



# RIVER HISTORY FACT SHEET

## EARLY USERS OF THE RIVER

During the last Ice Age, the ocean's waters were frozen in huge mountains of ice and the sea's level was much lower than today. While a narrow land bridge was exposed, the first people came into North America from Siberia following herds of Ice Age mammoths, mastodons and other great mammals. The people moved slowly across the continent and down into Florida.

Today, the distance from Clearwater to Cocoa Beach is about 145 miles. During Paleo Indian times the distance from coast to coast was approximately 280 miles. The Gulf coast was forty to seventy miles further west. The climate was cooler and drier. Wide grassy areas supported large herd animals that people hunted. At the end of the Ice Age, Florida narrowed as the ocean level rose. The climate became warmer and more humid. Swamps developed and rivers flowed even more with increased water level.

The history of Florida's native populations before the European invasion is discussed as different time periods. The first people to inhabit this area about 12,000 years ago were called Paleo Indians by scientists. They lived in small migratory bands with a hunting-gathering society.

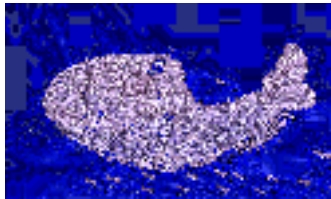


paleo spear point

The Archaic Period began about 8000 BC and continued until 2000 BC. These people continued to hunt and gather. They moved seasonally and used all the natural resources of the coastal and the interior riverine environments.



During the Orange Period, 2000-1000 BC, people first began to make pottery.



During the Transitional Period, 1000-500 BC, a more settled life based on agriculture developed. Regional cultures began to appear.

During the Manasota Cultural Period, 500-800 BC, burial mounds were used.

The Weeden Island Culture, 300-1300 AD, saw burial **middens** with elaborate grave offerings. Societies were strictly ranked. Shell refuse middens are typically found associated with a Weeden Island site.



During the Safety Harbor Period, 1300-1700 AD, social class was strictly observed. Chiefs, headmen, warriors, ordinary people and slaves belonged to very distinct social classes. Temple mounds, large flat-topped rectangular structures were built during this time. The Timucuan society that was in place when the first Spanish explorers came to Tampa Bay were from the Safety Harbor Culture.



Safety Harbor Bowl

Almost one-third of the known prehistoric sites in Hillsborough county are directly associated with lakes, rivers, and creeks. These provided drinking water transportation, and **chert** (a flint-like material) for weapons. The streams and springs drew game to drink and river crossings provided excellent hunting opportunities for the human populations. Plant communities were richer near these freshwater sources and the river's clay was another draw for early cultures.



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### BLOCKADE RUNNERS USE THE RIVER

During the Civil War, Tampa Bay was blockaded by federal troops hoping to stop the flow of beef, medicine and weapons to the Confederate armies and also to gain an economic stranglehold on the area. Cotton and cattle that were usually sold to the North or to foreign countries piled up in Florida stores.

Records show that Captain James McKay of Tampa shipped 4,016 head of cattle to Cuba in 1860 but only 2,000 in 1861 after the beginning of the war. There were no records kept for the remainder of the war. Imported items like medicine and luxury items like cloth, coffee, cigars and white flour became rare and were in high demand in Florida's small towns.



Florida longhorn

Cuba's need for cattle and cotton and Floridians' desire for luxury items created a situation of high demand while the naval blockade caused a severe shortage in supply. These two factors drove prices up and created the opportunity for huge profits to be made by anyone who was daring enough to break through the federal blockade.

The records of John T. Leslie of Tampa showed that while he paid \$4 per head of cattle in 1860, with the start of the Civil War in 1861 he paid \$5 per head and by 1863 he was paying \$7 per head.

During the first two years of the war, Jake Summerlin was contracted by the Confederate Army to supply beef at \$8 per head. Ship captains who could make it through the blockade to Havana, Cuba could sell their cattle for \$14 to \$418 per head, (in gold doubloons). They could then return to Tampa with a cargo of luxury items priced sky-high for eager Tampa buyers.

Because only small cargoes were able to slip past the blockade and because the blockade runners risked imprisonment and total loss of assets, only a few dared try the blockade-running business. But those that did it successfully became some of the wealthiest men in Tampa.



Southern Blockade Runner

One of Tampa's most famous blockade runners was the adventurous Captain James McKay. With a steamer named the Scottish Chief and a sloop, Kate Dale, Captain McKay made six successful round trips to Havana through the blockade.

In the fall of 1863, McKay took the two boats up the Hillsborough River to a hiding spot near where Lowry Park is today. There the boats would be cleaned of barnacles and loaded with cotton bound for Cuba. Northern sympathizers informed federal Naval officials. Federal troops landed at night at Ballist Point on Tampa Bay and marched upriver. They burned the two boats along with one hundred fifty-six bales of cotton on the Scottish Chief and eleven bales on the Kate Dale.

An angry Captain McKay spent the remainder of the war running supplies to the Confederate troops.

The remains of these two blockade runners were found in the 1960's by a group of divers led by Calvin "Pop" Taylor. Taylor hoped to salvage the ships, but the state of Florida claimed ownership. Angered at the state's reaction, he refused to tell the locations of the wrecks.



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## HARVESTING THE RICHES OF THE WATERSHED

In the late 1800's the valley of the Hillsborough River was a land covered by a rich, **old-growth forest**. Majestic bald cypress trees soared several hundred feet into the air. Some of these trees were more than 3,000 years old.

Lumber companies in north Florida knew that the wood from cypress trees was very valuable. It was highly resistant to rot and decay. Termites who attacked pine and other woods left cypress alone. Cypress is easy to cut into boards and was hand carved to create decorative moldings for houses.

Over time, the lumber companies perfected a technique to harvest this rich resource. They sent men into the swamps on foot during the dry winter months. These men used axes to cut a groove completely around the trees. This groove caused the trees to die and then dry out.

In the early fall, at the end of the summer rainy season, the trees were cut with two-man crosscut saws.



The logs were floated out of the swamps and down the river to railroad bridges.



A steam powered craine called a skidder was used to lift the logs out of the river.

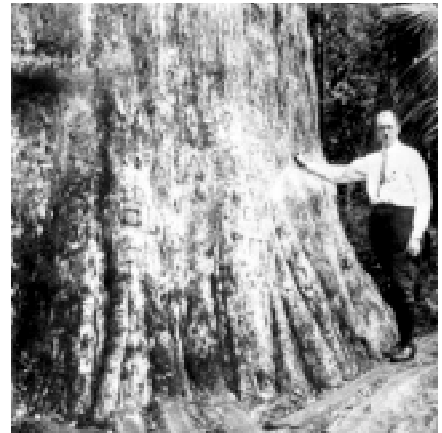


The logs were loaded on rail cars and taken to a mill.



The valuable cypress wood created a short term economic boom as the lumbermen cut their way through most of the riverine swamps along Florida's west coast rivers.

As the trees were cut some old giants were left behind. These were trees which had damage to their tops or interiors and would not make good lumber.



As a result of this lumbering activity, most of the cypress trees within the Hillsborough are less than one hundred years in age.

The harvesting of the old cypresses altered the ecosystems they dominated. Trees such as water ash and water locust were able to quickly grow in the sun lit spaces created when the cypress was removed. The riverine swamp forest we see today has quite a different ecology than the original which had existed along the Hillsborough for ten to fifteen thousand years.



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### HILLSBOROUGH RIVER TIMELINE

There have been several Ice Ages over the past million years with the last one ending about 15,000 years ago.

Geological data suggests that the Hillsborough River has been flowing for about 27,000 years.

Humans first made their way to this area 12,000 - 15,000 years ago.

(1528) Narvaez, a Spanish explorer, lands near Tampa Bay. He and the four hundred men with him find the Timucuan culture established in the area.

(1539) DeSoto, another Spaniard, comes to Tampa Bay and lands at what was probably the Hillsborough River.

By the early 1700's the Timucuan people are nearly exterminated.

(1757) A survey of the Hillsborough River is done by Don Francisco Maria Celi, pilot of the Spanish royal fleet.

(1772) A map drawn and sent to the English Lord Hillsborough, Governor of West Florida, shows the river named as the Hillsborough.

During the mid and late 1700's, Native Americans from the north, mostly Creeks, begin to migrate to Florida. These immigrants become known as Seminoles.

(1821) Florida becomes a US territory.

(1824) Construction of Fort Brooke begins at the mouth of the Hillsborough River.

(1828) The Fort King Military Road is built to

connect Fort King in Ocala with Fort Brooke in what was then the settlement of Tampa. A bridge is built to cross the Hillsborough.

(1830) Congress passes the Indian Removal Act. The American government begins efforts to remove the Seminoles from Tampa Bay and relocate them to a reservation west of the Mississippi. Tensions between Seminoles and Americans continue.

(1835) Seminoles burn the bridge at the Fort King Road's river crossing. Conflict continues.

(1836) Fort Foster is established at the Hillsborough River crossing to protect this strategically advantageous position.

(1842) The Armed Occupation Act promises one hundred sixty acres of land to any man who can bear arms, build a house and cultivate five acres for five years.

(1846) The first ferry crossing on the Hillsborough River is established. This improves transportation and widens the growth of Tampa to both sides of the river.

(1861) Tampa Bay is blockaded by federal troops to prevent goods from leaving Tampa or from coming into Tampa.

(1863) Federal troops march upriver to a location near the present day site of Lowry Park. There they discover a blockade-running steamer and sloop loaded with cotton. The ships are burned. The skirmish that follows is the only Civil War action on the Hillsborough River.



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(1891) The Tampa Bay Hotel, now the University of Tampa, opens with a grand ball.

(1895) An electrical dam is built on the river.

(1898) The dam is dynamited by cattle barons angry at the loss of grazing land.

(1900) The Sulphur Springs property is developed and open to the public.

(1910) Hillsborough Bay is channelized to the mouth of the Hillsborough River with the River and Harbor Act of 1910.

In the early 1900's the Hillsborough River is heavily logged for its valuable cypress.

(1923) A water treatment plant is built to utilize the water supply from the reservoir above the dam.

(1935) Hillsborough River State Park is opened.

(1979) The Hillsborough River is closed to swimming at the state park and a pool is built for public use.

(1986) The Hillsborough River Interlocal Planning Board and Hillsborough River Technical Advisory Council are established.

(1986) Sulphur Springs is closed.

(1988) The annual Hillsborough River cleanup begins.

(1891) Canoe Escape is opened and the owners donate canoes and time to bring the Hillsborough River to the public's attention.

(1992) The Hillsborough River Greenways Taskforce is established.

(1995) The Hillsborough River is designated as an Outstanding Florida Water.

(1995) The Hillsborough River is designated as a Florida Recreational Canoe Trail.

(1995) The Hillsborough River is named a Florida Sesquicentennial Greenway.