

Searching for the Real Florida in the Land of Make Believe: Historical Archaeology as Public Archaeology, Orange County, Florida

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Orange County encompasses the city of Orlando and is home to over one million residents and attracts millions of tourists annually. Starting in the twentieth century, areas in the county sustained intensive agricultural use and later massive residential and commercial development. As a result of these activities, natural and historic areas were spoiled while others vanished completely. Prior to the 1970s and the establishment of Walt Disney World, the area's tourism industry revolved primarily around its natural amenities, only to be supplanted by a form that was thematic and "make believe". In 2006, an archaeology program was initiated to unearth the county's early history as a way of searching for the "real Florida." This paper will discuss how public archaeology has the potential for addressing problems that affect cultural and natural resources as history is unearthed at the neighborhood level.

When most people think of Orlando, located in Orange County, Florida, Disney World, theme parks, killer whales, and other iconic representations of Florida tourism often come to mind. While the tourist industry has always been a staple of modern Florida's economy, recent theme parks and manufactured "communities" have attempted to create a past that never was while at the same time destroying the real past lying beneath their development footprints. In an article about Orlando's Gatorland (a famous roadside attraction established in 1949) in the context of changing tourist attractions, historian Dorothy Mays discusses the trend towards "manufactured" history by contrasting Gatorland to Walt Disney World, which opened in 1971: "Disney World was a departure from most theme parks in Florida that featured some aspects of the state's natural beauty or cultural history. The experience of Disney World was one of sanitized, simulated reality" (Mays 2009: 525-526). For the purposes of this article, we will use Mays' descriptors of "natural" and "cultural history" to define the "real Florida" experience. This is not necessarily to be confounded with the Florida State Parks (2010) use of the term "the Real Florida" in its promotional campaigns, nor the name of the television program "Real Florida TV" produced by The Goulding Agency Inc. (2010). It is worth mentioning, however, that the aims of both of these organizations are to promote a form of tourism that is centered on the state's natural environment and cultural history.

While "haunted" cemeteries and retro tin-roofed log cabin resorts may be found at some of the area theme parks, several recent archaeological projects have involved

neighborhoods, descendent communities, and students in an effort to rectify this conflict between Florida's make-believe and real histories through the study of historical sites and cemeteries. A major goal of these collaborative projects has been to use archaeology as a way of partnering with neighborhood residents to reveal local history, encourage preservation, and advocate for the environment. Since many of these projects have taken place in or around residential areas, and have involved collaborative efforts and public outreach, they can be considered public archaeology conducted within the context of the neighborhood as defined by Weisman (this issue); that is, a geographic place where people reside and where residents may or may not share values or common interests. It is in this context of the neighborhood that I will discuss some examples of how we have worked towards achieving of the goal of uncovering Florida's "real" history. The examples also chart our own growing awareness of the value and importance of involving the public in this effort. The use of the terms "we" and "us" in this article refers to the collaborations that include Tiffany George, and Jason Wenzel and his Valencia Community College students as well as the Central Florida Anthropological Society, which is the organization most of our volunteers belong to.

Background

Florida was once home to indigenous peoples as long as 12,000 years ago who resided all throughout the state. The first documented European to arrive was Juan Ponce De Leon in 1513 and in 1565 the Spanish established St. Augustine, which became the first permanent European settlement in North America. The British gained possession of Florida in 1763 but it reverted back to Spanish control in 1783. Florida was acquired as a territory of the

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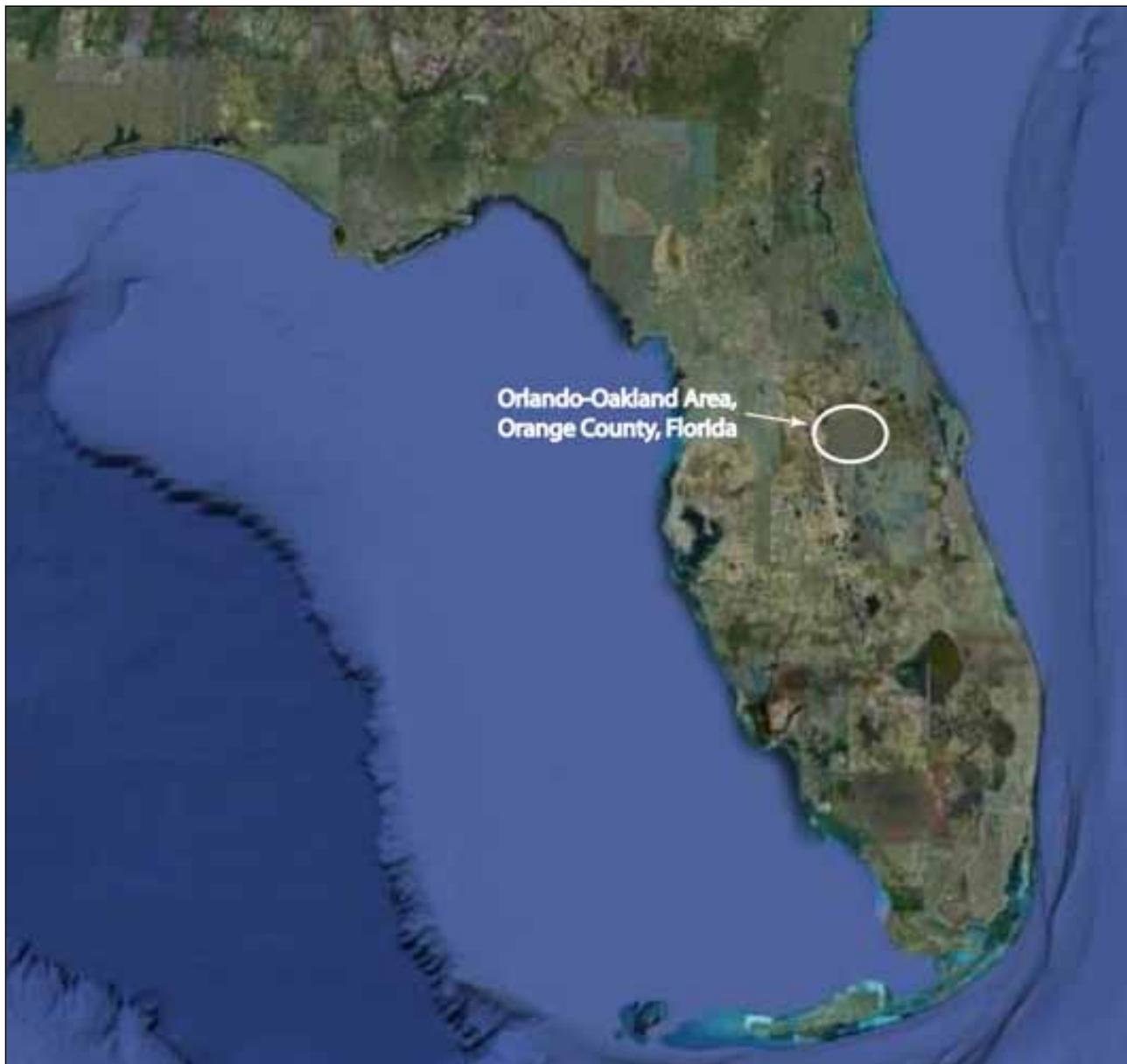


Fig. 1: Google Earth image showing the location of the Orlando-Oakland area in central Florida.

United States in 1821 and it officially became a state in 1845. Much of the area which encompasses Orange County today experienced very little contact between indigenous peoples and Europeans though when some of the territorial period Euro-American settlers arrived here, the area was home to groups of Seminole Indians who were later displaced through a series of aggressive military campaigns.

Originally chartered as Mosquito County in 1824 and renamed Orange County in 1845 after its chief agricultural product, the county along with its seat, Orlando, attracted some of the first settlers, agriculturalists, and vacationers to venture inland from the coastal areas, where most of the prior contact and settlement took place. Today, Orange County encompasses a very dynamic and diverse population that has grown from 896,344 in 2000 to an estimate of 1,063,098 in 2008 (US Census Bureau, 2010). Further, the county attracts almost 50 million tourists annually (Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors

Bureau, 2010). With this growth have come major changes and challenges, most particularly threats to local historical sites through extensive and intensive development.

Most of our work has been conducted in the Town of Oakland, which lies at the very western boundary of Orange County, 10 miles west of Orlando (Figure 1). The town encompasses approximately two square miles between Lake Apopka to the north and Johns Lake to the south. Initially established in 1844, Oakland served as both a railroad and social hub for Orange County as citrus grown from regional farms were brought in for packing and export to the national market, and people of "wealth and fashion" were attracted to the theatricals, parties, banquets and masquerade balls hosted at the town's Union Club (Bacon, 1974: 17). Much of this activity waned towards the start of the twentieth century, however, and Oakland continued to exist as a small rural town. While the town had a tourism industry up through the mid-twentieth century that centered around fishermen visiting

Lake Apopka, this nature-based, Old Florida-style industry operated on a much smaller scale than the “make believe” theme parks that later emerged in nearby Orlando following the establishment of Walt Disney World in the 1970s.

Since the 1990s, Oakland’s population has doubled as a result of the construction of new housing developments and this has resulted in the town being transformed from a once small, relatively isolated rural town into a suburban bedroom community at the western fringes of Orlando’s metropolitan sprawl. Because of this, cultural, historic, and natural resources have become increasingly endangered but this growth also has provided an opportunity for archaeological research through cultural resource management projects and volunteer efforts. These have given us the opportunity to be able to study the town’s history and the role it played in the development of Orange County, as well as the growth of Florida tourism, which is the state’s largest industry. Since many sites have been destroyed or are threatened by development, our archaeological program has the benefit of heightening public awareness about the importance of archaeological resources to better understand local history.

Involving the Public in Archaeology

In 2006, Wenzel directed an excavation at the Greenwood Bungalow site, a Craftsman-style home originally owned by a Massachusetts based fruit farmer in the early 20th century most likely as a seasonal residence. This project was initiated because Wenzel wanted to provide his Valencia Community College anthropology students with an opportunity to engage in field archaeology and this location was chosen due to a prior acquaintance with the current occupant who helped us gain permission to test the property. Through the excavation and analysis of an early trash pit, we were able to document a late 1920s trash deposition episode. This formed the basis of an exhibit at one of the Orlando branches of the Orange County Library system for Florida Archaeology Month, an annual state-wide event sponsored by the Florida Anthropological Society and funded by the Florida Department of State. The exhibit included some of the artifacts recovered from our excavation along with field photographs, interpretive text, and examples of excavation equipment. Many of the students came to appreciate the “old Florida” style atmosphere of this historic Orlando neighborhood with its unique houses, paved brick roads, and large hammock oak trees -- a very stark contrast to what they see on a daily basis in the modern suburban neighborhoods in which most of them reside.

Our first foray into public archaeology was less public than it was archaeology, since our interaction with residents in the surrounding neighborhood was limited. But it provided me with insight on how we could make future projects more public in orientation.

The following year Wenzel was invited by one of his departmental colleagues to conduct an archaeological survey of a historic property he owned in the Town of Oakland. While the original intention was to conduct a short-term project at the site (known as the Chambless-Hull House), as we learned about the history of the town and got to

know some of the neighbors we felt that this town would provide a good venue for the type of public archaeology program we desired to develop. After witnessing such tremendous growth in Orange County over the past decade, we believed that it was important to engage the public in the archaeology in order to foster some awareness of the threats to historical resources. Many archaeologists have argued for the benefits of doing archaeology for the public (Little 2002) which includes providing museum interpretation, site preservation, public policy and education. Not only does archaeology in itself provide an assortment of public benefits but it can provide us with lessons on the issues societies faced in the past that were not entirely different than those of today (Sabloff 2008).

The Chambless-Hull House was built by Simeon B. Hull, a pioneer citrus grower, in 1905. The Chambless family, who has owned and resided at the property since 2004, was very receptive to allowing us to survey and excavate their property on the condition that we engage their school-age children and their peers, for which we happily obliged. We also had the opportunity to become acquainted with the family’s neighbors, some of whom were direct descendants of the town’s first settlers and this provided an opportunity to gather oral history information.

Our work at the Chambless-Hull House was highly visible to the regional community as our project was featured as a Local section feature in the *Orlando Sentinel* newspaper in 2008 (Finley, April 8, 2008). This is also when we began to significantly interact with the residents who lived in the vicinity of our site. This increased interaction became feasible because the residents had resided in the area for at least several years, if not longer, appeared to be more likely to know each other, and expressed interest in the history of their neighborhood. This was in contrast to the Orlando neighborhood we had worked in the previous year where neighbors appeared to interact with each other less frequently and were less interested in the archaeology we were doing.

In partnership with the Florida Public Archaeology Network, we hosted two Kids’ Digs where children of various ages, including some from the neighborhood, had the opportunity to observe archaeology in action along with learning about local history, artifact identification, and archaeological practice and ethics. Overall, our experience working with the children was positive as they were enthusiastic to explore the underground history of their neighborhood (Figure 2). The presence of several parental chaperones may have helped us avoid any type of misbehavior or horseplay at the site.

Artifact analysis of the excavated assemblage revealed interesting insights about many facets of life in early twentieth-century Oakland that we were able to share with the family and their neighbors. Some of the highlights include the recovery of dozens of medicine bottles that may have been used to manage the pandemic influenza outbreak of 1918-1919 and several cross-mended ceramic vessels that helped us ascertain the interaction of ethnicity, class, and consumerism (Wenzel, 2008; 2009). An assortment of mechanical parts that may have once been part of a mule-drawn pioneer citrus duster provided a good example of



Fig. 2: The Chambless children and their school peers during a Kids' Dig, in the Fall of 2007.



Fig. 3: Area college students with local volunteers and members of the Oakland-Tildenville Cemetery Board.

how tangible, material items could be used to help the children and residents learn about what their neighborhood was like in the past, before suburban-class homes replaced many of the old citrus groves.

Following our excavation at the Chambless-Hull House, we embarked on a noninvasive study of the Old Oakland African American Cemetery. This cemetery was initially established around 1890 just outside of Oakland's residential area and was abandoned by the 1950s when a new African American cemetery was established nearby. Over the next 50 years, visitation and maintenance practically ceased and thus it became forgotten in the community until 2001, when a private cultural resource management firm recorded the cemetery during a survey for a highway expansion project. The highway expansion project was initiated in order to accommodate an increase in residential and tourist traffic in the county. Our investigation involved us working alongside members of the descendent African American community, some of who resided in the Oakland neighborhoods (Figure 3). The cemetery project provided an opportunity for us to serve the local African American community by researching the town's early African American residents, whose history is absent in many of the local written sources. Baram (2009) reports on how involving students in cemetery recording through a public archaeology program is way to foster civic engagement and service learning. By recording and mapping grave markers and surface artifacts, we were able to learn important insights about the history of the cemetery and the people interred there that we were then able to share with some of the town's residents who knew very little about or were completely unfamiliar with the cemetery. Through the concerted efforts of residents, professional archaeologists, and descendent communities, the cemetery will be preserved for future generations.

Two of our most recent projects, initiated in 2009, include field survey and excavation at the site of the Territo House-Oakland Hotel and the Hartsfield House. Initially established in 1910, the Oakland Hotel (Figure 4) was developed during the formative period of the Orlando area's tourism industry. After the hotel was closed and was demolished in 1947, the adjacent kitchen house, which was built in 1890, was converted to a private residence and underwent a succession of owners. Our hosts, the Territos, purchased the property in 1993 and have lived there since that time. Five doors down resides the Hartsfield family, who have owned their property since the 1970s. Their house was originally built in 1886 by the Orange Belt Railroad Company. These homes are two of only a handful of nineteenth-century extant structures in Oakland. Most of the materials excavated from the Hartsfield property, however, were associated with the family of Jason Orlando Brock, Oakland's first grocer, who lived in the house from 1905 until the Hartsfield's acquisition.

Both of these families were not only gracious enough to allow us to excavate on their properties (Figure 5), but on almost every occasion when we conducted work, they would invite family, friends, and other neighbors to observe archaeology in action. We were met with reactions of intrigue and excitement as they observed us digging up

a variety of artifacts from their neighborhood. Josey, the youngest of the Territo's three children, was working with us when we recovered a small teapot from an excavation unit. She was planning on attending a friend's tea party later that afternoon and was anxious to tell her friends about this discovery.

Over the last two years, we have made a visible appearance at the Oakland Heritage Festival, an annual fundraiser for the Oakland Nature Preserve that draws in hundreds of people each October. The event is held at Speer Park, which is conveniently located across the street from the Territo's house. We have been able to share our research findings with many of the town's residents as well as learn some new things about our sites and the people we are studying through the oral history accounts provided by various passersby. It is at this festival where we initially became acquainted with the both the Territo and Hartsfield families.

Using Archaeology to Promote Environmental Stewardship

One of our major accomplishments was developing a partnership with the Oakland Nature Preserve, a nonprofit organization that was founded by local environmental activists, many of whom were directly involved with cleanup efforts at nearby Lake Apopka over the last two decades. In 2008, this organization was able to acquire the funds necessary for construction of a new facility to serve as an educational center near the southern shores of Lake Apopka. The preserve was gracious enough to allow us space for artifact processing and curation, and in exchange we have supported their cultural history and environmental education programs by conducting a site survey of the property, developing a museum display, and applying the results of our archaeological research to an understanding of the historical ecology of the Lake Apopka basin through time. The preserve has become a place where area residents can come to gather and learn about local ecology and history.

In February 2010, we unveiled an historical archaeology exhibit in the museum at the Oakland Nature Preserve that featured interpretive information and artifacts from the Chambless-Hull House project as well as a reconstructed seashell-decorated grave marker modeled after one from the Old Oakland African American Cemetery.

The Oakland Nature Preserve immediately abuts the southern shore of Lake Apopka, one of Florida's largest lakes. This lake is important in terms of human history since people settled here as early as 12,000 years ago. It later became home to Seminole Indians and Euro-American agriculturalists. On a juttied-out peninsula west of the preserve is Hull Island, home to one of the earliest citrus groves in Florida. Throughout the twentieth-century, the lake experienced major ecological declines as a result of citrus processing waste, municipal sewage disposal, and muck farming. This resulted in catastrophic changes in which harmful algae blooms occurred frequently and fish populations declined (*Friends of Lake Apopka* 2010).

These degradations are important to understand in light of the fact that Lake Apopka was once known as being one of the best freshwater fishing lakes in the United



Fig. 4: The Oakland Hotel, built in 1910. To the far right is a partial view of the former kitchen house (built in 1890) that is currently owned and occupied by the Territo family.



Fig. 5: Students and volunteers excavating at the Territo House-Oakland Hotel site.

States, attracting fisherman from all over the country as testified by The Oakland Hotel's promotion of the lake's superb fishing qualities (Figure 6). As a public and applied archaeology project, our program has had the goal of raising the consciousness of the area's residents regarding the lake's ecological and cultural history by reminding them of its once pristine and bountiful qualities through our research. This is similar to the work done by Marquardt (1994) in Southwestern Florida. Whether we were excavating at the hotel site or processing artifacts in the laboratory of the Oakland Nature Preserve, we always tried to make the work visible to members of the public and answer any questions they had about what we were doing. We also took the opportunity to provide information to them about the nature of archaeology along with the town's cultural and environmental history in the hopes that they would be encouraged to take action in their own daily lives that could lead to increased preservation of history and protection of the environment.

Ethnographic research of contemporary visitors to the Oakland Nature Preserve has been conducted in order to better understand the long term changing patterns of tourism in Oakland by merging the ethnographic and



Fig. 6: Advertisement for the Oakland Hotel (Orange County Directory, 1913).

the archaeological data. This has allowed us to critically examine the impact of our public archaeology program by understanding the ways in which tourists perceive the authenticity of the past associated with that of the "real Florida". We analyzed visitor sign-in sheets and conducted face-to-face interviews and the results have provided us with insight into the perceptions and behaviors associated with contemporary tourism in the area.

While Oakland's past tourism had been centered on game fishing, an activity that took place in the natural environment, tourism today has returned to this same natural context but not in tandem with the local fishing industry. While pollution and degradation largely brought an end to fishing in Lake Apopka, the contemporary educational programs that have emerged in response to the lake's decline and subsequent restoration have opened

new opportunities for leisure seekers. New activities such as "insect safaris" and "bird watching" may be considered forms of ecotourism, a niche market within the tourism industry. Ecotourism, a form of alternative tourism is defined as a brand of tourism that "seeks to be low impact and provide tangible benefits for both the environment and the host communities" (Honey, 2010:439). We have developed archaeological lectures, workshops and interpretive displays to showcase to these visitors while they stop in at the Oakland Nature Preserve's museum.

This return to nature, in a modified form, is interesting given that much of the contemporary tourism in Central Florida (e.g., theme parks) is dominated by what Mintz refers to as "simulated tourism"; a type of tourism that is "carefully structured" and "staged" (Mintz, 2010:267, 269). The current ethnographic research in Oakland has uncovered some alternative viewpoints regarding the ways visitors spend leisure time in a natural setting that does not necessarily involve a simulated theme park. Most of the visitors revealed appreciation for being able to engage in outdoor leisure activities while learning about archaeology and conserving Florida's environment. Indeed, the "right kinds of touristic experiences can result in increased environmental awareness" (Stronza, 2001:278).

The interviews also revealed that the Oakland Nature Preserve is a place where visitors can "return to the past" and experience "old Florida", a phrase many could refer to as "the real Florida" before most of the major technological and social changes of the twentieth century began. With respect to the word 'place', like Cresswell points out it "is everywhere" (Cresswell, 2004:2). The Oakland Nature Preserve represents the place that signifies a return to the past through nature based activities albeit in a different form. For those new to the area, it is an alternate place to be entertained outside of the commercial venues, and our archaeology provides a medium of connecting tourists to the past. The preserve's function could also be, based upon the research, a site of "history and identity in the city" (Cresswell, 2004:5).

The concept of authenticity is a common discourse within the anthropological study of tourism. The definition of 'authenticity' when referred to tourism experiences varies widely in scholarly discussions on tourism and the literature tends to focus on commoditization of culture. Kaul defines it as having "credibility", specifically discussing artistic performances represented by a specific culture (Kaul, 2010:200). There has also been discussion regarding the authenticity of theme park tourism. As Gmelch observes, "some people actually seek out inauthenticity—the more glaring and kitschy the better" (Gmelch, 2010: 20). Walt Disney was known to openly admit that "his park is not about "reality" (Mintz, 2010:268). While visitors to the Oakland Nature Preserve did not use the term "authentic" during our discussions, there was a clear opinion expressed by most of the interviewees that they enjoy visiting the preserve because it offers an experience that meets their expectations regarding what they perceive what Florida is supposed to look like. Our archaeology program is one way to help illustrate Florida's "authentic" human past.

Conclusion

Reflecting on these projects, we have learned a valuable lesson: that a public archaeology project has the potential for addressing the problems associated with a fast-growing metropolitan community that is largely dependent on tourism. As natural habitats and historical structures constantly undergo the threats associated with expanding population and development, we risk losing the places that provide us with leisure, sustenance, and memories. Public archaeology, however, has a unique opportunity to heighten people's awareness of these issues through the material study of the past. For example, we spoke with many of the people who visited us while either excavating at the Territo House-Oakland Hotel or processing artifacts from this site in our lab at the Oakland Nature Preserve. While discussing the cultural and ecological history of the area, we noticed that most were somewhat familiar with the ecological problems in Lake Apopka, but very few knew that it once was the center of a fishing industry with an associated hotel. In a few extreme cases we were met with disbelief that the lake once was considered one of Florida's most popular fishing attractions. By showing these people the fish bones and tableware artifacts recovered from the hotel's middens, they were immediately able to connect tangible pieces of the unknown past to their familiarity of a problematic present.

The public archaeology program presented here together with contemporary ethnographic research on tourism demonstrates the resiliency of tourism in a nature based setting. While the ecological decline of Lake Apopka caused an end to the local fishing industry and tourism in the mid-20th century, a new "ecotourism" based form emerged decades later in tandem with some of the contemporary educational programs that were developed to address the lake's decline. Tourism is the largest employer and source of revenue for Orlando and Orange County and as its growth impacts natural and cultural landscapes, it contradictorily affects the very same places tourists once visited. While the area's contemporary tourism can ignore these realities by offering visitors leisure opportunities in a manufactured and simulated environment, ethnographic research shows that many tourists to the area still have some interest and desire to experience the "real Florida". This provides us with an opportunity to be able to present an authentic past through public archaeology while simultaneously supporting environmental conservation efforts.

While we have made great progress working in the neighborhoods of Oakland and are still actively working in the town, our next series of projects will take us to some of the other historical neighborhood communities in and around Orlando where we can continue to use archaeology as a way of forging community partnerships and supporting cultural history and environmental education. As historical and archaeological sites along with the natural environment continue to face threats and degradation from a variety of anthropogenic forces, it is our hope that these types of neighborhood archaeology projects will continue to actively engage students, local residents, and

tourists in making great strides towards addressing these challenges. Through these types of partnerships, we have the chance to collectively revisit life in the "Real Florida" that has largely vanished and become forgotten.

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