

## Transcript

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society, is made possible in part by the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, and the State of Florida. It's also made possible by the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund, and by the historic Rossiter House Museum and Gardens in Eau Gallie celebrating pioneer history, the natural environment, and women's history, available for weddings and events at [rossiterhousemuseum.org](http://rossiterhousemuseum.org).

This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society on the web at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org). I'm Ben Brotemarkle and coming up on the program we'll talk with Austin Bell, author of the new book *The Nine Lives of Florida's Famous Key Marco Cat*.

### **Austin Bell**

Probably the most common assumption about its possible use is that it was an idol of possible religious or spiritual importance.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

We'll discuss agricultural history in the state.

### **Mary McDonald**

Unlike the citrus industry, sugar production in Florida was not a poor man's commercial crop.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

And late 19th and early 20th century Nurse Leader Mary McDonald, Carter, all that ahead on Florida Frontiers.

When the Marco Island Historical Museum was built in 2010, a special vault was constructed to house the Key Marco Cat, even though the prehistoric artifact left the state in 1896. The Key Marco Cat came back to Florida in 2018, under the direction of Austin Bell, curator of collections for the Marco Island Historical Society. Bell has written the new book, *The Nine Lives of Florida's Famous Key Marco Cat*, published by the University Press of Florida.

### **Austin Bell**

So, the Key Marco Cat is what anthropologists consider anthropomorphic and that it has human like characteristics, but it's also got feline characteristics. So, it was created by Native American artists centuries ago, probably to resemble in part the Florida Panther, which roamed these parts for centuries as well. And so, it's about six inches tall, and carved from a probably a native, tropical hardwood. We don't know for sure, there is evidence for other types of woods, such as driftwood, non-native species being artifacts being carved from these things as well throughout Florida, but so, we don't know for sure. We've narrowed it down in the book to estimate about 22 different species of wood that it could have been, and maybe someone will be able to winnow it down even further. You know, I like to sort of put the threads out there for hopefully for others to pull on in the coming years, and I hope that being able to identify the wood species for this artifact and be one of those things that we could ultimately find out.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

The Key Marco Cat was probably created by a member of the Calusa tribe, or one of the earlier societies in the area.

### **Austin Bell**

This part of Florida around Marco Island was known to the Calusa, at least at the time of European arrival as Muspa, so we've given it that sort of regional signifier as well, especially at our museum here in Marco Island. But made by a Calusa, or Muspa person, and likely used a combination of tools, probably, but most certain is shark tooth tool, which Cushing, the archaeologist that uncovered the Key Marco Cat, also found plenty of examples of half the shark tooth tools at the site still attached to their wooden handles. Those tools and those tools were probably used to do the detailed carving and incisions and other features of especially the face and torso of the cat. But you know, it's probably part of this larger process, somebody had to go out and collect the wood and then you know size it and shape it and smooth it down, and so we don't know if it was one person that did all these things or it could have been a collective communal effort that that resulted in the production of this, and maybe even other artifacts from, you know, the same piece of wood. So one of the chapters in the book sort of explores the idea that the sort of the, imagines the process of what it would have been like to start with nothing and go out into the environment and then ultimately produce something like the Key Marco Cat and what that would entail.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

The creators of the Key Marco Cat left no written record of the objects' purpose, but Austin Bell discusses the possibilities in his new book.

### **Austin Bell**

Probably the most common assumption about its possible use is that it was an idol of possible religious or spiritual importance, and this comes from Spanish documents that around the time of European contact, probably at the Capital at Mound Key, which is not far north of Key Marco, there's talk of these massed processions where the Colusa would wear masks and carry their idols and go along in a mass procession with the women singing, and the Spanish were witnesses to these sort of ceremonies. And so, the idols that they describe, the Key Marco Cat, is often what probably the most used example of what one of those idols might have looked like, but it was of course one of many artifacts found at the site that could have been an idol. There are other plenty of other animal figureheads, some of which are also on loan to the Marco Island Historical Museum, that could have served those purposes as well. So that's the most common assumption, but you know, it could have been a piece of furniture, it could have been a toy, it could have been any number of things, because really, we don't know for sure, and you know that sort of abstract information doesn't survive in the archaeological record alongside the objects.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

The Key Marco Cat and other fascinating prehistoric objects lay dormant for centuries in an anaerobic environment, until archaeologist Frank Cushing uncovered them in 1896.

### **Austin Bell**

Cushing found these things in a muck pit on the north end of Marco Island, and basically, they were kind of the result of a perfect storm of condition that led to their preservation. First of all, they were sealed in an oxygen-free level of muck that was sort of supercharged by the calcium carbonate that resulted from the shells that were, you know, the shell middens that this site was built upon. And so that sort of neutralized the pH of the soil. And then also you know you've got an oxygen-free environment inhibiting the growth of any bacteria. So, these artifacts that were made of wood and plant fiber, and other materials that ordinarily decay, just survived in almost like new condition, some with paint still on them for hundreds of years. We don't know how many hundreds, but at least 500 because of sites thought to be precontact because of the lack of European goods down there. So, when Cushing broke the seal in 1896, I mean, he described it as a startling experience seeing these things in their almost like new condition. And you know, and the fact that they were even in at that time Florida was sparsely populated in this part of the state. But the Key Marco site actually was being dug out for fertilizer, and it lay just, you know, a couple 100 feet south of a hotel. And so, the fact that these things survived, even that level of development by modern humans is sort of miraculous because somebody you know had to recognize these things as significant and ultimately bring them to Cushing's attention before he could come down and do the excavation. So, you know, so many archaeological sites have been destroyed, whether through looting or development, over the past century and century and a half, that this is really the result of a spectacular number of circumstances that all sort of came together to make this possible.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

The Marco Island excavation was funded by the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, but Cushing worked for the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. The artifacts went to both institutions. While the Key Marco Cat was still at the Smithsonian, Austin Bell took a bronze replica of the artifact to D.C. to compare it to the original.

### **Austin Bell**

The bronze cat is sort of a recent addition to this story. It was actually brought to our attention here at the Historical Society by one of our members as an eBay item up for auction. And so, you know, we got in touch with the antique dealer, and you know, of course, we're curious about its provenance and how he wound up with it, and there were some details in there that were just too specific to be coincidental. So, we kind of took a chance on it, some of our donors stepped up and purchased it for the Historical Society, added it to the collection in hopes that it would be authentic or proven authentic by research down the road. And so that was part of what I was doing and traveling with it to these other museums was trying to figure out if this was the real deal. And long story short, after looking at other molds and castings at the Smithsonian and the Penn Museum, it turns out that this thing which has a patina that indicates that it's relatively old. And of the time when Cushing excavated these things it fit perfectly into the mold at the University of Pennsylvania. And the gentleman that worked with Cushing was named Samuel Murray, who was a bronze sculptor and had a workshop just down the street from the Penn Museum until about 1902. And so, we believe that this bronze cat casting was actually made from the original Key Marco Cat mold by probably Samuel Murray, who is pretty well-known artist and why it was

made. We're not 100% sure if it was made as a gift, or was it made at Cushing's direction because it was just a special piece. We don't know the reasons behind it, but we know that we're almost certain that it was made by this well-known artist around 1900 if not a little before.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

While the Key Marco Cat has been on display at the Marco Island Historical Museum since 2018, that's not a permanent situation.

### **Austin Bell**

As much as some people here would like it to be on permanent loan, it will be going back. It's been extended from 2021 to 2026, so we'll have had it for a period of about 8 years when all said and done, which is the longest loan that the cat has ever been part of. But ultimately, you know this thing, at least the way I feel about it is that it's a national treasure. And so, it's wonderful to have it back here on Marco Island. We had 30,000 people through the museum in 2019. But you think about how many millions of people go through the Smithsonian every year. You know, it was on exhibit there for decades before it ever came here. And so, it's something that the larger national audience can benefit from, not just the people on Marco Island. And you know they're well equipped to take care of an object like this for the past 100 years, they've been doing a wonderful job.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Austin Bell is author of the new book *The Nine Lives of Florida's Famous Key Marco Cat*, published by the University Press of Florida. To see the Key Marco Cat, find episode 32 of Florida Frontiers television, the indigenous people of Florida, archived online at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org).

This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society. I'm Ben Brotemarkle. Mark your calendar now for the 2022 Florida Historical Society public history forum to be held May 19 through 21st in Gainesville. This is a combined event with the 33rd annual Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society Conference. This special event will include engaging panel discussions, exciting tours of historic sites, archives, museums and more. More information is at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org), that's the Florida Historical Society Public History Forum and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society Conference May 19th through 21st 2022.

Joining us now is Connie Lester, Associate Professor of History at the University of Central Florida, director of the RICHES digital archiving project, and editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly. Connie, Florida's past and present is defined in part by its agricultural production, does the Florida Historical Quarterly publish many articles on agricultural history?

### **Connie Lester**

Over the decades, FHQ has published a number of articles on agricultural labor, and on the marketing of agricultural products. More recently, environmental history articles have dominated. Sometimes environmental articles are connected to agricultural issues, but they generally focus on urban development and the environment. Looking through past issues of the Quarterly in search of topics for this segment of Florida Frontiers, I noticed that in the space of one year, 1997-98, the FHQ published three articles on sugar production in Florida. That intrigued me.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

Anyone who reads the news or watches documentary reports knows that the sugar industry has been the target of investigations on labor practices and environmental pollution. Was that a focus of these articles?

**Connie Lester**

Surprisingly, no. These articles focused on the agricultural issues, including the investment in land and technology, the difficulties faced by potential sugar producers, and the interaction between sugar and the federal government.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

Interesting, well tell us more about that.

**Connie Lester**

First, a little background on Florida agriculture. In the post-Civil War era, Florida advertised to encourage migration and settlement by assuring farmers that the states climate and crop mix offered the potential to earn a comfortable income on small acreages. With only 20 acres planted in citrus, potential settlers were assured they could earn an income higher than what they were obtaining from wheat, corn, or cotton in their own states. Clearly, Florida's paradise myth extended to hard working farmers. Archives around Florida hold letters and diaries of men who came to the state to accept that promise and wrote enthusiastically to their families and friends to encourage them to migrate South as well. From the 1890s to World War One much of the citrus crop was produced by small farm agriculture.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

I'm assuming that changed. When and how did that change?

**Connie Lester**

There were always some better capitalized and large-scale citrus operations, but by the late 1910s you can see the effect of national agricultural shifts to mechanization and the influence of an increasingly discerning consumer market on the producers of citrus. The Florida Department of Agriculture began to address complaints about unripe fruit, for example, with new regulations. Consumers in New York, Boston, and Chicago demanded fruit of uniform color and size, as well as sugar content and taste. Both the Florida Citrus Cooperative and big citrus producers exerted pressure on smaller growth owners to produce and market more appealing and better tasting fruit. Big citrus producers who also bought fruit from smaller groves began to mechanize and standardize the process of selection and packing. As Andrew Padgett noted in his M.A. thesis on the citrus industry in this period, citrus became more corporate in its processes from the grove to the marketing of the fruit. Over the course of the 1930s to the 1960s and 70s, small operations faced multiple problems, including pressure to modernize as well as weather and disease related difficulties. When increased development presented opportunities to profit from the land, most small grove owners sold out and left citrus. This movement from small and mid-level farms and groves to large scale, mechanized, and highly capitalized production was typical of agriculture in the period, particularly farming in the Midwest and the Plain states.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

That's the background on citrus, but sugar production didn't follow the same course.

**Connie Lester**

That's correct. Cane sugar production occurs in a narrow geographic area in the U.S. Namely, South Florida and southern Louisiana and Texas. Sugar beets are grown in the central and northern plains states as far north as the Dakotas. Unlike the citrus industry, sugar production in Florida was not a poor man's commercial crop. As the three articles demonstrate sugar producers were highly capitalized and developed both crop land and the industrial facilities for processing the cane into syrup. These early investors who bought thousands of acres of drained swampland in South Florida, expected significant returns on their investment. But the articles indicate that even well-funded ventures into sugar production often met with disappointment. Low world prices on sugar undermined profits, hurricanes destroyed crops, and federal legislation during the New Deal imposed quotas on Florida's fledgling sugar production.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

Well, we know Big Sugar succeeded, what changed?

**Connie Lester**

In his article on Big Sugar's origins, John A. Heitman argues that the combination of scientific technology, corporate practices, and interaction with government, in what he calls a mix of free enterprise and government, undergirded Big Sugar success. On the free enterprise side, Heitman points to increased mechanization, the transfer of scientific and technological knowledge from older sugar production from Louisiana and Cuba, and its adaptation to Florida soils and climate, and the imposition of corporate management on processes and costs. On the government side, Big Sugar depended on the creation of modern drainage infrastructure provided by state and federal agencies. Tariffs protected American grown sugar from international competition, and, perhaps most importantly, federal legislation support for the importation of labor for harvesting the crop fill the gap in mechanization. Harvesting sugar cane remained dependent on humans who cut the cane close to the ground to maximize the sugar content. No machine of the period did as well. The seasonal importation of workers from the Caribbean filled that need with low-cost labor that left at the end of the season. The interaction between free enterprise and government is not unusual, but it is a story that is not always apparent.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

And interesting history and still, of course, relevant today. Thanks, Connie.

**Connie Lester**

You're welcome.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

Connie Lester is Associate Professor of History at the University of Central Florida, director of the RICHS digital archiving project, and editor of the Florida historical quarterly.

This is Florida Frontiers. Holly Baker spoke with award-winning author Christine Ardanan about an often-overlooked figure in the nursing profession.

## **Holly Baker**

Doctor Christine Ardalan is an adjunct professor of history at Florida International University in Miami. Doctor Ardalan recently wrote an article in the Florida Historical Quarterly titled "The Hidden History of the Florida Born Early Progressive Nurse Leader, Mary E. Macdonald Carter," published in the Winter/Spring 2020 issue, her article about Mary E. Macdonald Carter was the 2021 recipient of the Arthur W. Thompson Award for the Most Outstanding Article in the Florida Historical Quarterly.

## **Dr. Christine Ardalan**

Thank you for the opportunity to tell you about this remarkable woman who was born in the wilds of Central Florida in 1869, soon after the Civil War. So, as Mary Macdonald Carter's life unfolds, we're going to see this woman from Florida's backwoods, graduating from Bellevue Hospital School of Nursing in New York, when she was just 27 years old. Now I want to point out that Bellevue was the foremost nursing school in the nation, and it opened doors for Mary's travel. It opened doors for her association with major world events, as well as national reforms. We will see how nursing was Mary's platform to forward her progressive perspectives towards cultural issues that span race, class, and ethnicity.

## **Holly Baker**

Mary E Macdonald Carter spent much of her childhood in Eustis, Florida, working in the family citrus grove. Her family left Eustis for Miami at around the same time that Mary moved to New York to attend nursing school. She graduated from Bellevue's training school for nurses in 1896. Two years later, the Spanish American War began, and Mary was called to duty, first in Cuba and then the Philippines. In 1902, she returned to New York, where she became the Superintendent of the Women's and Children's Hospital in Syracuse. She went on to work with the New York Health Department, where she became the supervisor of nurses and a member of the State Board of Public Health Supervisors. In 1917, her father died, and she returned to Florida to help care for her mother. Mary E Macdonald Carter arrived back in Miami just in time for the 1918 influenza pandemic, also known as the Spanish Flu.

## **Dr. Christine Ardalan**

We can, of course, think of the parallels with today's pandemic. Back then, the epidemic ravaged the United States between September and November of 1918, causing at least 400,000 deaths. The flu had entered Florida through the gateway cities of Jacksonville and Pensacola, and then it made its way down through the state to take a toll of sickness and death in its wake. Now Florida State Board of Health has issued bulletins informing people of the flu's contagion and the transmission, the airborne transmission. It was quickly spread, of course, by personal contact and by crowds, and the greatest danger came from its complication, especially from pneumonia. So then here we see Mary Macdonald Carter at hand to take charge of facilitating nursing care for this emergency situation.

## **Holly Baker**

As chairman of the local Red Cross committee, Mary E. Macdonald Carter opened a centrally located nursing headquarters where qualified nurses could offer their services. She educated families about the importance of avoiding crowds, and she endorsed using Red Cross patterns to make what they called flu masks as a means of protection in public places. By 1920, Mary had established a solid foundation for public health nursing services in Miami, from supervising hygienic work in schools, to instructing nurses

and midwives, Mary demonstrated and proved that public health nursing services benefited all the people in the community. After Mary's mother died in 1928, she left Miami and returned to her childhood home of Eustis. Doctor Christine Ardalan.

### **Dr. Christine Ardalan**

And after a lifetime's journey of service to mankind that initially took her North then South and across the world, she returned full circle to the place of her birth. She died in, Eustis in Lake County in 1944. Her retirement then to Eustis reflected her love for Florida. But her earlier moved to New York and her training at Bellevue facilitated her leadership positions. She supervised hospitals, she initiated a nurse training school, she made strides in public health nursing, both in New York and in Miami. Her work is striking in the way that she extended her nursing platform from the soldiers to the children of Cuba, to the women of the Philippines, and onwards to the immigrants of the Lower East Side of New York and more. Her service as a Spanish American war contract nurse was indeed nationally recognized by her internment in Arlington National Cemetery in the nurse's section. So, dusting off the cobwebs of her life story shows us that she deserves to join the ranks of Florida's notable women. And she reminds us, too, of the many nurses who served as bridges for healthcare in the past and present, and who remain the unsung heroes of health care yesterday and today.

### **Holly Baker**

For Florida Frontiers, I'm Holly Baker, public history coordinator for the Florida Historical Society, and archivist at the Library of Florida history in Cocoa.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

You've been listening to Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society. Please join us right here again next week at any time online at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org) and on Facebook. Production assistance for Florida Frontiers comes from Holly Baker and Connie Lester. The program is edited by Jon White. Have a great week. I'm Ben Brotemarkle.

Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society, is made possible in part by the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources and the State of Florida. It's also made possible by the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund, and by the historic Rossiter House Museum and Gardens in Eau Gallie, celebrating pioneer history, the natural environment, and women's history, available for weddings and events at [rossiterhousemuseum.org](http://rossiterhousemuseum.org).