

1980

## Tampa from Shell Mound to Modern Town

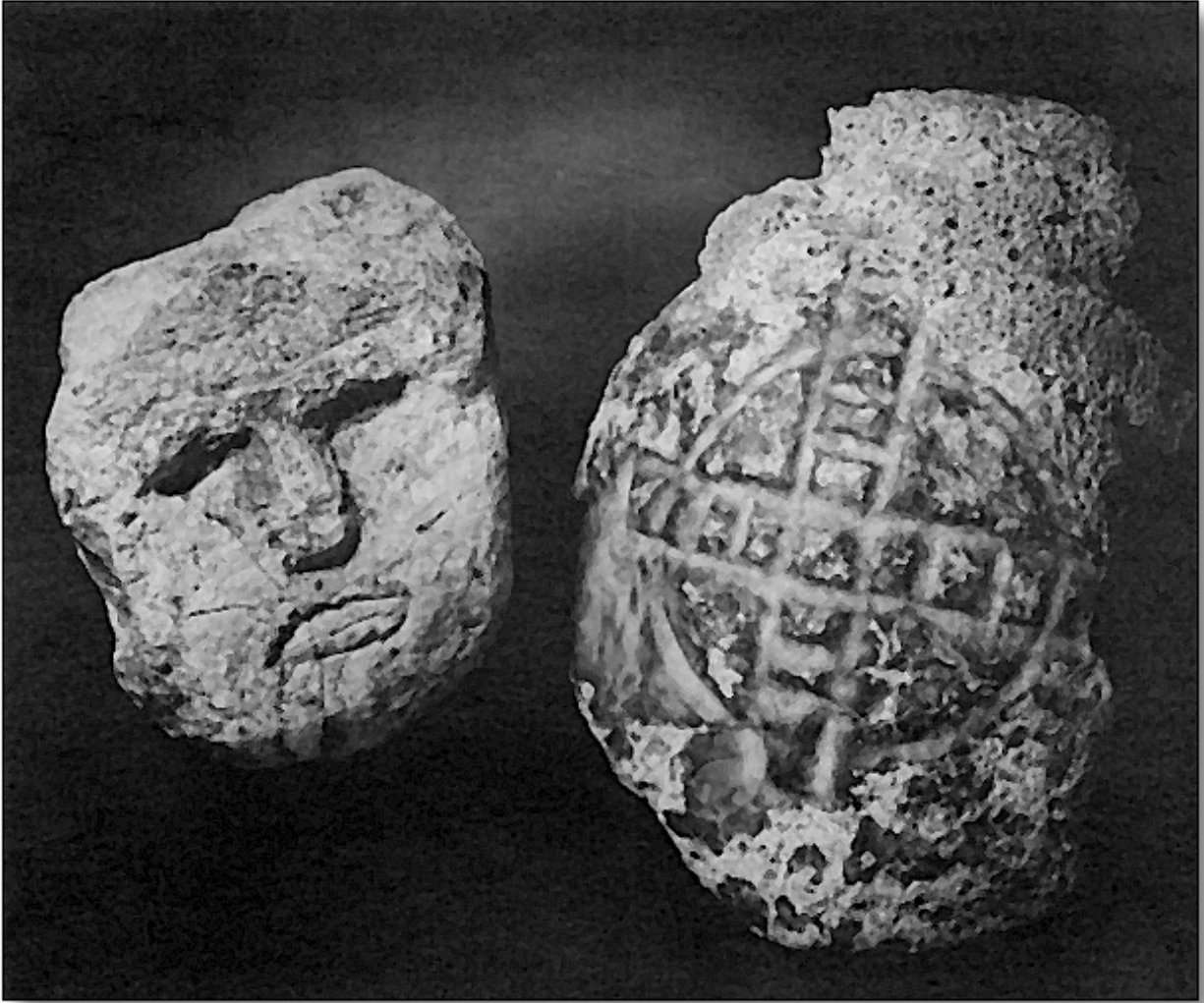
Kenneth W. Mulder

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### Recommended Citation

Mulder, Kenneth W. (1980) "Tampa from Shell Mound to Modern Town," *Sunland Tribune*: Vol. 6 , Article 4.  
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**STONE CROSS AND PRE-COLUMBIAN HEAD**  
Ancient Artifacts from Hillsborough River.

## ***TAMPA*** ***FROM SHELL MOUND TO MODERN TOWN***

By **KENNETH W. MULDER**

*"History is everything man has ever said, thought, or done. It is not required that the person, the word, or the act be important-only that it happened." Robert Harvey Robinson, world renowned author and historian, many years ago gave us this definition.<sup>1</sup>*

Charlton W. Tebeau, Professor Emeritus, University of Miami History Department, Author, and Lecturer (one of the best on Florida history) states that a local Historical Society is the fountainhead of state, national and world history, as all historical events occur first somewhere locally.<sup>2</sup> The Historical

Text of a lecture in the series "A Tampa Tribute," Hillsborough Community College, Dale Mabry Campus, Humanities Building, Room 118, Wednesday, June 11, 1980, 7:30 P.M. Sponsored by the Tampa Historical Society.

Society serves to document and perpetuate this local history.

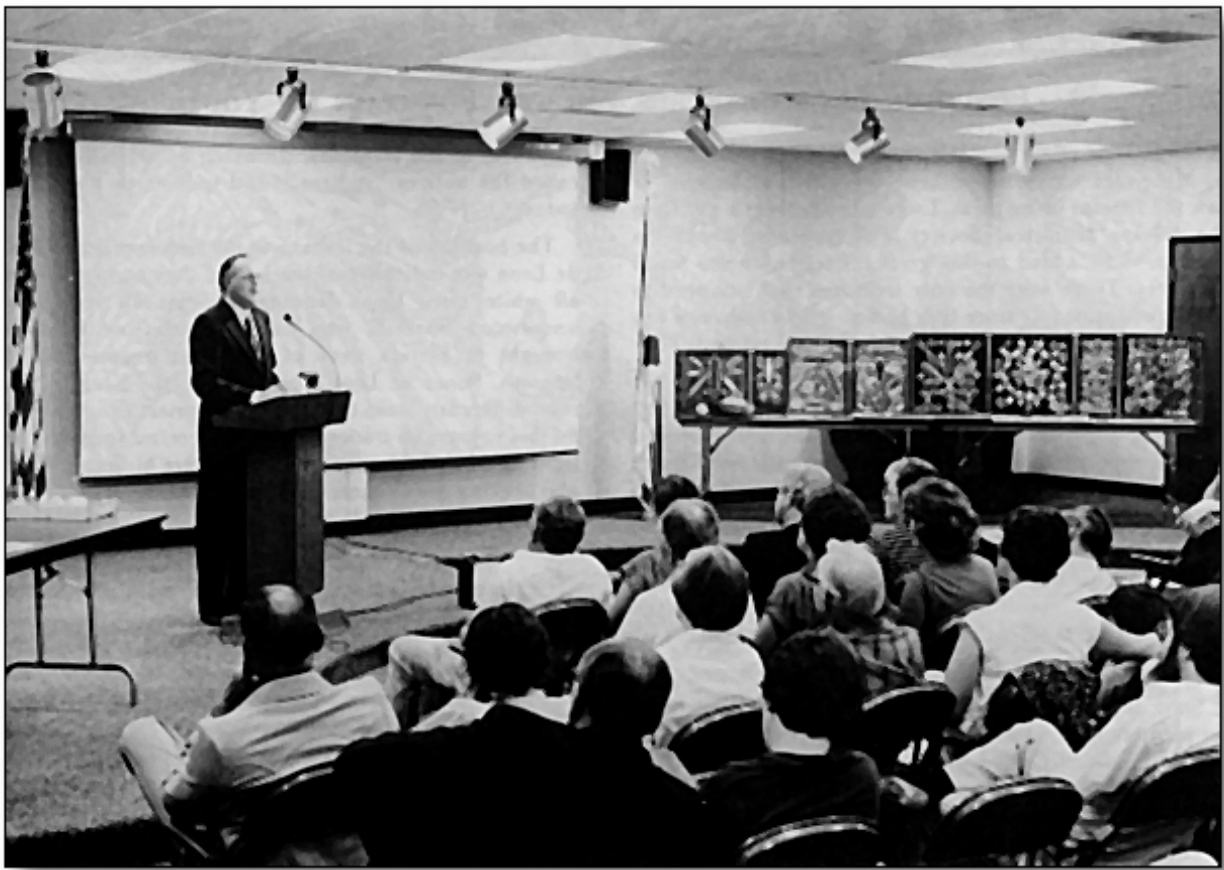
The study of Florida history involves most of the sciences: geology, ethnology, astrology, geography, biology, archaeology, and anthropology. The languages of French and Spanish are also helpful in the study of Florida history.

### TAMPA AND SPAIN

Tampa, the Tampa Bay area, and the entire west coast of Florida history is directly tied to Spanish history. First hand knowledge is found in the Museum of the Americas located in Madrid, Spain<sup>3</sup>, a huge four-story fortress, guarded inside and out by machine gun carrying guards. It houses artifacts, maps and records; gold, silver, jade, jewelry, and

hand-carved figures from Mexico, Peru, Chile, Yucatan, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. Proudly displayed are these priceless treasures in their original form, proof of the Conquistadors explorations, pacifications and complete annihilation of these ancient tribes: the Arravaks, Caribs, Mayas, Aztecs, Payas, Habanas, Incas, Caloosas, Timucuan, and many more of the aboriginal people that occupied this part of the new world since before Christ. For thousands of years, their culture grew, flourished and prospered; then came the Conquistadors.

In 40 short years, the Spanish destroyed most of them. What Indians were left went back into the forests and jungles, no longer bound together in great cities and tribes. The Spanish were brutal, cruel and final. Atrocities com-



**KEN MULDER ADDRESSES THE LECTURE SERIES**  
Display of Florida Artifacts Pleases Audience.

-Photo by NELSON MEDINA





PONCE DE LEON SEARCHES FOR THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

mitted against fellow human beings are unbelievable.

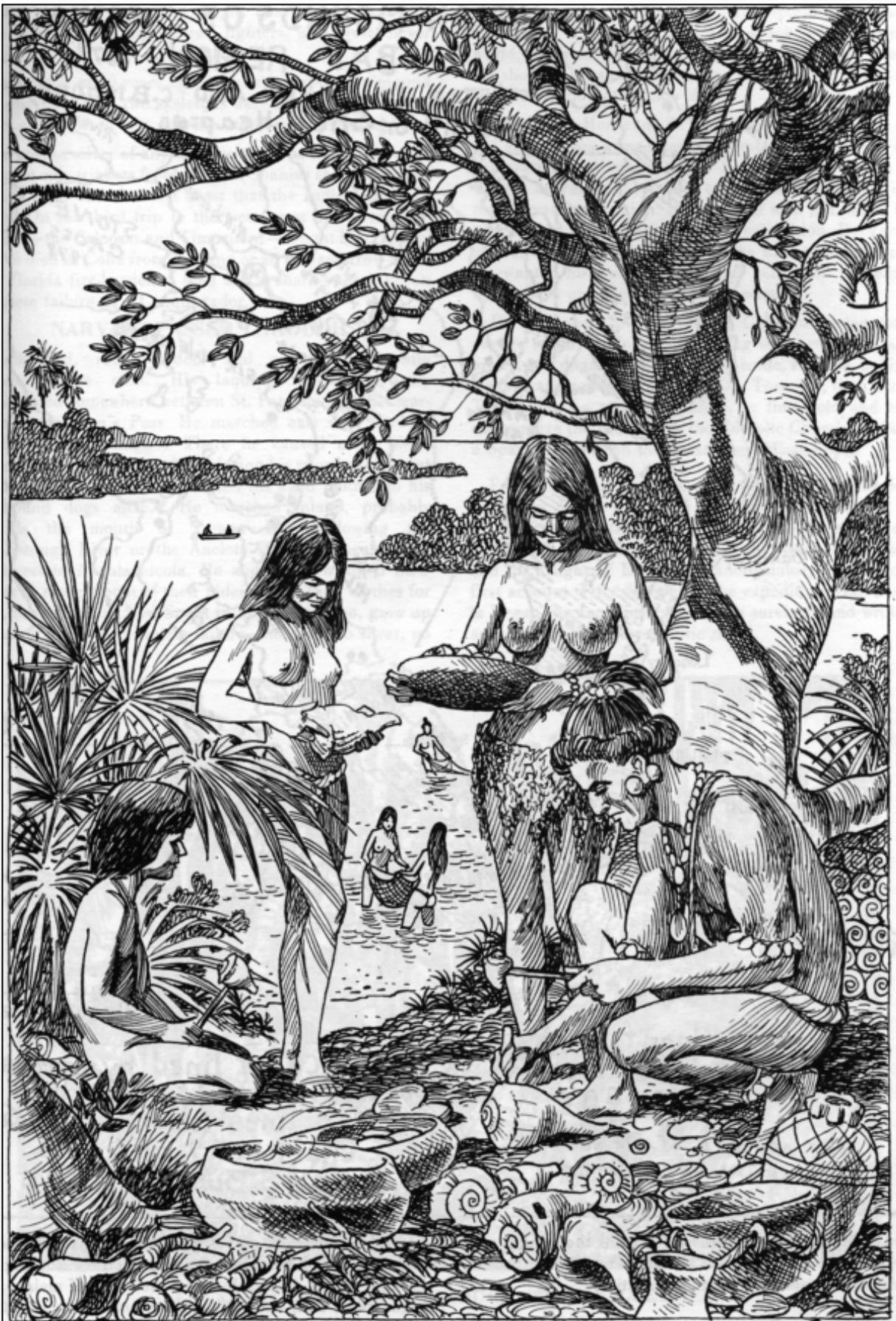
### MISSING TREASURES

Madrid's Museum of the Americas proudly and boldly displays their treasures in huge rooms, all identified by the various conquered countries and tribes<sup>4</sup>. Missing are treasures found in Florida upon the landing of Ponce de Leon, Diego Muruelo, Cordova, Pineda, Narvaez, De Soto, Menendez, de Ayllon, and others who came to explore Tampa Bay and Florida.

We were especially interested in the explorations of Hernando de Soto. My wife and I had taken some beautiful shell tools and

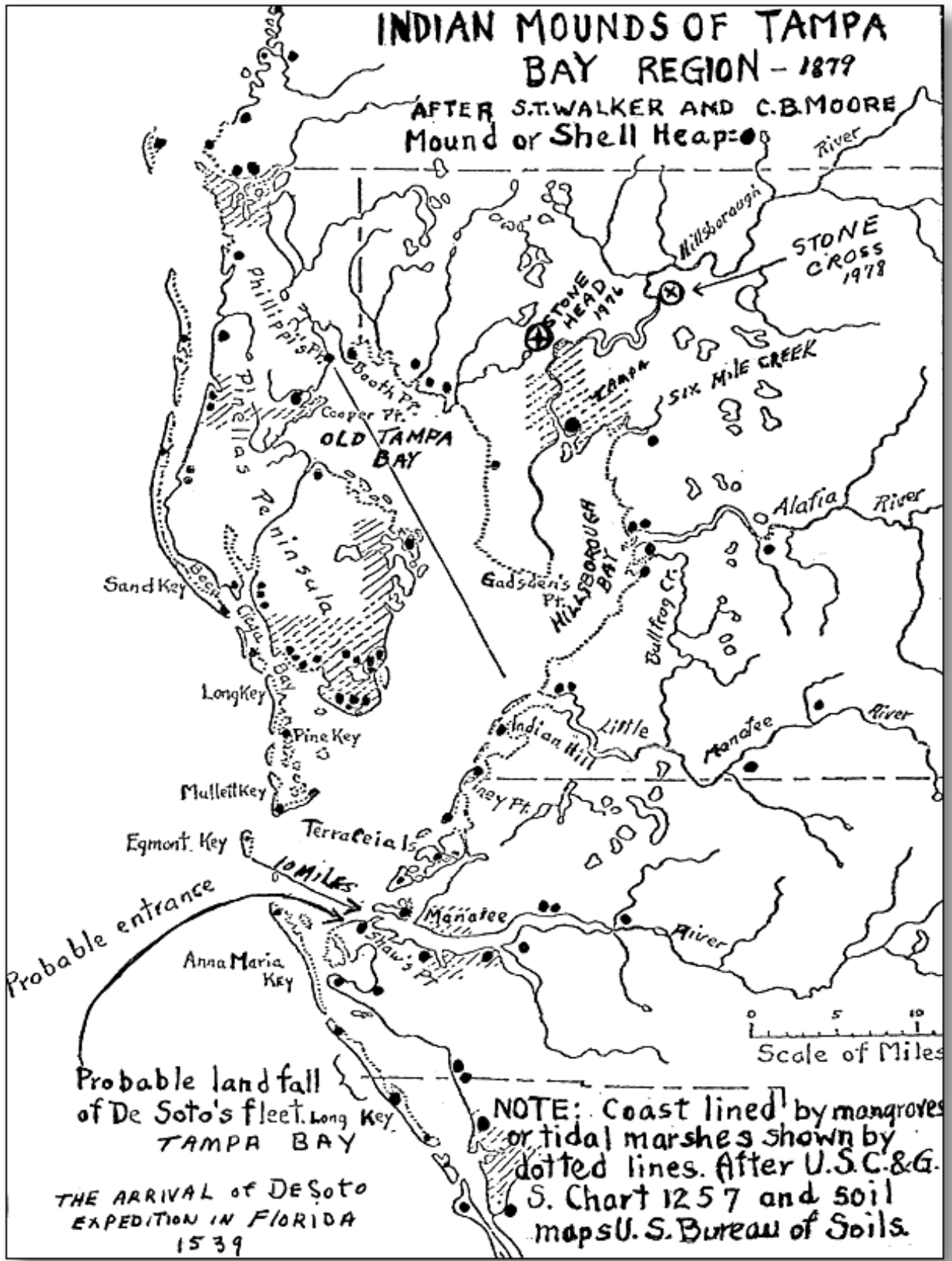
shell artifacts from the Tampa Bay area to compare and see if the ones they had displayed were similar for dating purposes. Our Museum guide took us to the great circular stairwell that ascends to three floors. The entire stairwell was a colored map of the new world, both North and South America. Lined routes designated the trips of Ponce de Leon, Pizarro, Cortez, Columbus, and other explorers, but very little was mentioned of De Soto's or Narvaez' trips through the Tampa Bay area. Our Spanish guide explained that the Spanish people considered Hernando de Soto, Captain General and Governor of Cuba, who led the greatest sea armada of ships and men to the new world in North America, a complete failure because he died





INDIAN FAMILY LIFE

GENE PACKWOOD



in our country. He never came back; never brought any gold or silver back as these other great explorers.

GIFT TURNED DOWN



I had a briefcase full of mint-finished shell tools, carved shells and Indian artifacts personally collected from all over the west coast of Florida. Showing them to the Museum officials, I said I would like to present them as a gift.

Perhaps some of De Soto's men, Ponce de Leon, Narvaez, or Menendez walked over these very shell implements or saw the Indians using them. I wanted to present a gift from the Tampa Historical Society and from the people in Tampa, to be added to this great collection of new world treasures. These were the only treasures that belonged to these ancient people since they had no gold or silver of any consequence.<sup>5</sup> The Museum officials politely refused. They did not want them.

Due North from the port of Havana, Cuba, lies the Dry Tortugas. North of this midway point lies the most beautiful deep harbor in the

world, so said the early explorers.<sup>6</sup> Historians confirm they were describing Tampa Bay (called Espiritos Santos when first sighted and explored by De Soto).

The Spanish had been in the Caribbean, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Bahamas, South America, Mexico, and the Yucatan many years before Ponce de Leon came to Florida.

### **RAIDED THE FLORIDA KEYS**

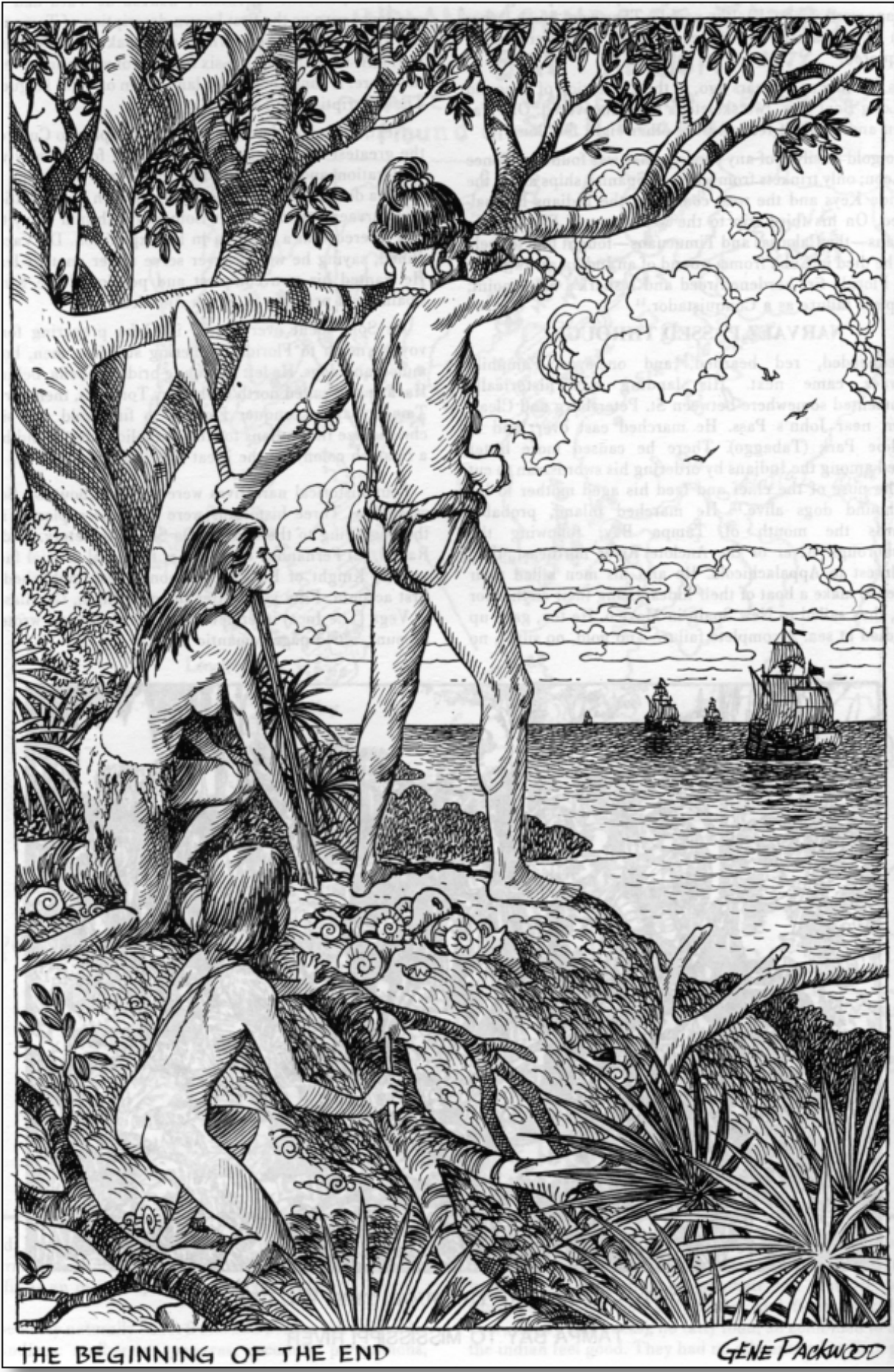
Slave traders (operating illegally) seeking human labor for plantations and the mineral mines in Hispaniola (Haiti), Puerto Rico and Cuba had sailed north many times from Havana raiding the Bahamas, the Florida Keys and the east and west coast of Florida hunting indians for slaves.<sup>7</sup>

The islands, channels, winds and tides were well-etched maps in the minds of the ship



**DE SOTO MARCHING THROUGH THE WILDERNESS  
TAMPA BAY TO MISSISSIPPI RIVER**

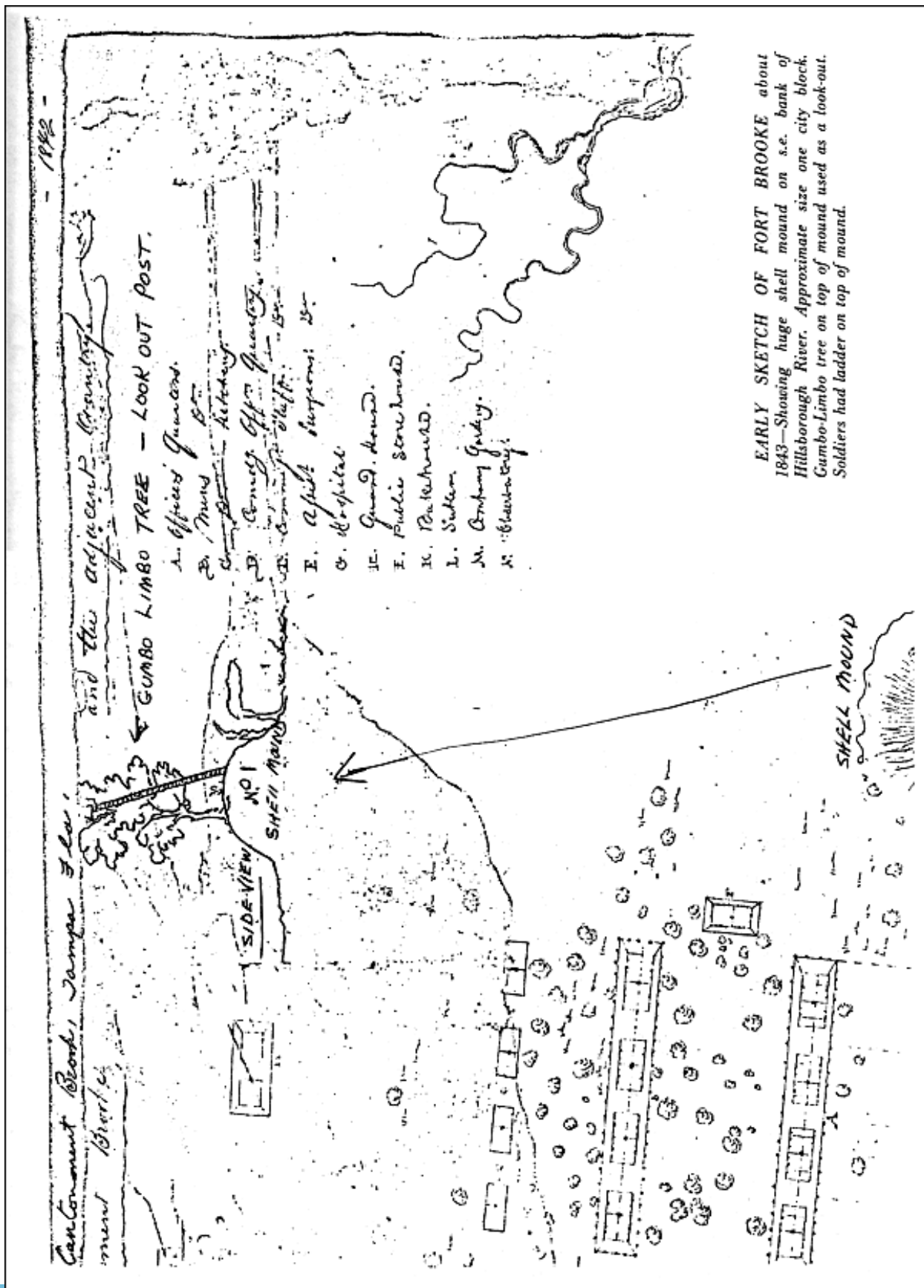




THE BEGINNING OF THE END

GENE PACKWOOD





EARLY SKETCH OF FORT BROOKE about 1842—Showing huge shell mound on s.e. bank of Hillsborough River. Approximate size one city block. Gumbo-Limbo tree on top of mound used as a look-out. Soldiers had ladder on top of mound.

captains and the pilots-not written down. There was no evidence to hang them if they should be caught.<sup>8</sup> They had captured, tortured and killed many aboriginal natives whose names were changed forever when Columbus discovered the new world landing in San Salvador, in the Bahamas. Thinking he was in India, he called the natives "indians", and indians they are called today.

The hostility of the indians to the first landing of Ponce de Leon was indicative of the hatred they had for any and all white men. Upon landing, he met an indian who understood Spanish, who had escaped from Cuba and brought to Florida news of the cruel treatment of the Spanish. Ponce de Leon's patent from the King of Spain read differently from the others.<sup>9</sup> No priest came with him on this voyage, no tradesmen, no settlers, no surgeons; only fighting men. Gold, silver and slaves were his quest. He was also seeking the "fountain of youth."

### FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

Captured slaves from the Florida mainland and the Bahamas were taken to the Caribbean and to Cuba. They told of springs that held life-giving powers on the land to the north. "It would make you feel young again," they said. The aboriginal slaves also spoke of the "River Jordan" as having the same life-giving water.

The "fountain of youth" was truly in Florida, but Ponce de Leon did not find it. Rather, he did, but he didn't know it.

The fountain of youth the Indians told of was a combination of the artesian wells and springs full of sulphur and other mineral elements helpful to digestion and body ailments. The drinking of the sulphur water from rivers and springs helped keep the insects (mosquitos, "no see'ems", and flies) away from the Indians who were always



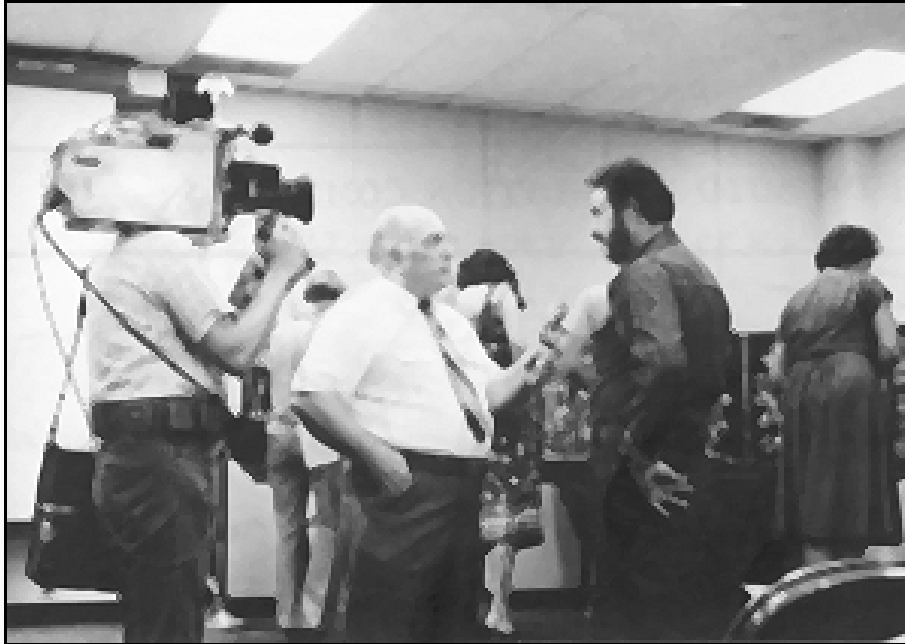
**INDIAN SHELL MOUND  
FORT BROOKE 1842**

nearly and we all know that if you feel good, you feel young. The indians were strong, healthy people. They were much larger than the Spanish and fierce fighters who were never conquered.

As recently as 50 years ago, in the excavation of a mound on Long Boat Key, two skeletons were uncovered. One was seven and one-half feet and the other eight feet long.<sup>10</sup>

No gold or silver of any consequence was found by Ponce de Leon; only trinkets from wrecked Spanish ships along the Florida Keys and the west coast that the Indians had salvaged. On his third trip to the west coast of Florida, the Indians-the Caloosas and Timucuan-fought him fiercely and he died in Cuba from a wound of an Indian arrow made of a Florida fire-hardened reed and a shark's tooth point; complete failure as a Conquistador.<sup>11</sup>





### STONE CROSS IS NEWS.

Bob fellows, feature reporter for Tampa's WTVT, Channel 13, interviews Don (Curley) Grey, who discovered and recovered Spanish cross carved in flint stone from the east bank of Hillsborough River in 1977. Discussion filmed at Tampa Historical Society Lecture Series.

Photo by NELSON MEDINA

### NARVAEZ PASSED THROUGH

Redheaded, red bearded, and one-eyed Pamphilo Narvaez came next. His landing was historically documented somewhere between St. Petersburg and Clearwater, near John's Pass. He marched east over land to Phillippe Park (Tabaggo). There he caused more bitter hatred among the Indians by ordering his swordsman to cut off the nose of the chief and feed his aged mother to his greyhound dogs alive.<sup>12</sup> He marched inland, probably towards the mouth of Tampa Bay, following the Hillsborough River or the Anclote River northeast, then northwest to Appalachicola. He and his men killed their horses to make a boat of their hides. Using their clothes for sails, they sailed to New Spain in Mexico. He too, gave up and died at sea. A complete failure-no gold, no silver, no conquests; but his chronicler, Cabeza de Vaca and other survivors gave us the first known description of Tampa Bay. He wrote, "The port of which we speak is the best in the world. At the entrance are six fathoms of water and five near the shore. It runs up into the land seven

or eight leagues."<sup>13</sup>  
The description of Tampa Bay.

Next, came Hernando de Soto. From Spain to Cuba came the greatest sea armada ever assembled for the new world exploration and conquest. De Soto knew of Tampa Bay. Cabeza de Vaca had returned to Spain with his revelation of the Narvaez expedition. De Soto met with him many times and offered him a position in his expedition. De Vaca declined, saying he would never serve under another leader. He wanted his own conquest and petitioned the King of Spain for a province in South America.

De Soto spent over a year in Cuba preparing for the voyage north to Florida, gathering supplies, men, horses, mules, and dogs. He left his young bride, Isabella, behind in Havana and sailed north to the Dry Tortugas, then north to Tampa Bay to conquer Florida, to find gold and silver, christianize the Indians for the Catholic Church, and begin a Spanish colony on the great river (Mississippi).



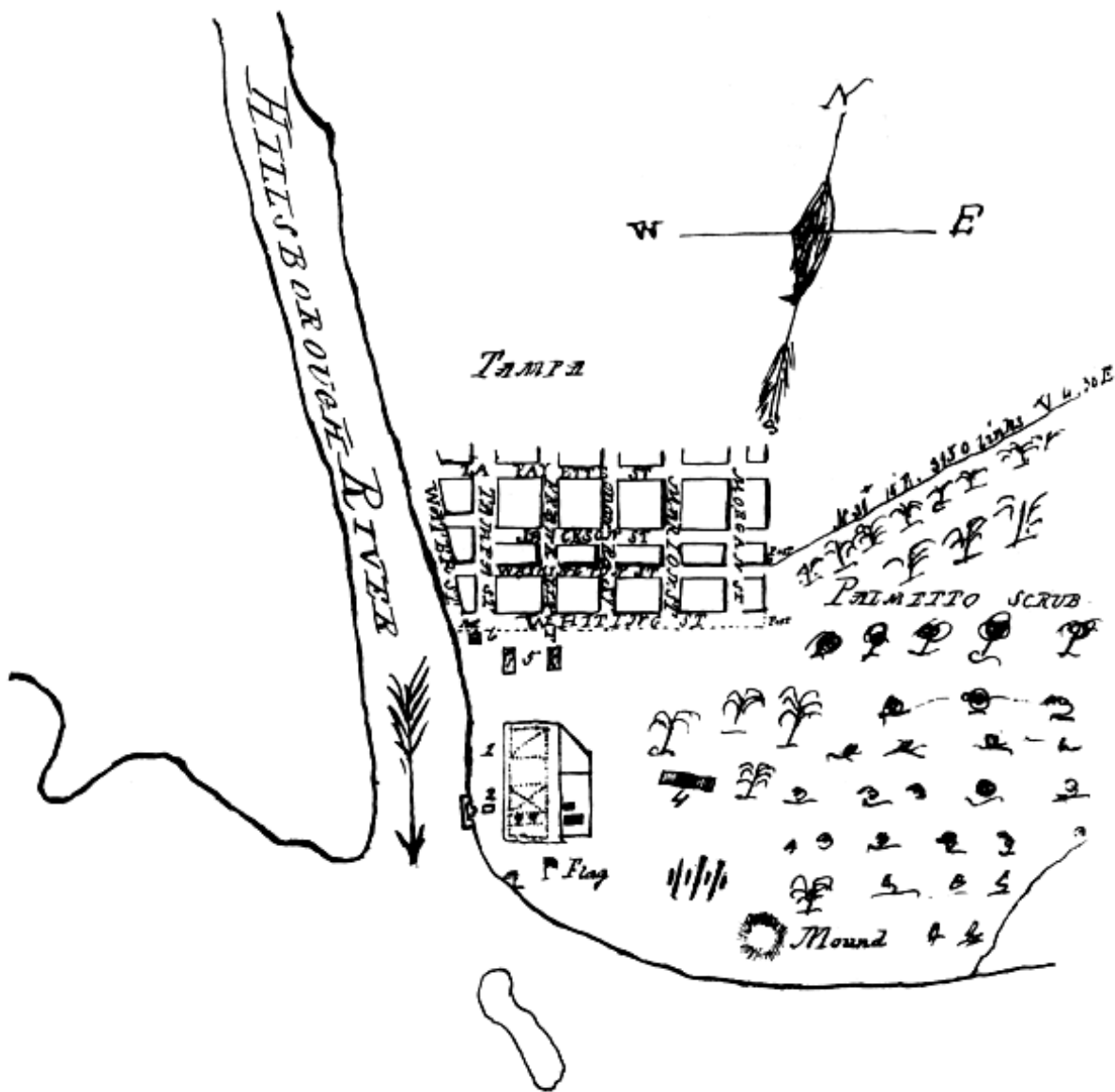
Map No. 3. – Tampa Bay to illustrate the landing of De Soto’s army as indicated in the present report.

Course of the vessels . . . . .

Route of the army - - - - -



# SKETCH of the MILITARY RESERVE FORT BROOKE.



- 1, Commanding Officers' Quarters and Gardens.
- 2, Public Store House.
- 3, Wharf.
- 4, Barracks.
- 5, Hospital.
- 6, Suttler's Store

Four historical narratives were written about De Soto's campaign. Three historians were with the explorers from the beginning to the end: (1) De Soto's secretary, Rodrigo Ranjel, (2) Fernandez de Biedma, the royal official factor, and (3) Knight of Elvas, who anonymously published the first account. Fifty years after the expedition, Garcilaso de la Vega (The Inca) interviewed the survivors and wrote his account, a 643 page romantic novel.

The three narratives written by the historians who accompanied De Soto were all brief but to a remarkable degree, support and confirm each other regarding the land fall of the ships.<sup>14</sup> There are some variances because they were written at different places during the expedition. In the beginning, each states that they traveled north from Cuba to the land called Florida. The land fall was due north of the Dry Tortugas which places the landing on the west coast of Florida. They each confirm they traveled eight to ten days, leaving and landing. This sailing time places the land fall at Tampa Bay calculating the miles and speed of these ancient ships of the 1500s.

### INDIAN SIGNAL FIRES

All three narratives also state that on the land fall they sighted a giant shell mound high above the mangrove trees, which puts the landing on the coast or beach.<sup>15</sup> Anchoring the ships the first night off the coast, campfires could be seen up and down the entire coast-signal fires of the Indians on the high mounds on both sides of the Bay, informing other villages of the coming of the Spanish. The hunters now became the hunted.

The landing, of De Soto was somewhere on the east side of Tampa Bay (possibly at Shaw's Point at the mouth of the Manatee River). At least, the Final Report of the United States De Soto Expedition Commission, 1939, concluded this was the site of the landing.<sup>16</sup>

The huge shell mound that was once there is now the National Historical De Soto Commemorative Monument to this event. The beautiful park is open daily to the public.

### DE SOTO DIES

With an army of over 1,000 men, including slaves to help with the supplies, armament and weapons; and with over 300 Appaloosa horses, 300 pigs, mules, and greyhound fighting dogs, this sight alone was frightening to the indians. Some had never seen a horse, pig, mule, dog; or men with shiny breast plates or pointed metal helmets. But, march they did. From a point somewhere on the east side of Tampa Bay, a trip began that would last over three years and 3,000 miles for De Soto through Timucan territory (northern Florida) and areas now known as nine of our other southern states.

De Soto died, but the exploration continued under the command of Luis de Moscoso. They marched another 1,000 miles in the thirteen months before they sailed down the Mississippi, into the Gulf and southwest to Tampico, Mexico, failing to establish even one colony.

This march was also the beginning of the wild hogs and horses in Florida, as many escaped from the expedition. Seeds from oranges dropped by the marching army were also the beginning of the wild sour oranges in Florida. The tall spikes carried by the foot soldiers would catch and tangle in the delicate lace grey fern that hung from the lowhanging oaks, magnolias, pines, and hardwood trees; and would forever change the name of this native Florida air plant to "Spanish Moss".

### A NEW WORLD

Little gold or silver were found; only some heat-scarred pearls damaged from cooking



oysters in open fire. But De Soto opened a vast new world which neither he nor his men had any idea of the vastness - larger than all of the old world. From the three narratives of documented

evidence of this new land, the countries of Europe (England, Holland, France, Portugal, and Germany) translated them and used them to encourage colonization of the new world in the 1600s and later.

De Soto's contribution was really the unlocking the door of the new world in North America and the doorway was Tampa Bay in 1539.

The size of De Soto's marching army of men and animals necessitated fresh water. Heading north from Shaw's Point along the east side of Tampa Bay, they had to cross the Little Manatee, Bullfrog Creek, the Alafia, Palm River, and then to the mouth of the Hillsborough River (and things have not changed much on the mainland in 440 years). Advancing scouts advised De Soto that the Hillsborough River ran north by northeast, exactly toward his destination of Ocala where the indians around Tampa Bay had told him much gold could be found. In the Tampa Bay area, he found Juan Ortiz, who had come from Cuba to search for Narvaez, was captured, and lived among the indians for twelve years as a slave.<sup>17</sup> He became a valuable scout and interpreter for De Soto's campaign. He, too, died on the long march and was buried near the Mississippi River.

INDIAN SHELL MOUND FORT BROOKE  
1842

### A VALUABLE FIND

Positive evidence of this march is the Spanish cross carved in pure flint, found recently on the east side of the Hillsborough River near Temple Terrace by Don (Curley) Gray,

member of the Tampa Historical Society. The everpresent need for water for animals and man was provided by our **Hillsborough River in 1539.**

A picture of this cross was take to Spain last year and was examined and authenticated by the Museum officials in Madrid. The circle around the cross was the frame (the custom in the 15th and 16th centuries) as we today frame pictures with a rectangle. This was probably the marking of a campsite. Perhaps this is where they buried a lot of the armor, tools and supplies before the march to Ocala, as the three narratives state they did. Unfortunately, the site where the cross was found can never be further excavated as it is now covered with approximately 300 apartment units. However, this is truly a valuable find for the Tampa Bay area.

### FIRST MENTION OF TAMPA

Five miles south of the site of the stone cross, where the Columbus Drive Bridge crosses the Hillsborough River, was found the stone carved head by another of our members, Santo Randazzo. It too, is an artifact of pre-Columbian art, carved by man, some time back in our area's history. Two cultures, worlds apart, meeting at Tampa, hundreds of years ago.

The first mention of our city, Tampa, is in the Memoirs of Fountaneda (1575). He was a ship-wrecked Spanish lad who spent 17 years among the Indians of the Tampa Bay area. He wrote of many villages; one, a large village called "Tanpa".<sup>18</sup> Early mapmakers changed the spelling to "Tampa".

S. T. Walker and C. B. Moore mapped over 75 mound sites in the Tampa area in 1879. Their map shows the indian mounds that were present at the time of the DeSoto expedition. Observe that their locations are now the

neighboring cities of Ruskin, Tarpon Springs, Crystal River, Clearwater, Safety Harbor, St. Petersburg, Pass-a-Grille, Gibsonton, Palmetto, Bradenton and Terre Ceia. These large mounds were found up and down both sides of the entire Tampa Bay area; any one of which could have been the landing site of De Soto in 1539.

### FEW MOUNDS REMAIN

In Tampa's early history, as well as each of these neighboring cities, the first man-made structure was these shell mounds built by early Indian tribes many years before Christ. There were three different types of mounds built. The smaller kitchen midden were living areas covered with thatched huts, for sleeping, cooking and eating. The burial mounds resulted from laying the dead on the ground and covering them with shell and earth. As more died, they were laid over those previously buried (with their treasures of shell jewelry, pottery, tools and weapons) and covered with more shell and earth. Ceremonial mounds, built of shell and earth, were taller than the others, towering over the surrounding land and water. They were T-shaped, with a ramp leading up to the elongated top which always faced east. Today, only a few Timucan mounds remain.

Cockroach Mound, near Ruskin is 56 1/2 feet tall and is the largest remaining in Florida. Shaw's Point in Bradenton, Phillippi Point in Safety Harbor, Terra Ceia and Crystal River are four mounds which have been preserved as historical landmarks of this area's history. Most of these mounds still have enormous Gumbo Limbo trees on them which were sacred to the aboriginal natives. From these trees they used the leaves for tea (medicinal), the red seeds for decorations, the sap for gout, the burning of the green limbs for incense. The sap from the trees also caught red birds which they traded with the Cuban fishermen.

The wood they used for canoes and rafts for collecting shell fish, corks for fishing nets, bowls, tables and many other items necessary for their every day life.<sup>19</sup>

### GUMBO LIMBO TREES

In 1897, Frank Hamilton Cushing excavated the worldacclaimed Key Marco mound site. Artifacts were excavated from muck beds still intact in form, color, and design from an early Caloosa village. Many were carbon dated 300 A.D. and earlier.<sup>20</sup> The book, *The Material Culture of Key Marco Florida*, depicts the artifacts from this site, including pictures of hand-carved items of Gumbo Limbo wood: bowls, fish net corks, stools and float boards. These artifacts are now in the Smithsonian and in the Florida State Museum.

At the entrance to the De Soto National Monument at Shaw's Point, Bradenton, stands an impressive grove of giant Gumbo Limbo trees where an immense shell mound once stood. For over 440 years, the exact spot of De Soto's landing has baffled historians, but the Memorial at Shaw's Point commemorated the landing somewhere in Tampa Bay. The carved cross is positive proof of a Spanish campsite, marking the route of an advancing army of De Soto or another Conquistador who followed the Hillsborough River northeast towards Ocala and the interior of Florida because of the need for fresh water.

### FROM MOUND TO TOWN

Somewhere back in time, the site that was to become the city of Tampa, began with a shell mound on the northeast side of the mouth of the Hillsborough River.

The mound was begun by a naked aboriginal native (named by Columbus, an indian) as he ate his first shell fish and discarded the shell. He ingeniously invented a hammer by putting

a stick through a conch shell and cracked open a giant oyster. He ate it to sustain life and threw down the two empty halves. He found a horse conch in the shallow water near the river, knocked a hole in it with his hammer, carved out the meat with a shell knife he made, ate this, and discarded the shell near the oysters. He then ate some clams; the next day, some scallops. The next week, more shell fish, and the mound grew shell by shell. Hundreds of years passed and other aboriginal natives came and found shell fish and ate them. This was the beginning.

### COULD THIS BE?

The years change rivers, islands and sand bars. Hurricanes can and do close passes and wash away beaches many times. But, could this mound at the mouth of the Hillsborough River be the one described in De Soto's narratives over 400 years ago?

Marching on the east side of the Hillsborough River, De Soto and his men could have observed this mound. Pedro Menendez and Narvaez could have observed it on their trips. Francisco Celli saw it when he came up the bay from Cuba in 1757 to map Tampa Bay and the Hillsborough River (as documented in his written journal).

Renegade pirates saw it, lived on or near it, divided their loot and were murdered on it.<sup>21</sup> Half-breed Spanish-indian and Cuban fishermen knew of it; lived on it or near it. They dried and cured their catches of mullet and mackerel to sell to Cuban fishing and trading ships that came to Tampa Bay.

### OUR FIRST SETTLER

**Robert Hackley** arrived at the mound on the northeast side of the Hillsborough River in 1823. He saw it, cleared land around it, and started his plantation near it-our first settler!<sup>22</sup>

Col. George Mercer Brooke, in 1824, saw the shell mound near the clearing of Hackley's plantation and confiscated the property and mound for the U.S. Army's cantonment, Fort Brooke. Early drawings of Fort Brooke show the Indian shell mound still intact in the 1840s. The mound is shown with a giant Gumbo Limbo tree with a ladder leading to the top for use as a lookout by the soldiers.

Early settlers knew of the mound, and after the Army withdrew, they expanded the settlement of Fort Brooke, hauling the shell from the mound in ox carts for road beds. The last mound in this area (Bullfrog Creek) was used as a foundation in building the Tampa Bay Hotel (now the University of Tampa).

The mounds are no longer here in Tampa. They are gone forever; but in building the mound, one shell at a time, man was doing something that made history. It was Tampa's beginning. The beginning of my town, your town, our town; a long time ago.



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Gloria Jahoda, THE RIVER OF THE GOLDEN IBIS

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FOOTNOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Visited personally by the author, May 1979

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Fontaneda's Memoirs, 1575, Translated, Buckingham Smith, Washington, 1854, (Reprinted, Coral Gables, 1944), p. 11

<sup>6</sup> Grismer, Karl H., Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida, (St. Petersburg, 1950), p. 23

<sup>7</sup> Fontaneda's Memoirs, p. 62

<sup>8</sup> Grismer, Tampa, p. 19

<sup>9</sup> Bickel, Karl A., The Mangrove Coast: The Story of the West Coast of Florida, (New York, 1942), P. 30

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 15

<sup>11</sup> Friu, Florence, Unknown Florida, (Coral Gables, 1963), p. 29

<sup>12</sup> Grismer, Tampa, p. 23

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Boyd, Mark F., "The Arrival of DeSoto's Expedition in Florida", The Florida Historical Quarterly, Vol. XVI No. 3, (DeLeon Springs, January 1938), p. 210

<sup>15</sup> Final Report of the United States DeSoto Expedition Commission, January 3, 1939; U.S. Government Printing Office, (Washington, 1939), p. 124, p. 135

<sup>16</sup> Swanton, John R., "The Landing Place of DeSoto", The Florida Historical Quarterly, Vol. XVI No. 3, (DeLeon Springs, January 1938), pp 148-151

<sup>17</sup> Grismer, Tampa, pp 28-29

<sup>18</sup> Fontaneda's Memoirs, p. 51

<sup>19</sup> Gilliland, Marion Spjut, The Material Culture of Key Marco, Florida, (Gainesville, 1975), pp 59-60, 161

<sup>20</sup> Gilliland, Key Marco, pp 257-258

<sup>21</sup> Brooke, Jr., Col. George Mercer, "Early Days at Fort Brooke", The Sunland Tribune, Vol. I No. 1, (Tampa, July 1974), p. 8

<sup>22</sup> Appeal from the Circuit Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit (Florida), Scott v. Carew, Argued November 1904-Decided January 1905, pp 100-114