

## 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 du Pont 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. This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society, on the web at my Florida history dot. I'm Ben Brotemarkle, and coming up on the program, June is LGBTQ Pride month. We'll go to the Parliament House resort exhibit at the LGBTQ History Museum of Central Florida.

### **Nikki Fragala Barnes**

Queer space is our refuge. Preserving this history can have higher stakes as people and places disappear.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

We'll discuss Orlando and the global fight against apartheid.

### **Connie Lester**

The Orlando City Council voted for a resolution that strongly condemned apartheid and the actions of the South African government.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

And we'll talk about the French and colonial Florida all that ahead on Florida Frontiers.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

The Parliament House resort, located near the intersection of Colonial Drive and Orange Blossom Trail in Orlando, catered to the LGBTQ+ community from 1975 to 2020. The complex provided a safe space with a lakeside beach, pool, disco, several bars, the Footlights theatre and hotel rooms. Nicki Fragala Barnes is a Ph.D. student at the University of Central Florida and serves on the board of directors for the LGBTQ History Museum of Central Florida.

### **Nikki Fragala Barnes**

Parliament House opened as the first of a small chain of hotels in 1962. In 1975, it was purchased by two established entrepreneurs, Bill Miller and Michael Hodge of Orlando, and reopened in 1975 as a gay resort called Parliament House Resort Hotel. It closed in November 2020, in large part due to the lockdowns on travel and closings of many tourist attractions in an effort to respond to the public health crisis of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Exhibits focusing on the Parliament House are online as part of the virtual LGBTQ History Museum of Central Florida. One of the artifacts shown is a program from the Parliament House Resort grand opening, which took place September 29th through October 5th, 1975.

## **Nikki Fragala Barnes**

The opening page contains an enthusiastic welcome from new owners Bill Miller and Michael Hodge. It's clear from the messaging that this was circulated in advance of the event, encouraging prospective guests to book, with details and rates on room reservations, \$14.00 for a single and \$16.00 for a double, with a \$3 upcharge for an additional person, and a note that pageant contestants could take advantage of a special rate. Detailing the Miss and Mister Parliament House pageant, the program also contains a lined entry form for entering the pageant. The Miss Parliament House pageant would take place on Monday, the 29th of September, with sportswear, swimwear, evening wear and talent. The Mr. Parliament House pageant took place on Wednesday, the 1st of October with self-expression, swimwear, and talent. It's filled with drink specials and details with an opening cocktail party ahead of the festivities that begin in force on Thursday with the BBQ luau on the beach of Rock Lake and the disco party that night with a dance contest. Friday and Saturday featured a Playhouse Theatre production of the Broadway musical Mame, and Sunday is "to rest and give everyone a chance to unwind from a fun filled week." There's a special box announcement invitation to a grand opening kickoff cruise out of Daytona on Sunday the 28th of October, for \$9.95, a person with \$0.25 beers. Of special interest are the included advertisements from vendors present on the property and local establishments, a haircut shop, the Gay Blade, a boutique and florist are listed as within the resort, and the Palace Club on Humphreys is also listed open for dancing until 6:00 AM.

## **Ben Brotemarkle**

Alexis Rodriguez is a graduate student at the University of Central Florida and Vice president of the LGBTQ Museum of Central Florida. Rodriguez's research focuses on a photography collection that features images of female impersonators at the Parliament House.

## **Alexis Rodriguez**

Due to the lack of information, I began to use social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter as tools and collecting information and contacting sources. Within the collection was a series of calendars which fortunately had the photographer's watermark. By contacting him through Instagram, I conducted an oral history related to the calendars and performers. The photographer, who's also a female impersonator through developing this connection with Locke Robertson and discussing with his associates the museum's project and gathering Central Florida's LGBTQ plus history in person and through social media. Others join in, offering some of their stories and providing potential contacts. In addition to Instagram, they also managed to collect information through crowdsourcing on the museum's Facebook page, which then promoted the discussion among patrons at Parliament House Orlando, allowing to examine the relation between collective and individual memory.

## **Ben Brotemarkle**

Alexis Rodriguez found that social media contact was not sufficient to complete his historical research in 2020.

## **Alexis Rodriguez**

While the use of social media aided in research and outreach, much of the history related to some of the photographs was kept alive through the preceding generation, who saw the transformative years of

Central Florida's LGBTQ+ community during the 1970s and 80's. This of course presented a dilemma, as many from the preceding generations were not familiar with platforms such as Zoom or video teleconferencing software programs, and many were at an age which made them more susceptible to the COVID-19 virus. After much deliberation and through taking the appropriate precautions, I began to conduct oral histories in person, following the CDC guidelines, to gather as much history as possible, especially at the passing of Sammy Singhaus, or known on stage as Miss Sammy, who was both an Orlando icon and Broadway performer. His unfortunate passing after setting up a date for an interview further motivated me to seek out and preserve the history of Central Florida's female impersonation subculture. Through conducting and collecting oral histories, which primarily focused on female impersonators, I came to realize the intricacies and attempting to preserve this history, and how it plays into the issues of historical erasure of certain subgroups and culture through the notion of collective memory.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

There is very little information about Florida's LGBTQ community prior to the 1960s, Rodriguez says. That's because the community was largely closeted, but that changed.

### **Alexis Rodriquez**

The arrival of several organizations and businesses, such as the Kennedy Space Center in 1962, the University of Central Florida in 1968, and Disney World in 1971, increased development of various establishments which catered to the LGBTQ+ population. In 1972, Bill Miller, Michael Hodge, John Koren, Wally Wood, and Suhana, who eventually became known as a gay and lesbian gang, sought to create gay and lesbian clubs and bars in Orlando, two of which hold significance for both gay and female impersonation history: The Diamond Head and On the House Landing. The Diamond Head, considered the first gay bar in Central Florida, was purchased by Bill Miller and Michael Hodge, and was a venue that provided a show bar for female impersonators and pageants such as Miss Diamond Head, the date of its closing is unknown. On the House Orlando, once a part of a hotel chain in the early 1960s, was purchased by Bill Miller and Michael Hodge several years later and closed in November of 2020. The significance of Parliament House in particular, demonstrates the necessity of investigating other historic sites of memory, while Parliament House Orlando was considered a safe haven for Orlando's LGBTQ+ community due to social homophobia and recognized as "one of the oldest gay resorts and entertainment complexes in the United States." The significance of this site expands to other communities and subcultures. Within this gay resort was a Footlight Theatre, where after the Diamond Head became a popular site within the national female impersonation subculture.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Rodriguez says that the Footlight Theatre at the Parliament House helped to develop Central Florida's LGBTQ+ community and link it with the national drag subculture.

### **Alexis Rodriquez**

The popularity of pageantry, for example, placed Central Florida and South Florida in the periphery of the greater female impersonation subculture. As the creation of the state pageant Miss Florida in 1972, and subsequent subcategories, allowed Florida's female impersonators to travel and participate in national pageantry, as well as bring the attention of potential visitors and residents to the region. The

Footlight Theatre also played a role within this as Miss Central Florida and other similar pageants were held at Parliament House Orlando as a precursor towards entering the national pageants. The development of these subcultures throughout an era of social homophobia should not be discredited as mere entertainment history, but rather an important development towards the historic narrative

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

A 1960s style oval sign with multicolored rectangles used to welcome visitors inside the Parliament House Resort Complex, which is now an empty lot. To see the sign, visit the Florida Historical Society on Facebook. Nikki Fragala Barnes explains why remembering the Parliament House is important.

### **Nikki Fragala Barnes**

There are specific vulnerabilities present as members of the LGBTQ community who embody an identity that has been criminalized, oppressed, and persecuted. Public spaces could contain imminent danger. People who identify as queer often develop self-preservation coping behaviors to decrease the risks and punishments of visibility among the dominant heterosexual population. Presence itself becomes precarious. The emergence of queer spaces through bars, bookstores, etc. affords queer people places to belong. Because the typical landscape consists of places that are socially coded to welcome and reinforce mainstream dominant heteronormative culture, they have written out queer narratives and ways of being. Queer spaces are refuge. Preserving this history can have higher stakes as people and places disappear.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Nikki Fragala Barnes and Alexis Rodriguez both presented papers as part of the 2021 Florida Historical Society Virtual Annual Meeting and Symposium. More information about the conference is online at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org).

This is Florida Frontiers, the weekly radio magazine of the Florida Historical Society. I'm Ben Brotemarkle. Visit us anytime online at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org) to find great new books on Florida history and culture. Listen to archived editions of this program. Watch our public television series, Florida Frontiers and much more. That's my Florida history.org.

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. It's sometimes easy to become so focused on local history that we forget the ways in which even the most remote areas and become involved in national or even international.

### **Connie Lester**

Events an article by Jacob Ivy in the summer 2019 issue of the Florida Historical Quarterly draws attention to an Orlando protest in the 1980s that was part of a global anti-apartheid effort to divest pension funds of holdings in companies that invested in South Africa. As Ivy describes it, the struggle against apartheid remains one of the most important and wide-ranging human struggles of the 20th century. The overthrow of the racist South Africa regime that initially came to power in 1948 has been considered one of the most enduring legacies of the post-colonial era.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

Connie, even during a globalized effort for change, Orlando seems to be an unlikely site for an extended anti-apartheid effort given the political climate at that time.

### **Connie Lester**

Professor Ivy agrees, but he convincingly demonstrates the historical factors that laid the groundwork for the Orlando protest. And the local dynamics that influence both support and opposition to the demands for divestment of pension funds from companies invested in South Africa. Historically, a number of agencies, organizations and civil rights leaders had condemned the South African government and praised those who oppose. These included the Council on African Affairs, the NAACP and Reverend Martin Luther King Junior. By the late 1970s, the anti-apartheid movement had developed a strategy beyond words. They targeted state and local government, universities and other institutions to demand investment of pension and trust funds. The event that triggered the change was the 1976 Soweto uprising. Outraged by the actions of the South African government, the movement hoped to weaken the economic viability of the apartheid state. As Ivy notes, by 1980 the United States was by far South Africa's largest trading partner and had a total direct investment of over \$2.3 billion, altering American investment in the nation would have important consequences. Orlando was not alone in experiencing the call for divestment in 1985. The topic was under consideration across the state, students and faculty at Stetson University petitioned US Senators Lawton Childs and Paula Hawkins to sponsor legislation for economic sanctions. University of Florida students staged a 40 day sleep in outside the administration building in an attempt to persuade the US Foundation Board to divest \$3 million of its Trust fund, Miami Opalocka Saint Petersburg, and Gainesville passed divestment resolutions. The Florida State legislature began debates on the issue, although no legislation was in.

### **Ben Brotemarkle**

How did all of this play out in Orlando?

### **Connie Lester**

In the summer of 1985, it seemed unlikely that Orlando would play any role in the debates roiling the country. Mayor Bill Fredericks refused to discuss the issue, observing that any kind of action dealing with social and political problems in South Africa should be left up to the federal government. Although the city claimed to be unaware of how much of the city pensions funds were invested in South Africa's Orlando Sentinel put the figure at \$22.2 million of the 100 million invested by the city. Mabel Butler, the first black woman elected to the Orlando City Council, voiced the feelings of many when she stated. We cannot say that we do not condone apartheid and yet let our money stay there. Action from activities in the Black and Hispanic communities was not long in coming. And here is where Ivy argues that local history, local strategies for addressing controversy and local means of exercising power influence the response to the anti-apartheid movement. On the Pro divestment side, a coalition of community activists, religious leaders and labor leaders mounted a campaign that drew on the strategies that were so successful in the civil rights movement. Anti-apartheid marches, petitions, appearances at City Council meetings and rallies characterized the actions of the coalition. Their efforts were met with efforts to prevent marches, the creation of commissions to study the issue and delay action, and the assertions that divestment could hurt pensioners. Finally, the city claimed that firms invested in South Africa followed the Sullivan Principles, a series of guidelines that call. For equal treatment in the workplace, many in the movement saw the principles as a positive step forward. Others condemned it

as a half measure. Companies were rated under guidelines with the highest rating making good progress. A company could be making progress while working with the racist labor system of South Africa.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

Connie did Orlando reach a resolution between the competing positions?

**Connie Lester**

To put the matter in plain language, the city argued for practicality. The Coalition viewed divestment in moral terms. At issue was the question, could a plan be created that could be both morally and financially sound? Weakening the South African government while also preserving the pension plans of 2300 full time employees and 500 retirees? And if divestment occurred, would it be the full divestment supported by the Coalition or the limited divestment offered by the city? In spring 1986, an 11 member Commission made-up of bankers, economists, finance professors and. Senators of Labor unions, the coalition and the pension funds met for three months to investigate the issues and recommend a resolution. The results of this effort were inconclusive and on May 19th, 1986, the Orlando City Council voted for a resolution that strongly condemned apartheid and the actions of the South African government as deplorable and a violation of human. Weights but supported a watered down divestment program that only affected some \$400,000 of funds, even with its limited response, Orlando became part of a larger national divestment movement that Ivy notes by the end of 1986 included 21 states, 68 cities, 10 of the nation's largest counties and 100 educational institute. U.S. investment dropped from \$2.8 billion in 1983 to 1.3 billion in 1985. In October 1986, Congress overrode a veto by President Ronald Reagan to implement a modified anti-apartheid act. Although the anti-apartheid efforts in Florida and Orlando were not as large or as successful as elsewhere in the country. Ivy concludes that the movement matters because it taught individuals to sympathize and act on the suffering of others, whether in their neighborhoods, their state, their nation, or on the other side of the globe. His words echo those of Elvies Holocaust survivor, who addressed the Florida State House of Representatives in 1987 to remember the dead is to remember the live. It means we must remember all those who need us, any victim, anywhere, his or her place is in our memory, in our hearts. Any person who suffers may count on us, the victims of apartheid in South Africa are, to us must be to us as important as the victims of anti-Semitism airing anywhere.

**Ben Brotemarkle**

One of the most important issues of the 1980s. 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 RICHES Digital Archiving project, and editor of the Florida Historical Quarterly.

This is Florida Frontiers. Before the Spanish established the first permanent European settlement in what would become the United States at Saint Augustine, the French established Fort Caroline. Holly Baker has more.

### **Holly Baker**

In 1564, René Goulaine de Laudonnière, a French Huguenot explorer, founded Fort Caroline, near present day Jacksonville and Duval County. The Fort served as a refuge for French Huguenots and were being persecuted in France for being Protestant instead of Catholic. On September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1565, 400 Spanish soldiers committed by Pedro Menendez de Aviles attacked Fort Caroline in an effort to expel the French from Florida. Nearly 150 French colonists were killed, while one Spanish soldier was lightly wounded. Doctor Christophe Boucher is an associate professor of history. With the College of Charleston and Charleston, South Carolina. I recently talked to Doctor Boucher about his article in the fall 2018 issue of the Florida Historical Quarterly titled The Greatest Assemblers in the World, Timucuas, Spaniards, and the fall of Fort Caroline.

### **Christophe Boucher**

Fort Caroline was founded in 1564 and it was the it was founded after Jean Ribeau visited the area in 1562. So, in 1562 what you had was really more of a reconnaissance. The French were trying to get a feel for the area. And in 1562, Rebel's expedition had actually navigated along the northern coast of Florida, and they had actually met a number of Timucua leaders. And in 1564, Laudonnière came back with a French contingent. Laudonnière actually made his way along the coast. He passed northern Florida, but then, after a little while, him and his men came to realize, you know, maybe the best spot would be, you know what, what they call the Mayor River, which is, you know, today the Saint John's River.

### **Holly Baker**

The Timucua initially welcomed the French colonists, but the relation soon soured between them and there caused tension by forming alliances with both Saturiwa and Timucua chief and Chief Butina, another Timucua chief and the enemy of Saturiwa. By the time that the Spanish arrived in Florida in 1565 to drive out the French colonists, the Timucua were eager to help them.

### **Christophe Boucher**

The Timucua has received him well. I mean, I think at this point they had heard of the troubles the French were causing diplomatically. And so, they provided help for the Spaniards. That was absolutely necessary and the first thing they did for them was actually not to find them. Actually, they welcomed them in the area. The leader of the village also gave the Spaniards a large dwelling where they could put their equipment and that became the core of the Spanish base of operation in the area. Native Americans also provided some important geographic information. At first, when Menendez arrived in the area, of course, the first thing he did when he arrived in Florida was to try to locate this French Fort because he knew that the clock was ticking. Native Americans here again provided some important information where they helped actually Menendez to locate the French Fort.

### **Holly Baker**

The Timucua not only told Menendez how to find Fort Caroline, but they also indicated that he and his men could reach the Fort by land using a route that the French didn't even know existed, Dr. Boucher.

### **Christophe Boucher**

Native Americans told him that there was actually a way to hit the French Fort by land and originally what Menendez wanted to do was to go buy ship and attack, you know, sailing to the Saint John River and attack the French there and possibly you know create some sort of a of a blockade but here suddenly Native Americans told him well you know there is a way to get there on land, the defenses of the French Fort at that moment were really facing the river and this trail allowed the Spanish to actually hit them from behind. And so that was another important, important element. And actually, two Native Americans guided the Spaniards to the Fort. So, you know, and the friends did not expect to see these guys coming out of nowhere. I mean, they expected to see them coming from the sea, not from the land. So that was a problem.

### **Holly Baker**

Pedro Menendez and his men marched for days through the swamps of northern Florida during a raging hurricane to reach Fort Caroline for the surprise.

### **Christophe Boucher**

The attack was so sudden and so unexpected. It was, you know, windy, rainy and the French in Fort Caroline were really diminished in terms of troops. There's an artist who was there, Jacques le Moyne, who had himself been injured. In a battle against Native Americans. So, he could not board the ships. So, you know, they were mainly women, children, a few soldiers were left but really Fort Caroline was extremely weak in terms of Garrison. So, the Spaniards pretty much managed to enter the 4th and literally catch the entire group of settlers by surprise, and the attack was very quick. Jacques le Moyne described, you know, the situation. I mean, pretty much he heard some noise. He just had time to get up and realize by then already the Spaniards were in the middle of the settlement, and it was time to run and run in the forest pretty much. There were there was a number of survivors, but most of the prisoners were killed on land by the Spaniards.

### **Holly Baker**

At the time of the assault by the Spanish, Fort, Caroline sheltered more than 200 French colonists. About 50 inhabitants survived the attack, including women and children, and a few musicians. Laudonnière, the artist Jacques Le Moyne and a few others were able to escape to ships and returned to France. The destruction of Fort Caroline brought an end to the possibility of a French Florida and ushered in an era of Spanish rule.

### **Christophe Boucher**

It has been presented. This event has been presented in the larger context of a conflict between the Spaniards and the French and in the process, we've lost sight of Native Americans. But Native Americans played an important role. And what is important too, is that the fall of Fort Caroline was also important in terms of colonial. American history because it completely redirected. The French colonial interests in the region, you know, had the French that been defeated, maybe Florida would have been an area of colonial expansion for the French. Now, after this defeat, the French like to focus much more on the

North East, but again, it shows that you know these events really redirected Colonial American history in unsuspected ways.

**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 and 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. Until then, visit us anytime at our content rich website at [myfloridahistory.org](http://myfloridahistory.org) and join the conversation on Facebook at Florida Historical Society production assistance for Florida Frontiers comes from Connie Lester and Holly Baker. The program is edited by John White. Have a great week, I'm Ben Brotemarkle.

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