



Now in its sixth iteration, this conference series began in 2012 and led to the formation of the Aucilla Research Institute (ARI) in Monticello, Florida. In the spring of 2012, a group of scientists and educators recognized the immense public interest in local history and heritage. They also had a corps of volunteers willing to share these concepts with the public. The First Floridians Conference was conceived and well-received through this combination of resources. After the event, organizers, presenters, and volunteers reviewed its success. Someone commented, “Scholars

coming here because of the research potential need a facility and equipment to support their work.” That was the impetus for forming the Aucilla Research Institute, now a 501c3 nonprofit organization. ARI was established “to attract and promote original research in the earth sciences and the natural and cultural history of the Big Bend area of Florida, and to act as a center for innovative thinking and activity about these disciplines.” The second First Floridians First Americans Conference in 2015 drew speakers from research institutions across the country. They included Dr. Michael Waters, Center for the Study of the First Americans at Texas A&M University; Dr. Dennis Stanford, Smithsonian Institution; Dr. Vance Holliday,

University of Arizona; Dr. Ervin Garrison, University of Georgia; Dr. Chris Moore, University of South Carolina; and Dr. Jessi Halligan, Florida State University. ARI's Spanish Missions and the Borderlands Conference in October 2017 focused on current mission-era research in North America. Featured speakers included Dr. Rochelle Marrinan, Florida State University; Dr. Eliot Blair, University of Alabama; Dr. Keith Ashley, University of North Florida; Dr. Mariah D. Wade, University of Texas; Dr. John Worth, University of West Florida; Dr. Willet Boyer, Aucilla Research Institute; and Dr. George Broadwell, University of Florida. A conference highlight was the attendance of members of the Apalachee native tribe of the Talimali Band of Louisiana, the

descendants of Florida's original Native American culture here in the Big Bend area of the state. The fourth conference in 2019 was titled Old Stories and New Discoveries. Speakers contrasted perspectives about early research efforts vis-a-vis modern approaches. Within any regional population, residents cannot fully understand where they are going unless they understand how the traditions and approaches began. Learning about the methods and results of gaining such a perspective was interesting and informative. With the fifth conference, ARI broadened its horizons, focusing on Cultural Heritage, Natural Resources, and Land Stewardship—The Significance of Apalachee, Chesapeake, and Galveston

Bays. These bays are far enough apart geographically to have had dissimilar annual climate cycles and biota, but possibly similar coping mechanisms. Their geological histories also differ, which allowed regional adaptations. The Pleistocene coastline of 21,000 years ago is far offshore from today's coastline, which occupies vast bays and estuary systems with inland waterways. Within these parameters, an understanding of human adaptation and technological development over time was explored and compared through geology, paleobotany, paleontology, archaeology, technology, and past and future conservation efforts. ARI is delighted by the public interest in its objectives, planning, educational outreach,

and research. Many have supported the conference series with volunteer work, equipment, and money. Through the years, conference attendees have been eager to learn about the scientific discoveries and work being conducted by ARI. Our conference venue is the historic Monticello Opera House, but ARI headquarters can be contacted at [aucillaresearchinstitute.org](http://aucillaresearchinstitute.org) or (850) 933–6286.