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## "Then Potano": Archaeological investigations at the Richardson and White Ranch sites in northern-central Florida

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### ABSTRACT

The town of Potano, referenced in sixteenth-century and in early seventeenth-century Spanish accounts of the exploration and settlement of the Southeast, is one of the named sites associated with the Hernando de Soto *entrada* that possesses sufficient documentary and archaeological evidence that would allow for its firm identification. The Richardson site, 8AL100, has long been known as a site which has both an early seventeenth-century Spanish and a late precontact/early contact Native American component. We contend, based on the documentary and archaeological evidence, that the Richardson site is the location of the early contact and mission-period town of Potano, and that claims made concerning the White Ranch site, 8MR3538, cannot be substantiated or verified.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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The early contact town of Potano, referenced in a number of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Spanish accounts of the early contact and early mission periods, is one of the sites referenced by name as visited by Hernando de Soto in the accounts of the *entrada* (Boyer 2015c:75; Clayton et al. 1993: 66,262; 1993b:153-186). The Richardson site (8AL100) in northern peninsular Florida, has long been known as a site with both an early Spanish and Native American component, and has been speculated, based on the historical evidence, to be the site of the Potano of the Soto accounts as well as the early 1608 mission of San Buenaventura de Potano (Worth 1998a:27-28). However, archaeological evidence to make this firm identification has previously been insufficient, and claims concerning the identification of the White Ranch site (8MR3538) as Potano, were also made in the popular press in 2012.

Between 2012 and 2015, archaeological work by the lead author of this paper was performed at both the Richardson site, 8AL100, and the White Ranch Site, 8MR3538. Based on this fieldwork and a broad range of additional sources, both documentary and archaeological, we conclude the following:

- 1) The Richardson site, 8AL100, is the site of the early contact town of Potano mentioned in the accounts

of the Hernando de Soto *entrada* as well as the site of the 1608 mission of San Buenaventura de Potano.

- 2) The White Ranch site, 8MR3538, cannot be verified or substantiated as either a late precontact Native American or early contact Spanish or Native American site, strengthening our case for the identification of the Richardson site as the site of Potano.

The historical evidence concerning the contact-era town of Potano and mission San Buenaventura de Potano is presented first to provide a context for the archaeological evidence from both sites. Based on the historical evidence and the late precontact archaeological cultures discussed here, a series of archaeological criteria one would expect to be present at the site of Potano is formulated, and the archaeological evidence from both the White Ranch and Richardson sites are evaluated against these criteria. Based on this evidence, our conclusions and their implications are discussed in detail.

### Potano: the historical evidence

The town of Potano is first mentioned in accounts of the Hernando de Soto *entrada* (Clayton et al. 1993a:xxvii). Milanich and Hudson's reconstruction of the *entrada's*

route projects a landing on the southern side of Tampa Bay near the location of modern Bradenton and travel northwards around the eastern side of the bay (Milanich and Hudson 1993:88-89, 133-134). During the northward journey, the expedition crossed the “River of Cale” (Clayton et al. 1993a:260-262). North of the river, which is believed to be the modern Withlacoochee (Milanich and Hudson 1993:94-98), the expedition first entered the town of Uqueten, subject to Ocale, and thereafter came to the town of Ocale itself (Clayton et al. 1993a:260-262). The expedition remained at Ocale for two weeks, seizing corn and supplies and sending men eastward to unsuccessfully attempt to take supplies from the chiefdom of Acuera (Boyer 2010:43, 2014:42-44; Clayton et al. 1993a:269-262; Milanich and Hudson 1993:133-134). In mid-August, Soto himself, with 100 soldiers on foot and 50 on horseback, traveled north from Ocale (Clayton et al. 1993a: 66,262). The Elvas and Ranjel accounts agree that Soto came first, after a day’s travel, to the town of Itaraholata, meaning “single chief” or “small chief” in the Timucuan language (Boyer 2010:43, 2014:42-44; Clayton et al. 1993a: 66,262). At the end of the second day’s travel, the Spanish came to the town of Potano, staying a single night and then moving north (Boyer 2015c:75; Clayton et al. 1993: 66,262; 1993b:153-186). It is important to note that, in these accounts, the mention of Potano is cursory. No specific events are described as having taken place during the Spaniards’ stay at the site, and Soto and his men continued moving northwards immediately thereafter (Clayton et al. 1993a:66, 262).

During the 1564–1565 French occupation at Fort Caroline on the St. Johns River, the Potano are recorded as being at war with the confederacy led by the Timucuan chief Utina (Hulton 1977: 143-144; Laudonnière 2001: 76-77, 91; Worth 1998a:27). During this conflict, the Utina, allied with the French, defeated the Potano in battle (Hulton 1977:143-144; Laudonnière 2001:76-77, 91). The French account of the conflict suggests that this battle did not take place at the principal town of the Potano chiefdom. Utina is described as having consulted a shaman to determine the location of the Potano forces, and as being uncertain of their location (Hulton 1977:143-144; Laudonnière 2001:76-77, 91). This would suggest that the conflict took place somewhere besides the principal town of the chiefdom, whose location was likely well known to the Utina and the other Timucua.

Subsequent to the destruction of the French settlement at Fort Caroline and the founding of the Spanish colony of St. Augustine in 1565, further conflicts between the Potano and the Spaniards occurred. In 1567, Pedro de Andrade led a raid on the Potano

among others, as an ally of Utina, much as the French had done two years earlier (Menendez 1584). The Potano attacked and killed him and many of his men on their return journey to St. Augustine (Menendez 1584). In 1584, in retaliation for raids by the Potano against the Spaniards, a force of Spanish soldiers under Gutierre de Miranda was dispatched to the interior to burn the principal town of the Potano chiefdom, recorded as having been the same visited by Hernando de Soto in 1539 (Worth 1998a:27-28). The town was burned to the ground, its cornfields destroyed, and twenty Potano Indians were killed in what was referred to as a “slaughter” (Worth 1998a:27-28). After this raid, the Potano abandoned the site and retreated to the area northwest of Gainesville in modern central Alachua County (Worth 1998a:27-28, 59-61).

In 1601, the new chief of the Potano went to St. Augustine to render obedience to the Spanish governor and requested permission to re-occupy the abandoned site of the original principal town of the Potano chiefdom. Upon receiving such permission, the town was rebuilt and reoccupied by the Potano. In 1607 or early 1608, the Spanish mission of San Buenaventura de Potano was founded in the same town, with an initial recorded population of 200 people (Worth 1998a:27-28, 59-61), though it is not clear from the record whether this number represents the total population, the number of able warriors, or some other measure. This mission seems to have existed for barely a decade or less prior to its permanent abandonment, and appears to have been the same town referred to as “Apalo” in the 1616 Fray Luís Geronimo de Oré visitation (Worth 1998a:57-61).

### ***Archaeological characteristics of the site of potano***

The historical evidence provides baseline data, which can be supplemented with what is known of the archaeology of the late precontact and early contact cultures of northern Florida and of early contact sites throughout the Southeast, particularly those associated with the Soto entrada. These data provide a series of five archaeological criteria that a modern observer should expect to be present at the site of Potano.

Criterion 1: The site should be located approximately two day’s travel north of the site of Ocale by the standards of the sixteenth century, estimated at between 25–40 miles. This criterion is based on the Elvas and Ranjel accounts of Soto’s expedition (Clayton et al. 1993a:66, 262; Milanich and Hudson 1993:133-167), describing the Spaniards reaching Potano after two days’ travel northwards from Ocale.

Criterion 2: The site should be large enough to represent a chiefdom's principal town with other, smaller contemporaneous sites nearby. Ethnohistoric accounts of the Timucuan cultures of northern Florida and southern Georgia make it clear that the Timucua were chiefdom societies, with a larger principal settlement and its leaders governing smaller satellite communities throughout that chiefdom's territory (Milanich 1996:9-37; Worth 1998a:10-18). This settlement pattern has been observed at other places within Timucuan territory (Boyer 2010:281-287, 2014; Johnson 1991:47-54; Worth 1998a:10-18).

Criterion 3: The site should be an Alachua culture site with predominantly Alachua culture artifacts present. The Alachua culture is the late precontact archaeological culture known to be associated with the historic Potano. Alachua ceramics include Alachua Cob-Marked, Prairie Cord-Marked, Alachua Net-Impressed, and Lochloosa Punctated ceramics, as well as plain sand-tempered wares. Lithics include Pinellas Points, grinding stones and pestles, and larger blades (Milanich 1971, 1994:333-348; Rolland 2012). The presence of cob-marked ceramics corresponds with historical records describing the use of maize by the Timucua (Milanich 1996; Worth 1998a:27-28).

Criterion 4: The site should contain a limited number of Spanish artifacts dating to the early sixteenth century. The known European interactions with the Potano during the sixteenth century are not likely to have left large quantities of artifacts present at the site of Potano. During the 1539 entrada, while Hernando de Soto himself was present at Potano, he was only there for a single night and only a part of his army was with him (Clayton et al. 1993a: 66, 262); the mention of Potano in the accounts of the expedition is cursory. The conflict between the Potano and Utina and the French in 1564-1565 does not appear to have taken place at the principal town of the Potano chiefdom, and the nature of this interaction is such that it is unlikely any European artifacts were exchanged to the Potano during its course. The same is true of the 1567 raid by Pedro de Andrade and the 1584 raid by Gutierre de Miranda on the principal town of the Potano, which the Spanish accounts suggest were brief, very destructive raids that were followed by a quick retreat by both the Potano and the Spanish from the site. Thus, it is likely that, at best, sixteenth-century European artifacts at the site of Potano would be those lost or discarded during a single night's stay by some of the men of Soto's expedition, or possibly Spanish military hardware resulting from the 1567 and 1584 raids.

Criterion 5: As compared to the number of sixteenth-century Spanish artifacts, the site should contain a larger

number of Spanish artifacts dating to the early seventeenth century, as well as structural features confirming the presence of a Spanish mission at the site. The 1608 mission of San Buenaventura de Potano was placed in the site re-settled by the Potano in 1601, which historical records make clear was the same site visited by Hernando de Soto in 1539 and destroyed by Gutierre de Miranda in 1584 (Worth 1998a:27-28, 59-61). Accordingly, at the site of Potano, one would expect to find both seventeenth-century European artifacts and features associated with Spanish mission sites. These would include, minimally, a mission church structure with associated human remains, a convento or friary, and a cocina for food preparation (Hoshower and Milanich 1993:217-227; Johnson 1993:145-158; Larsen 1993:322-356; Shapiro and Vernon 1992:177-205; Thomas 1993:8-12; Weisman 1992:58-64).

Taking these five criteria into account, let us now consider them against the actual archaeological evidence present at the Richardson Site.

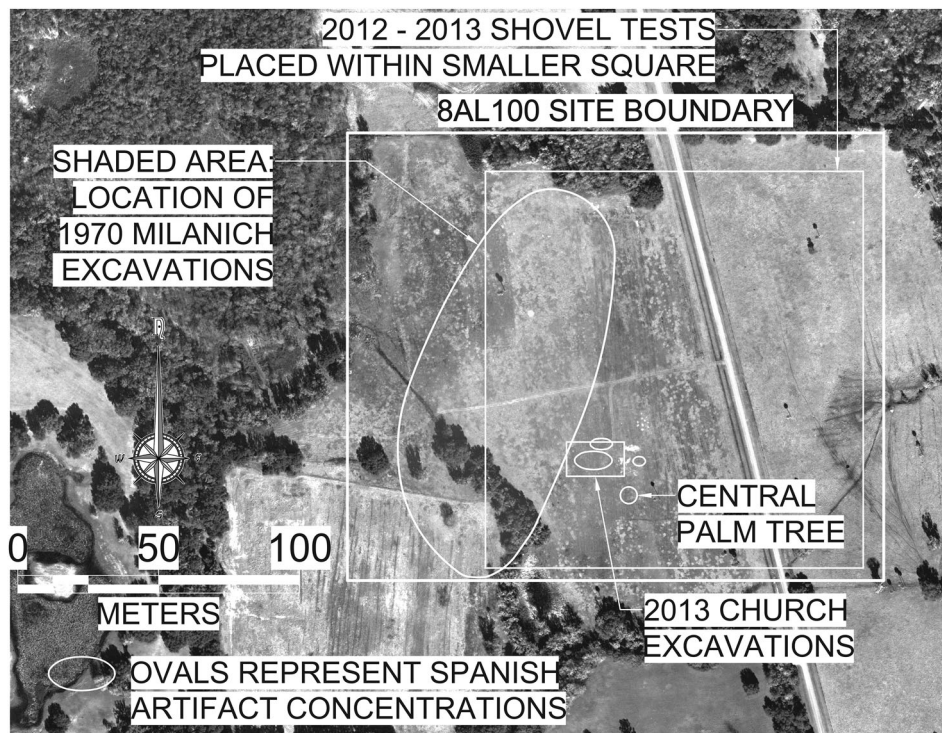
### *The Richardson Site*

The Richardson Site is located in northern central Florida, on the western side of Orange Lake in southernmost Alachua County near Evinston, Florida (Figure 1). The site is located on a series of ridges, most of which have been cleared for planting crops or the pasturage of cattle. Soils present at the Richardson site are predominantly Arredondo and Kanapaha soils. The site has a permanent spring-fed pond on its northern side, and a seasonal wetland within it (see Figure 1). Flora and fauna are typical of a Florida upland environment and include both terrestrial and aquatic species. The site will here be considered against the five archaeological criteria for the site of Potano detailed previously, with the information gathered from the archaeological, documentary, and geophysical data from the site reviewed against each criterion.

### *Criterion 1: the distance of the site from the site of Ocale*

The site of Soto's Ocale is not known with absolute certainty. However, it is currently agreed that the site of Ocale must have been located on the northern side of the "River of Cale," the Withlacoochee River, in what is now southwestern Marion or northwestern Sumter County (Boyer 2010:44; Clayton et al. 1993a:260-262; Milanich and Hudson 1993:94-98). A site cluster in this area contains sites which are strong candidates for the towns of Ocale and Uqueten referred to in the Ranjel account (Boyer 2013, 2017; Clayton et al. 1993a:260-262) (Figure 2).

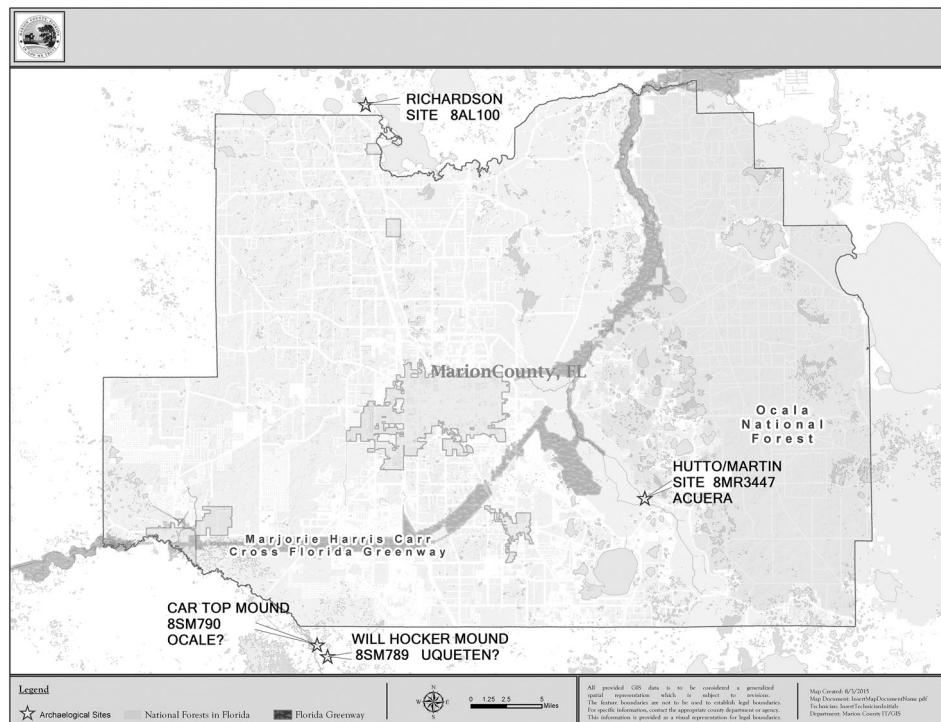




**Figure 1.** 8AL100, Richardson Site, aerial view

It is estimated that, in the sixteenth century, the Soto entrada would have made a distance of some 21–29 km (13–18 mi) daily based on current knowledge, depending on the conditions of the area being traveled. This would place the site of Potano

between 42–58 km (26–36 mi) north of the site of Ocale, since Potano was reached by Soto and the 150 men traveling with him on the second day's travel north from Ocale (Clayton et al. 1993a:66, 262).



**Figure 2.** Early contact/mission sites described in the text.

The Richardson site falls within this estimated distance from the area of the site of Ocale (see Figure 2). Furthermore, the Ruth Smith (8CI200) and Tatham Mound (8CI203) sites, both known to have a sixteenth-century component believed to be associated with the Soto expedition (Hutchinson 2006; Milanich and Hudson 1993:80-89; Mitchem and Leader 1988:41-48), are nearly due south of the presumed site of Ocale, and there is a cluster of sites with an Alachua component roughly north of this area, west of modern Ocala. One such site, the Winter Camp site (8MR2739), has returned a calibrated set of radiocarbon dates between A.D. 1450–1640, and was likely to have been occupied during the time of the Soto entrada (Boyer 2011). Based on known sites within this region, the Richardson site is a very good fit for the location of Soto's Potano, based on the patterning of late precontact and early contact sites to the north and south of Richardson proper.

#### ***Criterion 2: the size of the site and its relationship to nearby sites***

The Richardson site covers an area estimated to be between 25–30 acres, with dense concentrations of artifacts throughout that area, as well as features consistent with a large site having numerous Native American and other structures present (Boyer 2015c:86; Milanich 1971:25-27; 1972:38-49). These include Alachua culture ceramics and lithics, postmolds consistent with the patterns of structures, firepits, and other evidence of the presence of a substantial Alachua culture occupation at the site.

Fieldwork performed at the site in 2012-2013, 2015 and 2016, as well as review of the collections and field notes from both John Goggin's work at the site in the 1950s and Milanich's work at the site under Fairbanks in 1970, has demonstrated that the Richardson site extends east from the central ridge investigated by Milanich in 1970 and west through the area planted in orange grove in the 1950s (see Figure 1). Both of these areas have substantial concentrations of Alachua culture ceramics and evidence of features indicating the site extended throughout these places as well as the central ridge (Milanich 1971 field notes, Florida Museum of Natural History)

Furthermore, the Richardson site is part of a larger cluster of sites surrounding Orange Lake and areas nearby (Figure 3). These sites include numerous Alachua culture sites, including village sites (8MR3708, the High Ground site, and 8MR3667, the Swoap's Cache site, among others); mound sites (the Richardson Mound, 8MR3720, and the Regatta Mound, 8MR3714) (Boyer 2015a:3-21); and special-use sites (Florida Master Site File records). This is consistent with the

Richardson site representing a larger principal town site, with a cluster of satellite villages nearby, as would be expected of the site of the town of Potano.

#### ***Criterion 3: the presence of Alachua culture artifacts***

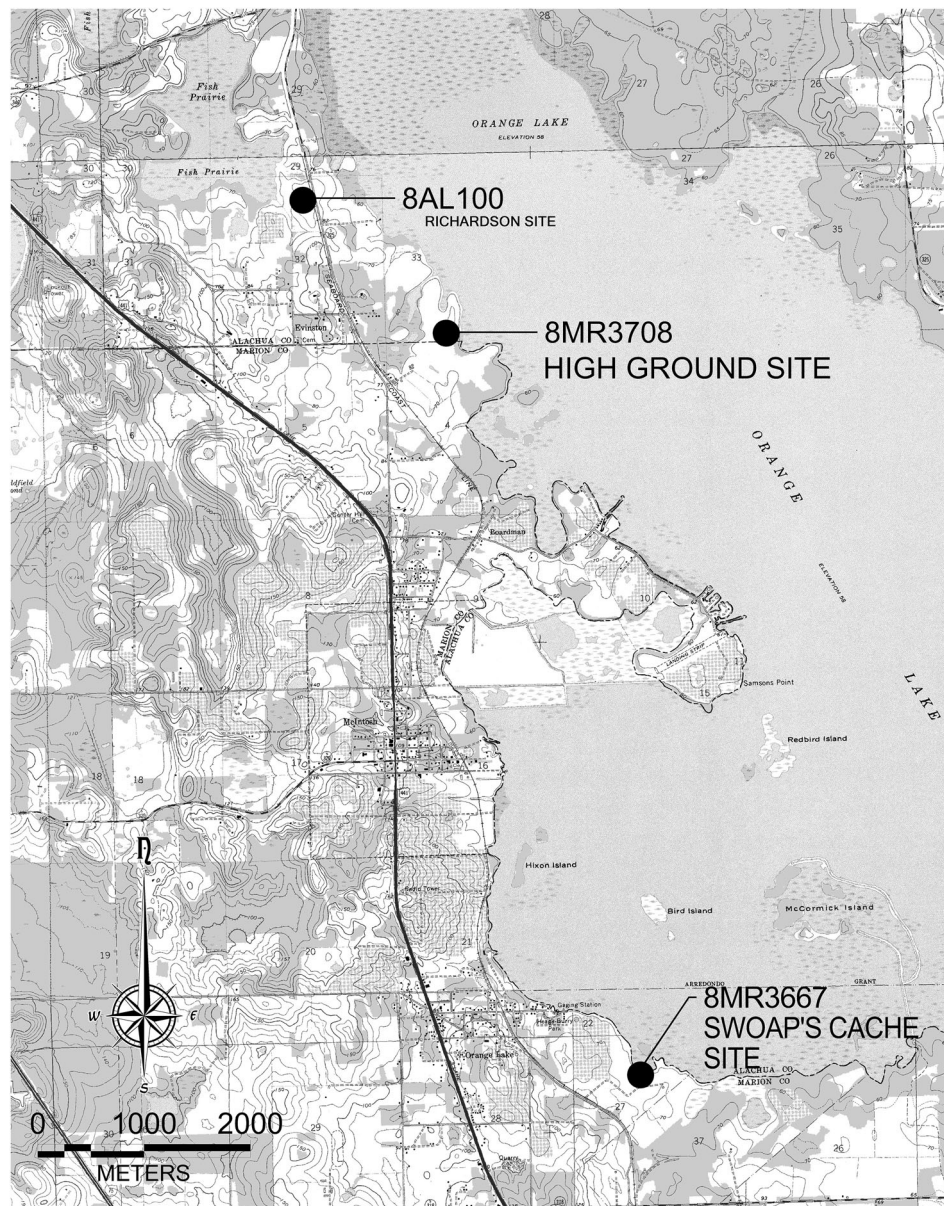
It is currently agreed that the Timucuan culture of Potano recorded in historical documents from the early contact and mission eras corresponds with the Alachua archaeological culture in that region (Milanich 1994:333-348; Worth 1998a:27-28). Accordingly, the artifacts present at the site of Potano, as previously noted, should include numerous artifacts associated with the Alachua culture.

The Richardson site has long been known as a type site for the Alachua culture (Boyer 2015c:75; Milanich 1971, 1972:38-49; Worth 1998a:27-28). During work by John Goggin at the site in 1952, Jerald Milanich in 1970, and Willet Boyer between 2012 and 2016, thousands of Alachua culture ceramics, including cob-marked, cord-marked, net-impressed, punctated and plain ceramics, were recovered from the site (Boyer 2015c:88; N.D.; John Goggin, University of Florida Department of Anthropology, Florida Museum of Natural History unpublished field notes, 1952; Milanich 1971, 1972:38-49). Alachua culture lithics, including Pinellas points, are also common throughout the site. Indeed, during Boyer's excavations in 2013, Pinellas points constituted more than 30% of the classifiable lithic tools recovered from the excavations (Boyer 2015c:88). Further testing and excavations at the Richardson site in 2015 and 2016 confirmed the presence of Alachua culture ceramics and lithics at the central ridge of the site and in the areas to the east and south of it. Thus, there is no question that the Richardson site is an Alachua culture site covering a large spatial area, with related Alachua culture sites nearby.

#### ***Criterion 4: sixteenth-century Spanish artifacts***

As noted in the initial discussion of the archaeological criteria one would expect to be present at the site of Soto's Potano, Soto was only present at Potano for a single night, with only a portion of his army present – 150 men, 50 on horseback and 100 on foot. In both the Ranjel and the Elvas accounts of the entrada, the mention of Potano is cursory – “then Potano” (Clayton et al. 1993a:66, 262). The Spaniards spent only a single night at the site, with only a portion of the force traveling with Soto present, and then moved on quickly. This suggests that the number of artifacts present at the site of Soto's Potano should be extremely limited, if indeed any were present at all. Thus, the likely sixteenth-century assemblage from the site of Soto's Potano would be very small and consist of a very





**Figure 3.** Richardson Site, 8AL100, and contemporaneous sites in vicinity.

few European artifacts left behind by men traveling quickly through the area – possibly broken ceramics, armor or tack fragments, and so forth.

The assemblage from the Richardson site does have an extremely limited number of sixteenth-century European artifacts present, both from Boyer's 2012–2016 work at the site and in the materials collected by Goggin and Milanich from the site in 1952 and 1970, respectively. In all three excavations, a total of 14 sherds of early-style olive jar have been recovered from the Richardson site (Boyer 2015c:89; FLMNH collection records). This limited number of sherds is consistent with the breakage of one or perhaps two vessels at the site. In addition, Boyer's testing at the site in 2012–2013 recovered fragments of armor, horse tack, and a spur attachment similar to

those found at other early sixteenth-century sites (Boyer 2015c:80, 89; Deagan 2002:142) (Figure 4).

Thus, the assemblage from the Richardson site is consistent with what should be expected at the site of Soto's Potano. The limited quantity of sixteenth-century materials recovered during multiple investigations at the site over time is precisely what should be expected of a stay by Soto and a part of the *entrada* at the site for a single night and limited interactions with Europeans at the site thereafter.

#### **Criterion 5: seventeenth-century Spanish artifacts and features**

As noted in the initial discussion, after the abandonment of the original site of Potano following the



**Figure 4.** Iron artifacts recovered at 8AL100, 2013 testing Left to right: forged iron nails ( $n = 3$ ); mail armor fragments ( $n = 2$ ); hand-wrought iron plate; forged iron chisel; spur attachment fragment, ca. 1500–1550 (Deagan 2002:142).

Miranda raid of 1584, the site was abandoned until resettled by the Potano in 1601, and the subsequent founding of San Buenaventura de Potano in the same location in 1608 (Worth 1998a:59-61). This mission was present at the site of Potano for at least five years, and possibly nearer ten, before it was abandoned by both the Potano and the Spaniards (Worth 1998a:27-28, 59-61). San Buenaventura de Potano was a *doctrina*, with a resident friar, and would be expected to have both a mission church and residence for the friar, as well as the features associated with a Native American principal town. The initial population of the mission in 1608 is reported to have been 200 (Worth 1998a:59-61).

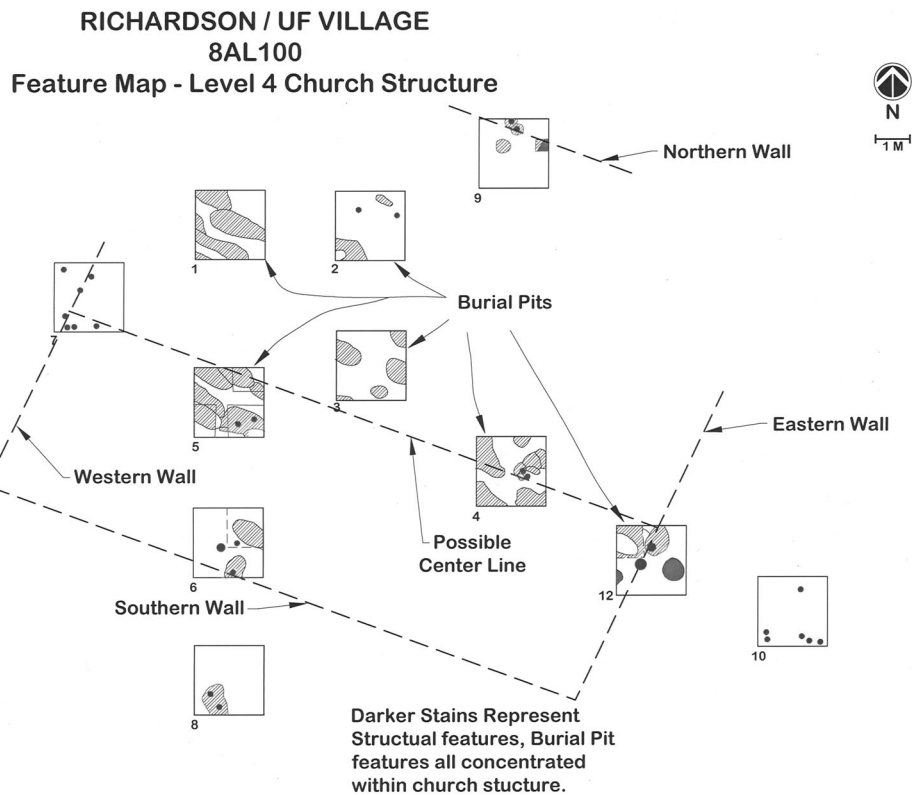
At the Richardson site, a rectangular structure was found in Boyer's 2013 excavations which is clearly a mission church structure (Boyer 2015c:81). This structure's long axis was oriented northwest to southeast and in direct association with human remains inside its walls (Figure 5). Based on the excavated portion of the mission church, the estimated burial population within this structure is 174 persons (Boyer 2015b, 2015c:81). The church structure at the Richardson site is consistent with and similar to such structures reported at seventeenth-century Spanish mission churches in other locations in Spanish Florida (Hos- hower and Milanich 1993:217-227; Johnson 1993:145-158; Larsen 1993:322-356; Shapiro and Vernon

1992:177-205; Thomas 1993:8-12). The excavation units dug during the 2013 excavations produced middle-style olive jar, Sevilla Blue on Blue, Columbia Plain, and other early varieties of majolicas, as well as heat-altered beads and orange micaceous ware, together with forged iron nails – including two found in situ with the posts forming a part of the structure. Numerous Alachua tradition materials were also recovered, as previously noted.

In addition, excavations at Richardson in 2015 uncovered an area with at least two structures with squared postmolds, in direct association with pit features containing “greasy,” dense soil with numerous animal bone fragments, including deer, alligator and pig (*Sus scrofa*). The structures exposed in 2015 appear to represent portions of the *cocina* and the *convento*, both typical mission features (Marrinan 1993:244-294). As with previous excavations, these units produced numerous seventeenth-century Spanish and Alachua tradition artifacts in direct association with the features (Figures 6–7), including Sevilla Blue on Blue majolica dating to the early seventeenth century.

Previous excavations by John Goggin in 1952, and by Jerald Milanich in 1970, at the Richardson site both recovered numerous seventeenth-century European materials as well (Florida Museum of Natural History collection records; Milanich 1971:25-27, 1972:38-49; Worth 1998a:27-28). The assemblage recovered from





**Figure 5.** Plan view, 2013 church excavations, Richardson site, 8AL100. From Boyer 2015c:81

the Richardson site reveals a substantial seventeenth-century Spanish component associated with a mission located at the site. This is precisely what would be expected of the site of de Soto's Potano, which had the seventeenth-century mission of San Buenaventura built in the same location. Furthermore, the seventeenth-century materials at the site all date to the early part of that period, which is also what would be expected of a mission site founded in 1608 which was present for a decade or less (Worth 1998a:27-28).

#### **White Ranch: results of fieldwork and artifact analysis**

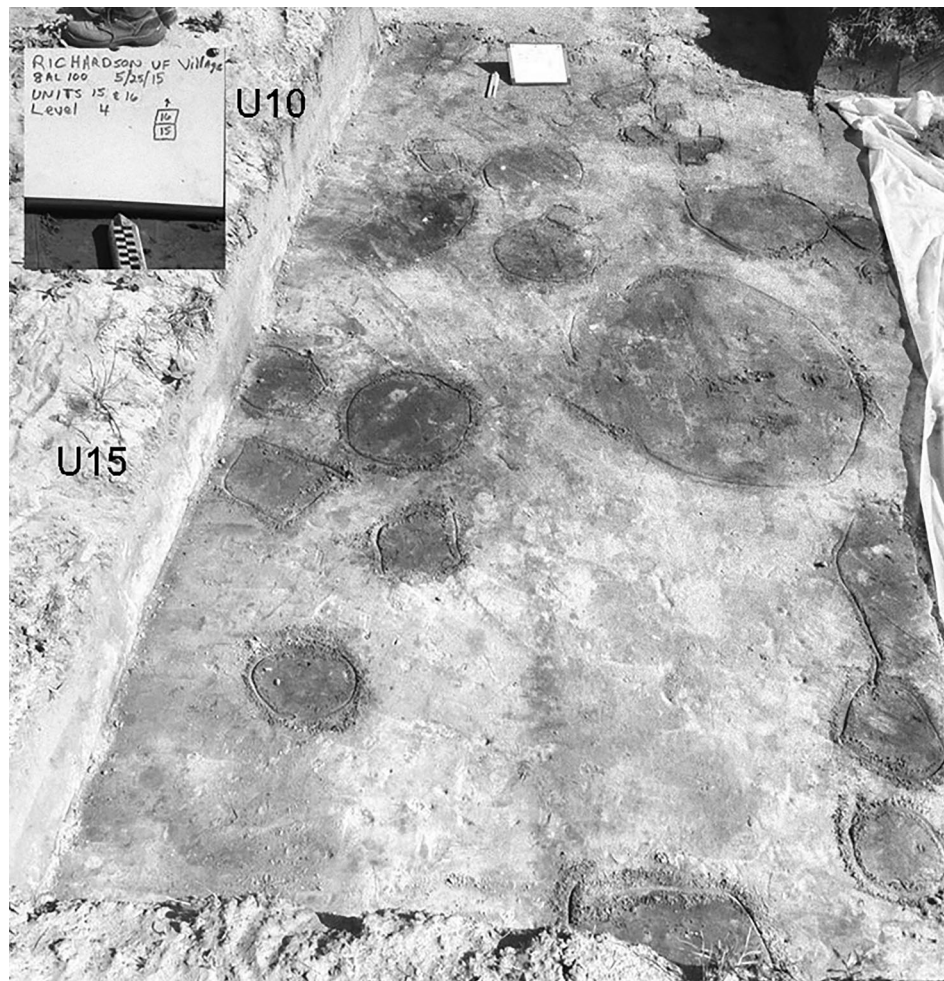
The White Ranch site is located between Black Sink Prairie and Gooski Prairie, in northern Marion County (see Figure 1). The property on which the site was reported is some five miles east of Sparr, Florida. The land on which the site was reported is predominantly wetlands with adjacent planted pine and scrub. Soils present at the White Ranch site are mostly Lynne, Pomona, and ponded Pompano soils typical of a wetland environment (USDA Soils Survey). The western side of the site is bounded by Gooski Lake, grading into a mosaic of wetland and scrub. Flora and fauna are typical of a wet "prairie" environment.

Concerning criterion 1, noted previously, the White Ranch site could potentially fit within the distance from the sites of Ocale and Itaraholata as described in the Soto expedition accounts (Clayton et al. 1993a:66, 262; Milanich and Hudson 1993:133-167). However, the physical environment is not what would be expected of an early contact town making use of maize agriculture, and no later precontact sites have been reported from anywhere in the vicinity (Florida Master Site File records).

The remaining criteria for the identification of Potano rely on archaeological results from the sites in question. Accordingly, the methodology and results of fieldwork at the White Ranch site will now be discussed. As will be shown below, extensive testing throughout the areas previously reported to have an early contact and mission-era Native American and Spanish components at the site was unable to verify or substantiate the claims concerning White Ranch.

#### **2015 archaeological survey and test excavations, White Ranch**

Fieldwork was performed at the White Ranch site by Boyer from August to October 2015. Marrinan and Mitchem were both present at different times during the fieldwork. A datum was established at the site in



**Figure 6.** Units 15 and 16, structural and pit features, 2015 excavations, Richardson site, 8AL100.

the vicinity of the GPS points provided by F.A. White in materials filed with the Florida Master Site File, and 50 cm x 50 cm x 100 cm tests were dug at the site, first using a grid of 10 m intervals, and then expanding outward with judgmental shovel tests in a stratified random sample throughout the property. The material from each unit was screened through  $\frac{1}{4}$ " mesh to recover all archaeological material present in each. Ultimately, 102 shovel tests were dug throughout the areas claimed to have late precontact, contact-era, and mission-era European and Native American materials present. In addition, the property was subjected to pedestrian survey for surface collection. Throughout these areas, no European or late precontact Native American artifacts or features were present at any location tested at 8MR3538. Furthermore, review of the Florida Master Site File as well as interviews with local informants revealed that no late precontact or early-contact Native American or European occupations exist in any location within a seven-mile radius of the White Ranch site (Vincent Birdsong, Florida Master Site File, e-mail

communications 2015, 2016; Florida Master Site File records). In other words, the White Ranch site lacks any evidence consistent with the presence of a principal town of the Timucuan cultures of this region, and also lacks any archaeological evidence consistent with the satellite communities and specialized areas of use one would expect to be present near a principal town site.

Archaeological testing of the White Ranch site in 2015 recovered no Alachua culture materials. No Native American ceramics of any kind, from any archaeological culture in Florida, were found at the site. Lithics were found to be present at the site in limited locations, primarily debitage consisting of chert flakes and fragments.

In certain locations, tools and blades diagnostic of Florida's Middle Archaic period were recovered from the White Ranch site (Purdy 1981). In two of the units near the watercourse bisecting the site, two Archaic Stemmed Points, including one which had been re-worked as a knife or cutting tool, were found. To the west, in another test, a broken portion of another Archaic Stemmed point was recovered, and, in two





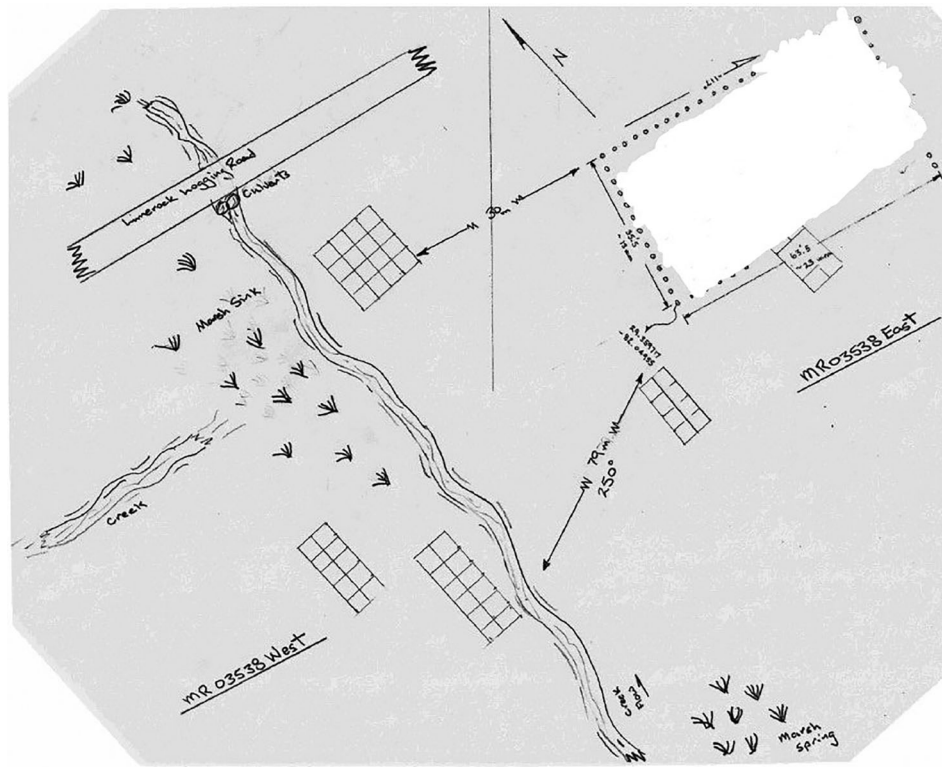
**Figure 7.** Units 14 and 17, east of Units 15 and 16, 2015 excavations, Richardson site, 8AL100, showing structural and pit features. The location of a previous shovel test within the archaeological features is noted.

locations, dense concentrations of nondecortication “finishing” flakes, many of thermally altered chert, were found. While none of these materials were found in any abundance, their presence suggests a small Middle Archaic occupation at 8MR3538, which is consistent with the environmental and geophysical conditions present in that area. However, nothing suggesting a later Alachua culture occupation was anywhere on the site.

Boyer’s work at the White Ranch site in 2015 recovered no Spanish artifacts in any of the areas tested. As will be discussed, there are numerous difficulties with the materials reported by White to have been found at the site previously. However, even if one assumes for the sake of argument that the materials reported by White were, in fact, recovered from the site, the sheer number and variety of artifacts reported by White simply are not at all consistent with the sixteenth-century assemblage that would be expected at the site of Soto’s Potano, and are, indeed, not consistent with any of the Soto-era sites reported throughout the greater Southeast (Boyer 2016).

Boyer’s investigations at the White Ranch site in 2015 placed shovel tests in a 10 m grid interval in the precise location White had previously reported, in multiple sources, as having found a “rectangular structure” (Figure 8) (White 2014:23, 27). No structural features of the kind previously reported were found in any area. A part of the claims concerning the presence of a “mission church” at the White Ranch site was based on a GPR survey performed in the area of the reported structure by Richard Estabrook of the Florida Public Archaeology Network. The original GPR survey data was provided by the Florida Public Archaeology Network to Boyer, and photographs taken of the GPR survey grids matched with vegetation and surface features at the White Ranch site in 2015 to confirm testing was being performed in the same locations as the original GPR survey. No features were found in any of the tests. In this area and elsewhere at the White Ranch site, a spodic horizon was typically encountered between 75–85 cmbs, indicating much of the site had been routinely underwater. It seems likely that this spodic horizon is the source of the GPR readings previously





**Figure 8.** "White Ranch Site", 8MR3538, as recorded in FMSF records. Locations of surface features noted; area of GPR grid with "church structure" shaded. From FMSF records.

reported (Mokma et al 1990:936-937; Doolittle et al 2005:181), as there was no sign in any location at the White Ranch site of postmolds, burial pits, firepit features, or other features routinely found at mission sites throughout Florida and elsewhere (McEwan 1993; Milanich 1995, 1999; Worth 1998a, 1998b).

Based purely on the archaeological evidence recovered from both the White Ranch and Richardson sites during Boyer's work at each, as well as previous excavations at the Richardson site, it is clear that a comparison of the evidence against the archaeological criteria for the site of Potano reveals Richardson to be the most likely candidate for the location of this important Native American community. Indeed, archaeological fieldwork by Boyer at White Ranch yielded no evidence of any late precontact, early contact, or mission-era components, whether Native or European.

#### **Artifacts reported from White Ranch**

The White Ranch site was initially reported to have numerous sixteenth-century European artifacts present, including crossbow bolt heads, beads, coins, and the jaw of a pig. As discussed elsewhere (Boyer 2016), there are a number of difficulties and issues with the types of artifacts reported from the site, as well as their condition. However, simply considering the materials reported as

coming from the White Ranch site on their face, the initial problem with the reports is the sheer quantity, variety, and number of sixteenth-century European artifacts reported from the site. As noted in the initial discussion of the archaeological criteria one would expect to be present at the site of Soto's Potano, Soto was only present at Potano for a single night, with only a portion of his army present – 150 men, 50 on horseback and 100 on foot. The assemblage of artifacts reportedly recovered from the White site are simply not consistent with the sixteenth-century assemblage that would be expected at the site of Soto's Potano, and are, indeed, not consistent with any of the Soto-era sites reported throughout the greater Southeast (Boyer 2016).

#### **Beads**

The beads purportedly recovered from the White Ranch site are especially problematic. Two of the present authors (Smith and Marrinan) were allowed to examine a bag of glass beads reportedly from the site, and their impressions were that the supposed mission-period beads appeared to be very recent. The earlier bead types looked authentic, but most were of varieties previously unknown from sites in the Southeast. Although we cannot rule out the possibility archaeologists will recover additional types and varieties from archaeological sites, the past half-

century has witnessed a great deal of research on early glass beads from sites in the southeastern U. S. and the Caribbean, and archaeologists are quite familiar with the specific bead varieties that are typically found on sites of the early contact period (Deagan 1987:156-171; Hutchinson 2006:38-61; Mitchem 1993; Mitchem and Leader 1988; Smith and Good 1982). Indeed, one of these two researchers coauthored a major reference work on glass beads from early Spanish contact sites in the New World (Smith and Good 1982). The beads examined by Smith and Marrinan were mostly varieties unknown to them. There was also no provenience information whatsoever, as the beads were presented for inspection all loose in the bag. To our knowledge, there are no photographs of any of the glass beads in situ.

The purported mission-period beads provided one of the clearest examples of problems with the artifacts from the site. Shortly after the first newspaper article appeared online, with photographs of some of the chevron beads, it was shared with members of an online forum of bead collectors (BeadCollector.net). Several of them immediately observed that the chevron beads appeared similar in style of manufacture to those produced in India since the 1990s. The chevrons appearing in the newspaper accounts purportedly found at the White Ranch site were six-layer examples made by what is known as the hot-strip method, which builds the bead by applying strips of molten glass to the exterior of each successive layer in an effort to imitate the star pattern evident on chevron beads. In contrast, Venetian-made chevrons were always produced by fitting each layer of glass into star-shaped molds, after which they were drawn into canes and cut into beads (Deagan 1987:164-165; Kidd 1979:14). Some Indian artisans began trying to find a way to replicate modern Venetian chevron beads in the mid-1980s but were not successful until the 1990s (Picard and Picard 1993:47).

### **Archaeological conclusions: what we found (and why it matters)**

Taking the totality of the historical evidence concerning the Potano chiefdom, and all of the archaeological, documentary, and environmental evidence from the Richardson site and the White Ranch site we contend that such evidence clearly supports the following conclusions:

- 1) Richardson site fulfills all the archaeological criteria that should be expected for the site of Soto's Potano of 1539 and Mission San Buenaventura de Potano of 1608.
- 2) Contrary to claims made in the popular press and elsewhere concerning an early contact and

mission-era component at the White Ranch site, 8MR3538, field research by Boyer (Boyer 2016) at White Ranch has found no evidence to sustain such claims. Moreover, Spanish material culture offered as evidence by proponents of the White site are problematic on numerous grounds.

This being the case, it is important to understand the implications for early contact studies both in the Florida and in the greater Southeast. The European explorers of North America encountered the late Mississippian societies of the region, which cannot and should not be considered piecemeal as individual towns, even when named as such in the accounts of the *entrada*. Rather, such societies were part of larger chiefdoms comprised of multicomunity political units under differing levels of social hierarchy, interacting with other communities within such polities and with other chiefdoms throughout the Mississippian sphere and beyond. In the case of the Timucuan chiefdoms of the early contact and mission period in Florida, a principal town site such as Potano was a part of a larger cultural network of communities within a social hierarchy, and those chiefdoms in turn were a part of the larger network of Native American societies throughout the Southeast and the Americas. Such a site would have been a place where Native Americans and Europeans made choices within their own cultural frameworks that seemed good to them, and the material record of such a site would reflect those choices.

Through the firm identification of the Richardson site as the site of de Soto's Potano and the site of the later mission of San Buenaventura de Potano, modern researchers have the opportunity to understand the ways in which the Potano chiefdom responded to the effects of European exploration and colonization on a large, multisite scale. As discussed here, the Richardson site is a part of a larger site cluster which appears to represent the remains of a principal town site surrounded by satellite communities, ritual sites, and other special use sites (Boyer 2015a, 2015c). These sites provide a unique opportunity to study the ways in which the culture of the Potano in this area changed over the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Through understanding the ways in which the principal town of Potano changed during this period, as well as the communities with which it was associated, the impacts of disease, warfare, European trade and interaction and demographic change on the people of Potano may be more deeply understood.

Furthermore, by firmly identifying one of the sites encountered by Soto on this early part of the *entrada*, discovering additional sites that may be associated

with specific named communities in the accounts might prove clearer. The Governor Martin site in Tallahassee has been firmly identified as the site of Anhaica, Soto's winter encampment within the Apalachee chiefdom in 1539-1540. Through the firm identification of the site of Potano, Soto's route on the landscape in this region becomes clearer and the potential identification of additional sites from the records of the expedition more possible.

The importance of this type of identification is critical for anthropological historical archaeology. As with the relationship of the principal town of Potano to its satellite communities within a single chiefdom, so does identification of other named sites along Soto's route allow for greater and deeper understanding of the impacts of the *entrada* and other European colonial encounters on Native American cultures throughout Florida and elsewhere. As historical archaeologists, we have hopefully moved well beyond the point where discovery of these sites is important only because of their association with the expedition; such a viewpoint abridges the agency of the Native peoples of the Southeast and the complexity of the human relationships within each society and between differing groups. Rather, identification of such sites is important because, by foregrounding the experience and agency of Native Americans before, during and after the *entrada*, historical records combined with archaeological evidence will provide an expanded understanding of the differing responses of Native American societies to the stresses of European encounters in the early contact and early colonial periods.

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**Data Availability Statement.** The collections gathered by the lead author from the Richardson site and the Orange Lake survey, with their associated field notes

and data, are currently curated at the Marion County Museum of History and Archaeology and the Silver River Museum in Marion County, Florida. The collections and field notes gathered by John Goggin in 1952 and Charles Fairbanks and Jerald Milanich in 1970 at the Richardson site are curated at the Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville, Florida.

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