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THE CONSERVATION OF HISTORIC SITES
IN FLORIDA *

by C. R. VINTEN

In past years I have noted with great interest the concern expressed by members of the Florida Historical Society for the protection of the historical and archeological relics which still exist in Florida. In listing these accounts of strange archeological sites and of interesting historical areas, I have always asked myself the question, "What can be done to save the most valuable of these sites so that they will not have to share the fate of many which have been wantonly destroyed?" I believe we will all agree that these historical and archeological relics, which have been passed down to us through many generations are the things which tell the story of Florida most vividly, and which under effective administration and control might become of great educational value to the people of Florida and those who visit the state in such large numbers. The Society is to be congratulated for the conservation work it has already done.

Possibly the experience of the National Park Service in Florida and the experience of the State Park Service and local agencies would be of value to this Society in determining how these historical and archeological values might be preserved. At the present time the National Park Service is preserving and interpreting several areas of national significance in Florida. Castillo de San Marcos National Monument is a notable example of the way a preservation program can be applied to a splendid old historic relic. Then there is Fort Matanzas

* This address was read before the annual meeting of the Florida Historical Society at St. Augustine, April 27, 1944. Mr. Vinten is Coordinating Superintendent, Southeastern National Monuments, National Park Service, St. Augustine.

National Monument, fourteen miles south of St. Augustine, which is being carefully guarded. Fort Jefferson National Monument in the Dry Tortugas, sixty-five miles west of Key West, is one of our most intriguing relics of the Civil War period. Even the thirty-nine mile stretch of island in the Pensacola region, Santa Rosa Island National Monument, possesses a considerable amount of historic and archeological interest. The Everglades National Park, when established, will contain many important archeological sites, and there are no doubt other areas in Florida that might later prove to be of national significance.

The Florida Forest and Park Service in its State Park program has established Fort Clinch State Park at Fernandina. The park ties in very definitely with the Spanish colonial period and also tells a very interesting story of colonial struggles, as well as the Civil War period represented by the ruins of the old fort. Torreya State Park on the Apalachicola River, Caverns State Park near Marianna, Goldhead Branch State Park near Keystone Heights, and even the beautiful scenic areas of Myakka State Park near Sarasota and Highlands Hammock State Park near Sebring, all have backgrounds of interest and can tell stories which make the history of Florida live more vividly. County and local interest in the preservation of relics and the interest of organizations such as the Florida Historical Society indicate that there is a statewide effort being made to protect and preserve the things which can contribute so much toward a greater understanding of the State of Florida.

While the areas just mentioned might be considered the important historical and archeological sites in the state, there are many others of possibly equal value and interest, or of lesser value and interest, which have no definite sponsorship and consequently

no specific assurance of future protection. These are the areas which constitute our major problem - a problem that, in my opinion, is one in which the entire state of Florida should be interested. It is in connection with this problem that I ask myself the question, "What are we going to do about it?"

There are some who believe that things should be preserved merely for the sake of preserving them. There are others who believe that we should preserve these important values for the things they can contribute in the way of education, inspiration and enjoyment. Recently one of our visitors at Castillo de San Marcos National Monument was a lady who had served as curator of the Hanby House Museum at Columbus, Ohio, for many years. She attended our Saturday morning Children's Hour program, at the time the youngsters organized their "Castillo Club". When she returned home, she wrote a most delightful letter about her experiences in carrying out a similar program for children at the Hanby House. One comment in her letter which impressed me was the statement of one of the children in her Hanby House Club. This young man made an observation which I think expresses most clearly the reaction of the layman and his appreciation for any efforts that are expended in the direction of preserving our historical heritage. His simple comment was, "Isn't it fine that these places and things are saved, so that a fellow can learn just by looking!" That statement seems to give us the key to a door that might open the vast storehouse of knowledge, now locked up in abandoned or neglected areas. If the field of historic and archeological interpretation could be expanded, this knowledge could then be more readily available to those who enjoy the experience of "learning just by looking".

I know of no organization in Florida that is better qualified to sponsor a historical conservation pro-

gram, to accomplish the better preservation and interpretation of these sites, than the Florida Historical Society. While such a program covers a very broad and complicated field, I believe the solution is a simple one if we approach it as a series of progressive steps, not trying to solve the entire program at once, but to accomplish a definite purpose in accordance with a definite objective, one step at a time. These steps seem to be as follows:

(a) Create a general interest throughout the state favorable to the preservation of archeological and historic sites. This may be done through the press, through state and national magazines, through motion pictures, radio and any other means of publication.

(b) Establish responsibility for these things by setting up a state administration, or assigning the responsibility for site preservation to some state agency. After all, a problem of this kind can be given closest and most permanent attention if things of statewide interest are recognized as official state responsibilities.

(c) Under such administration, surveys of various historical and archeological sites in the state could be completed and this information consolidated so as to be of greatest value in planning an effective conservation program.

(d) On the basis of these surveys, areas could be classified to determine if they might be of national significance, state significance, local significance or merely of minor importance.

(e) In order to start such a program on a small scale it would be advisable to take one or two of the most important sites and plan the program of protection and interpretation in such a way that the area or areas will become a demonstration of what may be expected from efforts in broader fields. Demonstrations already exist in national park and

state park areas in Florida which can serve as a safe guide and specification.

(f) As the last step in such a program, we should not forget to provide for adequate support, so that complete protection and adequate interpretation services may be available.
