

Preserving our past at Florida's springs

March 11, 2018

Renowned Florida author Rick Kilby has an op-ed in the [Gainesville Sun](#), March 11, 2018.

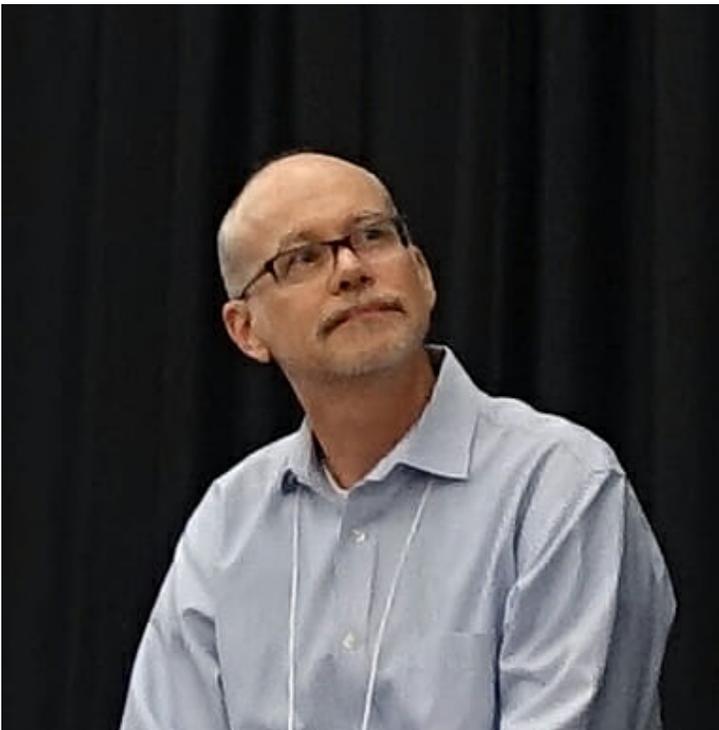
Comments by OSFR historian Jim Tatum.

-A river is like a life: once taken, it cannot be brought back-

Preserving our past at Florida's springs

By Rick Kilby

Special to The Sun



Rick Kilby

Restoring the health of Florida's springs gets plenty of attention, but preserving the history around them is often ignored. Sadly, the practice of ignoring, and sometimes destroying, the archaeology of our springs is commonplace in our state. The loss of the human history of our springs does irreversible damage to our understanding of Florida's past.

To give just one example, archaeological evidence shows that Silver Glen Springs in the Ocala National Forest was the largest native gathering site in the prehistoric Southeast. Humans have lived alongside springs such as Silver Glen for thousands of years, and indigenous people significantly altered the environment around the springs.

Yet much of the spring's archaeological value was destroyed by mining in the 1920s. Many of the state's shell middens, created from the accumulated refuse of ancient peoples, were also mined for materials used in road building. What we value and seek to conserve about Florida's springs is not their "cultural features" but their natural "fragile ecosystems," as archaeologist Jason O'Donoghue points out.

By the turn of the 20th century, many of Florida's springs were developed into spa resorts with elegant hotels including one at Hampton Springs near Perry. The attraction was their healing waters, thought to cure everything from rheumatism to indigestion. The influx of invalids wintering at our springs helped reshape Florida's early economy, transforming it from agricultural origins to the tourism-based economy that still powers our state today.

Few physical reminders from this era exist today, however; the elaborate hotels at Suwannee and Green Cove Springs are distant memories. The remnants of the spring pools at Suwannee, White

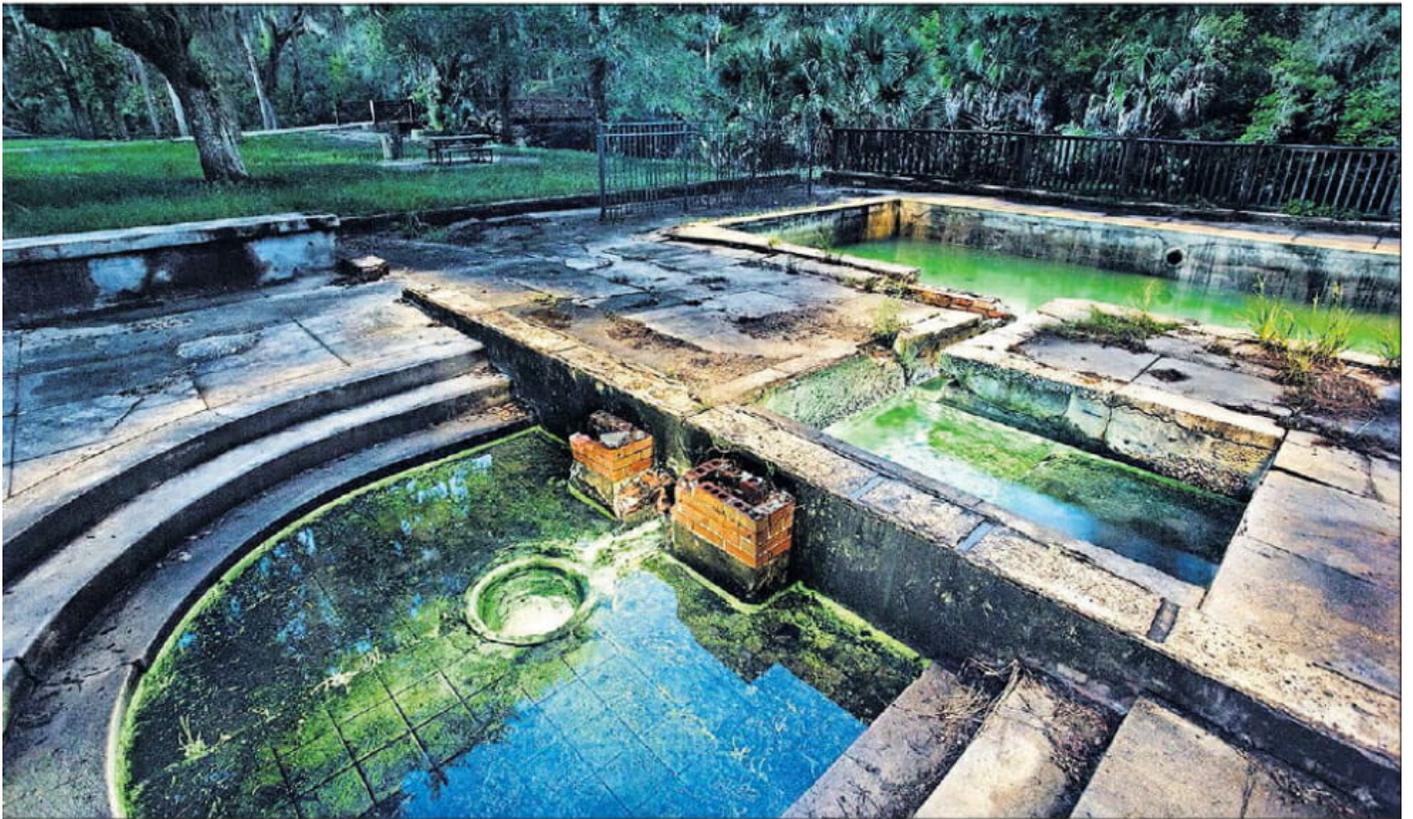
Sulphur and Hampton Springs are the lone survivors from Florida's "Golden Age of Therapeutic Bathing."

The first hotel and bathhouse built at Hampton Springs were completed in 1908. The facilities were expanded, and by 1920 promotions for the hotel boasted of "superlative advantages" including golf, a casino, wonderful food and much-touted sulphur baths. As the practice of taking the waters faded, the resort endured by shifting its marketing focus to outdoor leisure activities such as hunting and fishing, until the hotel burned down in 1954.

Today the site of the hotel is part of a Taylor County Park, recognized with a state historical marker in 2007. The location was also awarded a state grant for archaeological work and rehabilitation of historical features. The Perry News-Herald, however, recently reported that Taylor County officials were looking for "creative solutions" for the pool due to "frequent vandalism" and a "lack of resources." Filling in the pool was the county's solution to make it less of a liability risk, according to the county administrator. Fortunately, the county reconsidered its decision.

In Gainesville, however, the built environment surrounding Glen Springs is at risk of crumbling away, forever closing the door on an important story from the region's past. The spring house dates from the 1920s. The original pool structure was designed by noted architect Guy Chandler Fulton, who is also responsible for designing many familiar buildings on the University of Florida's campus.

Glen Springs hosted mermaid shows, was mentioned in lyrics by Tom Petty and was the place where many locals learned how to swim. Efforts to purchase and restore the spring recently failed, and these significant historical



Hampton Springs, near Perry, was part of a spa resort attracting tourists in the early 20th century. Today the site is part of a Taylor County Park, where county officials, concerned about vandalism and liability, filled in the spring pool and then later reversed their decision after work had begun. [SUBMITTED IMAGE BY JOHN MORAN AND DAVID MONAHAN]

resources may suffer irreparable damage.

So why aren't these relics from an important era in our state's history better preserved? Perhaps it's because "here in Florida, we bury the past," notes John Moran of the Springs Eternal Project.

Florida Book Awardwinning author Rick Kilby will present "Finding the Fountain of Youth in Florida" on March 17 at 4 p.m. at the Matheson History Museum. For more information, call 352-3782280 or email director@mathesonmuseum.org.