Whole and True Discoverye of Terra Florida

Jean Ribault

1563

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Recommended Citation
Ribault, Jean, "Whole and True Discoverye of Terra Florida" (1563). Early Visions Bucket. 22.
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Jean Ribault, The Whole & True Discoverye of Terra Florida

Juan Ribault was among the first Europeans to colonize Florida. He was a naval officer, navigator, and a colonizer of what would later become the southeastern United States. As a Huguenot (or French Calvinist) and officer under Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, Ribault led an expedition to North America in 1562 that established the outpost of Charlesfort, on today's Parris Island. After two years, he took over command of Fort Caroline, the first European settlement in what is now Florida.

Ribault was sent by Coligny to Fort Caroline in an attempt to relieve the 300 colonists that had gone with Laudonnière. However, Ribault did not expect Spain to engage in war with the Huguenot faction of France. The war resulted in the cutting of the supply line and travel route for Ribault to return to France. He and many of his followers were killed by Spanish soldiers near St. Augustine in 1565. The Spanish regarded the Huguenots as illegal trespassers. Catholic Spain’s official position on the Huguenots in Florida was that they must be driven out because they were heretics. Also, their very presence in Florida was considered a threat to Spanish shipping in the Atlantic.

After his death, Ribault’s account was found and purchased in 1563 by Thomas Hacket, an Englishman who used the French document for his writing over French occupation. Only a few copies of the document were issued and printed in English. In 1875 the title was changed to Histoire de l’Expedition Francaise en Florida by Paul Gaffarfel. Finally in 1875 The Whole and True Account, a reprint of the 1563 London edition was published in New York. There are very few histories of Jean Ribault. The selection below retains the original spelling.

Edited by Valerie Lanham, University of South Florida St. Petersburg
Further Reading


….. So yt is come to passe, that God, by his onlye goodnes, hathe given us grace to make the furthest cut and travers of the seaes that ever was made in our memorye or knoweledg in longitude from the east to the west, and therfore was it comonly said bothe in France and Spayne and also amonges us, that it was impossible [for us] to come and salutely arrive thither where the Lord did conduct us, all which proceaded but of ignoran[ce] and lacke of attempting that which we have not byn afraied to give thadventure to prove, albeit that in all maryne cardes, they sett fourthe the coast with shippwrackes, withowt portes or rivers which we have found otherwise as yt ffollowithe.

Thursday the last of Aprill at the breke of the daye we discovered and clearly perceaved a faire cost, streching of a gret lenght, covered with an infeinite number of highe and fayrc trees, we being not past 7 or 8 leages from the shore, the countrye seming unto us playn, withowt any shewe of hilles, and approching nearer within 4 or 5 leages of the land, we cast ancre at ten fadom watter, the bottom of the sea being playn with muche oose and of fast hold. On the southe side as far as a certen poynct or cape, scituate under the latitude of 29 degrees and a half, which we have named the cap Francoys, we could espie nether river nor baye, wherfore we sent our boates, furnished with men of experience, to sound and knowe the coast nere the shore, who retourning agen unto us abowt one of the clocke at after none, declared that they had found, amonges other thinges, viij fadom watter at the harde bancke of the sea. Wherupon, having dilligently wayed up our ancrs and hoist up saile, with wynd at will we sailed and veewed the coast all along with an inspeakable pleasure of thoderiferous smell and bewtye of the same. And bicause there apeared unto us no sine of any porte, abowt the setting of the sonne, we cast ancre agayn, which don, we did behold to and fro the goodly order of the woodes wherwith God hathe decked everywhere the said lande. Then perceving towards the northe a leaping and breking of the water, as a streme falling owt of the lande unto the sea, forthewith we sett agayn up saile to duble the same while it was yet daye. And as we had so don, and passed byonde yt, there apeared unto us a faire enter [ye] of a great river which caused us to cast ancre agen and tary there nere the lande, to thende that the next mornyng we myght see what it was. And though that the wynd blewe for a tyme vehemently to the shore warde, yet the hold and auncordge is so good there, that one cable and one ancre held us fast without driving or slyding.

The next daye in the morninge, being the ffirst of Maye, we assaied to enter this porte with two rowel barges and a boate well trymed, finding littell watter at the entrye and many surges and
brekinges of the water which might have astuned and caused us to retourn backe to shippborde, if God had not speedely brought us in, where fynding fourthwith 5 or 6 fadom water, entered in to a goodly and great river, which as we went we found to increse still in depth and lardgnes, boylling and roring through the multytute of all sortes of fishes. Thus entered we perceived a goods number of the Indians, in-habytantes there, coming alonge the sandes and seebanck somewhat nere unto us, withowt any taken of feare or dowbte, shewing unto us the easiest landing place, and thereupon we giving them also on our parte tokens of assurance and frendelynes, fourthwith one of the best of appearance amonges them, brother unto one of there kinges or governours, commaunded one of the Indians to enter into the water, and to approche our boates, to showe us the easiest landing place. We seeing this, withowt any more doubting or difficulty, landed, and the messenger, after we had rewarded him with some looking glases and other pretie thinges of small value, ran incontenently towards his lorde, who forthwith sent me his girdell in token of assurance and ffrendship, which girdell was made of red lether, aswell couried and coulored as is possible. And as I began to go towards him, he sett fourthe and came and receved me gentlye and receosed after there mannour, all his men following him with great silence and modestie, yea, with more then our men did. And after we had awhile with gentill usage congratulated with him, we fell to the grownd a littell waye from them, to call upon the name of God, and to beseche him to contynewe still his goodnes towards us, and to bring to the knoweledg of our Savior Jesus Christ this poore people. While we were thus praying, they sitting upon the grownd, which was dressed and strewed with baye bowes, behelde and herkened unto us very attentively, withowt eyther speaking or moving. And as I made a sygne unto there king, lifting up myne arme and streching owt one fynger, only to make them loke up to heavenward, he likewise lifting up his arme towards heven, put fourthe two fynge[rs] wherby it semed that he would make us tunderstand that thay worshipped the sonne and mone for godes, as afterward we understode yt so. In this meane tyme there number increased and thither came the kinges brother that was first with us, their mothers, wifes, sisters and childern, and being thus assembled, thaye caused a greate nombre of baye bowes to be cutt and therwith a place to be dressed for us, distant from theires abowt two fadom; for yt is there mannour to parle and bargayn sitting, and the chef of them to be aparte from the meaner sorte, with a shewe of great obedyence to there kinges, superyours, and elders. They be all naked and of a goodly stature, mighty, faire and aswell shapen and proportioned of bodye as any people in all the worlde, very gentill, curtious and of a good nature.

The most parte of them cover their raynes and pryvie partes with faire harten skins, paynted cunyngly with sondry collours, and the fore parte of there bodye and armes paynted with pretie devised workes of azure, redd, and black, so well and so properly don as the best paynter of Europe could not amend yt. The wemen have there bodies covered with a certen herbe like unto moste, wherof the cedertrees and all other trees be alwaies covered. The men for pleasure do allwayes tryme themselves therwith, after sundry fasshions. They be of tawny collour, hawke nosed and of a pleasaunt countenaunce. The women be well favored and modest and will not suffer that one approche them to nere, but we were not in theire howses, for we sawe none at that tyme.

After that we had tarried in this northe side of the river the most parte of the daye, which river we have called by the name of the river of Maye, for that we discovered the same the ffirst day of that mounthe, congratulated and made alyance and entered into amytie with them, and presented theire kinge and his brethem with gownes of blewe clothe garnished with yellowe flowers de luce,
yt semed they were sorry for our departure, so that the most parte of them entered into the watter up to the necke, to sett our barges on flote, putting into us soundry kindes of ffishes, which with a marvelus speed they ran to take them in there parkes, made in the watter with great redes, so well and cunyngly sett together, after the fashion of a labirinthe or maze, with so manny tourns and crokes, as yt is impossible to do yt with more cunning or industrye.

But desiering to imploye the rest of the daye on the other side of this river, to veue and knowe those Indians we sawe there, we traversed thither and withowt any diffycuty landed amonges them, who receaved us verry gentelly with great humanytie, putting us of there frutes, even in our boates, as mulbereries, respices and suche other frutes as thay found redely by the waye.

Sone after this there came thither there kynge with his brethern and others, with bowes and arrowes in there handes, using therewithall a good and grave ffashion and bhavior, right souldier like with as warlike a bouldnes as might be. They were naked and paynted as thothers, there hear likewise long, and trussed up with a lace made of hearbes, to the top of there hedes, but they had neither there wives nor childern in there company.

After we had a good while lovengly intretayned and presented them with littell giftes of haberdasherye waeres, cutting hookes and hatchettes, and clothed the king and his brethern with like robes we had given to them on the other side, [we] enterd and veued the cuntry therabowte, which is the fairest, frutefullest and plesantest of all the worlde, habonding in honney, veneson, wildfoule, forrestes, woodes of all sortes, palme trees, cipers, ceders, bayes, the hiest, greatest and fairest vynes in all the wourld with grapes accordingly, which naturally and withowt mans helpe and tryming growe to the top of okes and other trees that be of a wonderfull greatnes and height. And the sight of the faire medowes is a pleasure not able to be expressed with tonge, full of herons, corleux, bitters, mallardes, egerties, woodkockes, and of all other kinde of smale birdes, with hartes, hyndes, buckes, wild swyne, and sondery others wild beastes as we perceved well bothe then by there foteing there and also afterwardes in other places by ther crye and brayeng which we herde in the night tyme. Also there be cunys, hares, guynia cockes in mervelus numbre, a great dele fairer and better then be oures, silke worms, and to be shorte it is a thinge inspeakable, the comodities that be sene there and shalbe founde more and more in this incomperable lande, never as yet broken with plowe irons, bringing fourthe all thinges according to his first nature, whereof the eternall God endued yt.

About there howses they laboure and till there ground, sowing there fildes with a grayn called Mahis, whereof the[y] make there meale, and in there gardens the[y] plant beans, gourdes, cowekcumbers, citrons, peasen, and many other simples and rootes unknon unto us. There spades and mattockes be of wood, so well and fyttely made as ys possible, which they make with certen stones, oister shelles, and mustelles, wherwith the[y] make also ther bowes and smale lances, and cutt and pullishe all sortes of woodes that they employe abowt there buildinges and necessaraye use. There growth [also] many walnuttrees hazeltrees and smale cherytrees verry faire and great, and generally we have sene there of the same symgles and herbes that we have in Fraunce and of like goodnes savour and tast. The people are verry good archers and of great strenght; there
bowe strynge are made of lether and there arrowes of reades which the[y] do hedd with the
teathe of certen ffishes.

As we [nowe] demaunded of them for a certen towne called Sevola, wherof some have wrytten not
to be farr from thence, and to be scituate within the lande and towardes the southe sea, they
shewed us by signes which we understode well enough, that they might go thither with there
boates by rivers in xxtie dayes. Those that have wrytten of this kingdom and towne of Sevolla, and
other towns and realms therabowtes, say that ther is great aboundaunce of gould and silver,
precious stouns and other great riches, and that the people hedd ther arrowes, instedd of iron, with
[sharpe] poyneted turqueses. Thus the night aproaching, and that it was conveyniert for us to retire
by daye to ship board, we toke leve of them muche to their greif and more to oures withowt
comparison, for that we had no meane to enter the river with our shippes. And albeyt it was not
ther custome either to eate or drynke from sonne rising till his goyng down, yet there kyng openly
would nedes drinke with us, praying us verrry gentelly to give him the cupp wherowt he had dronke.
And so makyng him understand that we would see him agen the next daye, we retired agayn to
our shipps, which laye abowt vj leages from the haven to the sewarde.

The next day in the morning we retourned to land agayne, accompanied with the captayns,
gentilmen, souldiers, and others of our smale troup, carrin with us a piller or colume of hard
stone, our kings armes graven therin, to plaint and sett [the same] at the entreye of the porte in
some high place wher yt might be easelly sene. And being come thither bifoire the Indyans were
assembled, we espied on the southe side of the river a place verry fyrt for that purpose upon a littell
hill compassed with cipers, bayes, palmes, and other trees, and swete pleaanten smellding
shrubbes, in the mydell wherof we planted the first bounde or lymete of his majestie. Thus don,
perceiving our first Indians assembled and loking for us we went first unto them according to our
promisse, not withowt some mislyking of those on the southe parte, wher we had sett the said
lymete, who tarried for us in the same place where they mete with us the day before, seming unto
us that there ys some ennemytie bytwen them and the others. But when the[y] perceved our long
tarring on this side, the[y] ran to se what we had don in that place where we landed first and had
sett our lymete, which they vewed a gret while without touching yt any wanye, or abasshing, or ever
speaking unto us therof at any tyme after. Howebeit we could scant departe but as yt were with
greif of mynde from theis our first alies, they runyng unto us [all] along the river from all partes,
presentyng us with some of there harte skins, paynted and unpaynted, meale, littell cakes, freshe
watter, roottes like unto ru-barbe, which they have in great estymation, and make therof a kinde of
bevradg or potion of medyzen. Also they brought us littell bagges of redd coullours and some
smale peces like unto oore, perceving also amonges them faire thinges paynted as yt had byn with
grayn of scarlett, shewing unto us by signes that they had within the lande gould, silver, and
copper wherof we have brought some muster; also leade like unto ours, which we shewed unto
them, turqueses, and a great aboundance of perles, which, as they declared unto us, they toke
owt of oysters, wherof there is taken every along the river side and amonges the reedes and in the
marishes and in so mervelous aboundance as ys scant credeble. And we have perceved that
ther be as many and as faire perles found there as in any contry in the worlde, for we sawe a man
of theires, as we entered into our boates, that had a perle hanging at a collour of gould and silver
about his necke as great as an acom at the least. This man, as he had taken ffishe in one of the
ffishing parkes therby, brought the same to our boates, and our men perceving his great pearle
and making a wonderinge at yt for the greatnes therof, one of them putting his fflynger towards yt,
the man drew back and would no more come near the boat, not for any fear he had that they would have taken his collar and pearl from him; for he would have given it them for a looking-glass or a knife, but that he doubted least they would have pulled him into the boat and so by force have carried him away. He was one of the goodliest men of all his company.

But for that we had no leisure to tarry any longer with them, the day being well passed, which grieved us for the commodities and great riches which as we understood and saw might be gotten there, desiring also to employ the rest of the day among our second allies, the Indians on the south side, as we had promised them the day before, which still tarried looking for us, we passed the river to the shore where we found them tarrying for us quietly and in good order, trimed with new pictures upon their faces, and feathers upon their heads, their king with his bow and arrows lying by him, set on the ground, strewed with bay leaves, between his two brethren [which were] good men [and] well shapen and of wonderfull shew of activity, having about their heads and ears, which was trussed up of a height, a kind of ear of some wild beast died redd, gathered and wrought together with great cunning, and wreathed and fashioned after the form of a diadem. One of them had hanging at his neck a little round plate of red copper well polished, with an other lesser of silver in the myddst of yt (as ye shall see) and at his ear a little plate of copper wherewith they use to scrape and take away the sweat from their bodies. They shewed unto us that there was great store of this metal within the country, about five or six journeys from thence; both on the south and north side of the same river, and that they went thither in their boats, which boats they make but of one piece of a tree working yt hollow so cunningly and fittly, that they put in one of these thus shapen boats or rather great troughes, xv or xxi persons, and go therewith very swiftly. They that row stand upright having their oars short, made after the fashion of a peel. Thus amonging them they presented us with their meale, dressed and baked, very good and well tasting and of good nourishment, also beans, fishes, as crabs, lobsters, crevices and many other kinds of good fishes, shewing us by signs that there dwellings were far off, and that if there provision had been near hand, they would have presented us with many other refreshings.

The night now approaching we were fain to return to our ships, much to our grief, for that we durst not hazard to enter with our ships by reason of a barr of sand that was at [the] entrance of the port, howebeit at a full sea there is two fathom and a half of water at the most, and yt is but a leap or surge to passe this barr, not passing the length of two cables, and then fourth with every where within vj or vij fathom water, so that it make the a very fair haven and ships of a mean burden from iiiijx to c. tonnes may enter therein at all floods, yea, of a far greater burden if there were Frenchmen dwelling there (that might scour that tree as they do in France, and where nothing is lacking for the lief of man. The situation is under the elevation of xxx degrees, a good clime, healthful, of good temperance, marvelous pleasuanta, the people gentle and of a good and amiable loving nature, which willingly will obey ye, be content to serve those that shall with gentleness and humanity go about to allure them as yt [is] necessary for all those that shall be sent thither hereafter so to do, and as I have charged those of ours that be left here to do, to thende that by these means they may ask and learn of them where the[y] take their gold, copper, turquoises, and other things yet unknown unto us, by reason of the shortness of time we sojourned there; for if any rude and rigorous means should be used towards this people, they would fly hither and thither through the woods and forestes and abandon their habitations and country.
The nexte day being the thirde day of Maye, desiering alwaies to fynd owt harbour to rest in, we sett up saile agayn, and after we had ranged the coast as nere the shore as we coulde, there appeared unto us about viij leages on this side the river of Maye, a great oppening or baye of some faire river, whither with one of our boates we rowed and there found an entre almost like unto that of the river of Maye, and within the same as great a deptime and as large, dividing yt self into many sea armes, great and brood, streching towards the highe lande, with many other lesse that devide the countrye into faire and greate landes and a great number of smale and faire medowes. Being entred into them about 3 leages we found in a place vary comodous, strong and pleasant of scituation, certen Indians who receved us verry gentelly, howebeyt we being somewhat nere there howses yt semed yt was [somewhat] agenst there good willes that we went thither, for at theire cryes and noise they made, all therewiefes and childem and howshould stuf were fledd and carried furthewith into the woodes. Howebeyt, they suffered us to go to there howses but they themselves would not accompany us thither. There howses be fyttely made and close of woode, sett upright and covered with reed, the most parte of them after the fashion of a pavillon, but there was one [house] amonges the rest verry great, long and broode, with settelles round abowte made of reedes, tremly couched together, which serve them bothe for beddes and seates; they be of hight two fote from the ground, sett upon great round pillers paynted with redd, yellowe and blewe, well and [trimly] pullished. Some of this people, perceving that we had [in] no mannour of wise hurted there dwellinges nor gardens which the[y] dresse verry diligently, they retourned all unto us byfore our imbarking, semyng verry well contented by there putting into us watter, frute[s] and hartes skynes.

It is a place wonderfull fertill and of strong scituation, the ground fat so that it is lekely, that it would bring fourthe wheate and all other corn twise a yeare and the comodities there for livelode and the hope of more riches be like unto those we found and considered upon the ryver of May, and men may travel thither through a great arme of the sea in hoyes and barkes as great as ye maye do in the river of Maye without coming into the sea. This arme dothe devide and makethe the Isle of Maye, as many other rivers and armes of the see which we have discovered devide and make many other great islandes, by the which we maye travell from one island to an other bitwen land and lande. And yt semeth that men may goo and saile without daunger through all the contrye, and never enter in [to] the great seas, which were a wonderful advauntag. This is thelandofChicorewherof some have wrytten, and which many have gon abowt to fynd, for the great riches they perceved by some Indians to be found there. It is sett under so good a clymate, that none of all our men, though we were there in the hotest tyme of the yere, the sonne entering into Cancer, were troubled with any sicknes. The people there live long and in great helthe and strength, so that aged men go without staves, and are able to do and ron like the youngest of them, who only are known to be ould by the wrynkeles in ther face and decaye of sight.

We departed from them verry frendly and with there contentation, but the flood and the night overtaking us, we were constrayned to lie in our boates all [that] night, till yt was day fliting upon this river which we have called Seyne, bycause at the entrye yt is as broade as from Havre de Grace unto Honefleu. At the breake of the daye we espied on the southe side one of the fairest, pleasantest and greatest medowe ground that might be sene, into the which we went, fynding at theVery entre a longe a faire and great lake [and] an innumerable numbre of fotestepes of hartes and hyndes of a wonderfull greatnes, the stepes [beynge] all freshe and newe. And yt semeth that the people do nurishe them like tame cattell, in great herdes; for we sawe the fotestepes of an
Indian that followed them. The channell and depthe of this river of Seyne is on the side of the medowe that is on the isle of May.

Being retourned to our shippes, we sailed to knowe more and more of the coast, going as nere the shore as we could. And as we had sailed so all alonge about six or seven leages, there apered unto us another baye where we cast ancre twart of yt, tarring so all the night. In the morrowe we went thither, and fynding by our sounding at the entre many bankes and beatynges, we durst not venture to entre there with our great shippes, we having named this river Some, which within is a leage over and of viij, ix, x, and xj fadom deapthe, deviding yt self into many great river, that sever the country into many faire and great ilandes and smale goodly meadowe ground and pastures, and every where suche aboundaunce of fishe as is increadeble. And on the west northewest side there is a great river that comithe from the highe country, of a great leage over, and on the other on the northeast side which retorn into the sea. So that (my lorde) yt is a country full of havens, rivers and islandes of suche frutefullnes as cannot with tonge be expressed, and where in shorte tyme great and precious comodyties might be founde.