he adds to his specimen collection, coasting slowly about the spring. He visits the grounds of an abandoned plantation, where he laments the destruction of the orange groves that many plantation owners caused when planting their preferred crops such as cotton and indigo.

Upon his return to the lower store, Bartram finds that a group of Lower Creek Indians were camped nearby. They were en route from St. Augustine, where they had traded horses for a number of items, including liquor, which they proceeded to avail themselves of, making for much raucous celebration. Bartram notes, however, that the chiefs among the Indians did not partake of either the alcohol or the carousing. Some trading also took place while the Indians were encamped, though not without some strife, as the Indians wished to be extended credit in order to get what they needed, and naturally the head trader was not thrilled about his. However an agreement was eventually reached.
Before the Indians departed, they were confronted with a rattlesnake that wandered into their encampment. Bartram discovered that they hold this snake in either extreme veneration or dread: at any rate, they sent a summons for Puc Puggy, as Bartram is known to them, to come and dispense of it. Bartram kills the snake and adds its fangs to his specimen collection. However, later some of the Indians express displeasure at Bartram’s having killed the snake within the boundaries of their camp and wish to scratch him. The Indians refrain from killing any snake because they believe that to do so incites the wrath of the snake’s living kin, who will seek to avenge their brother. However, Bartram says that what these Indians tell him was that “I was too heroic and violent, that it would be good for me to lose some of my blood to make me more mild and tame” (Bartram 1996:221). Fortunately, one of his friends among the Indians comes to his rescue, and the scratching is avoided.

Later, after the band of Seminoles has departed, Bartram accompanies the head trader of the lower store to attend a “feast of Water Melons and Oranges” (Bartram 1996:252) in a nearby Indian town, believed to be located where Palatka is today, and about six miles from the lower store. The event takes place at a pavilion in the center of the village, and consists of smoking tobacco followed by consuming quantities of fruit.
Here, Bartram’s account of his travels in Florida draws to an end. It is September, he tells us, and his ship is making ready for its departure. (According to his letters, Bartram probably departed the area in November, since he describes cooler weather and sightings of migratory birds (Bartram 1958:379 nn. 306)). They journey back down the river, arriving once again at Frederica, where Bartram is able to visit again with his friends and make arrangements for his specimen collection to be sent to Fothergill, his benefactor in Europe. Bartram’s next destination is Charleston, South Carolina, where he continues his adventures in nature while awaiting Fothergill’s instructions.
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