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Enlist Intuition -

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Jeanne Nixon Baur, Artist

A report to the membership of
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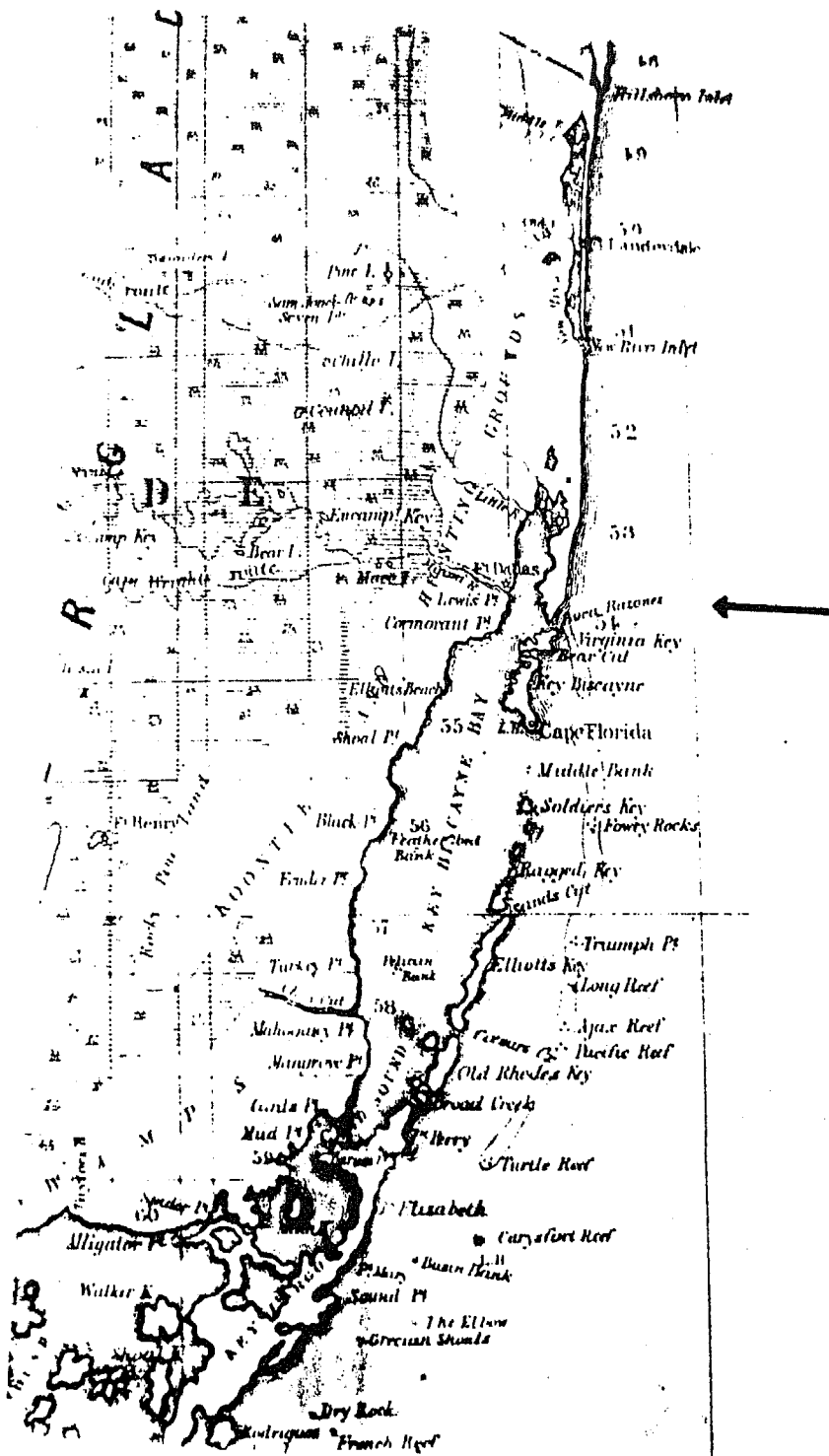
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There seems never to have been a time in the history of Boca Raton in which the name has not generated controversy. Usually literalists insisted that it meant "rat's mouth," while those who could not stand this "translation" offered all manner of alternatives. Daniel Austin, professor of Biological Sciences at Florida Atlantic University, and David McJunkin, formerly a graduate student in geography and now a PhD candidate at the University of California, have put the argument to rest in the following article.
 Donald W. Curl, Editor

THE LEGENDS OF BOCA RATONES

Daniel F. Austin and David M. McJunkin

Summary

There were formerly two Boca Ratones, one in Dade County and the other in Palm Beach County. The Dade County site, now called Indian Creek, was the original Boca Raton and appeared on maps in the late sixteenth century. From the late 1500s to the 1820s the Palm Beach County Boca Raton was known as Rio Seco or Dry River. By 1822 this waterway and three associated lakes were known as Boca Ratones Sound. This was eventually shortened to Boca Raton by the late nineteenth century, and gave a name to the town of Boca Raton before 1924.

Associated with the present Lake Boca Raton is an inlet from the Atlantic Ocean. This inlet has changed positions at least three times in the past two hundred years. In the late 1760s the inlet was at the northeastern corner of the lake. By the 1800s this inlet had closed and another opened on the southeastern corner. Both of these were closed as much as open due to drifting sands. In 1926 the present Boca Raton Inlet was dredged.

Stories of pirates hiding in the modern Lake Boca Raton and other ships using it as safe refuge are not true. These stories were borrowed, as was the name Boca Raton, from the Dade County Site.

The Legends

According to local legend the "laguna de boca ratones" or "Boca de Ratones" was used during the early period of Florida history as a haven for pirates and other dangerous characters (Lineham, 1973). These stories flourished during the early 1900s but recently have appeared less often.

Among the tales frequently told are those that Captain Edward Teach, usually called Blackbeard, regularly anchored in Lake Boca Raton between raids on merchant ships (Wisehart, 1973). He is said to have buried his treasure somewhere in the sands of Boca Raton. The story is even told that Blackbeard's ghost, sometimes taking the form of a sea gull, guarded the treasure under a large gumbo limbo tree that formerly stood south of the inlet. Hunts for pirate treasure in the area have been markedly less than successful, although in the 1920s a road crew building Highway A1A found a few doubloons and triggered a series of treasure hunts. None made the "big find" although a tale persists of a ship being found off the coast of modern Boca Raton with silver bars aboard. This ship finally disappeared after bad weather, and a dynamite blast intended to uncover it buried everything in sand.

According to some of the other stories the "Boca de Ratones," supposedly meaning "the mouth of the rat," was an inlet with a fresh water spring "where a ship could wait out the winds of a hurricane and replace water that had grown green and slimy after months in a ship's wooden cask" (Wisehart, 1973). Modern developers have even taken up these stories. One recent newspaper ad tried to attract attention with the drawing of a stereotyped pirate, bandana around his head and cutlass in hand. The captain entreated potential buyers to live on romantic Lake Boca Raton where the legends of Blackbeard and other pirates abound.

The Name

All past students of "Boca Raton" seem to have translated the name as "rat's mouth," and most have said the term was an archaic nautical term used to describe a "harbor of hidden rocks" (Chamber of Commerce, Boca Raton) or a "hidden rock that gnaws and frets a ship's cable" (Waldron, 1971). No etymological source has been found to support these interpretations.

Use of the term "boca" to describe an inlet appears early on Spanish maps (e.g. "boca del drago, Cosa, 1500). "Ratón" is the Spanish word for "mouse;" "rata" is the word for "rat." This is an unusual case in the Spanish language where the augmentative of a term applies to the smaller form. There are, however, other meanings for "ratón" which appeared in Spanish literature in the 1500s and 1600s. Corominas (1954) shows the origin of "ratón" to mean a "ladrón cobarde" or cowardly thief. Another meaning is "rastero, que se arrastra" or dragging or hauling. Thus there appear to be at least the following translations of "Boca Raton:" mouse's inlet, hauling inlet, and thieves' inlet.

Since the most common translation as "rat's mouth" is incorrect, the next to be considered is the modern meaning--"mouse's mouth or inlet." Unless, as some local sources have suggested for "rat's mouth," one can find evidence for an inlet shaped like a mouse's mouth, there is no support for this translation.

Chardon (1975) has given some detail of the rocky nature of "Boca Raton" and suggested that passage was available only to small boats. This may be interpreted to support the translation "hauling inlet." For long periods of time the term "haulover" has been used for shallow water sites where boats had to be physically dragged or hauled through. In an inlet noted for its shallow rocky nature one might expect the name "hauling inlet."

Although the evidence is still highly circumstantial, there seems to be more support for the third translation or "thieves inlet." During the sixteenth century when the name "Boca Raton" appeared, at least eight groups of Europeans visited upper Biscayne Bay after Ponce de Leon's voyage past the bay in May of 1513. Three of these, in the 1560s, are particularly pertinent. In 1565 Menendez sent a ship north which was seized by mutineers and sailed south. A storm caught them and forced them to shelter in Biscayne Bay. There, to their surprise, they found a village of white men (Barcia, 1723). Both of these groups of Europeans apparently contained lawbreakers such as mutineers and thieves.

During the same period, in 1567, Brother Villareal was left by Menendez to establish a mission with the Tequesta Indians on upper Biscayne Bay. His report of the Indians is little different from those almost two centuries later (Alana, 1743) of the same village. These Spanish priests were less than pleased with the Indians' behavior and make reference to their practices of stealing (McNicoll, 1941). Probably Brother Villareal or his military companions originated the name of the site "Boca Raton" or "thieves inlet."

The Sites

(A). The first map to label a site with the name "Boca Raton" was apparently prepared in the last part of the sixteenth century. This map is anonymous and undated but historians have suggested that it was drawn between 1550 and 1600 (Anon., 1550-1600?). By the eighteenth century when Padre Alana and his group settled on the Miami River to try to start another mission, the name "Boca Raton" was well established (Anon., 1742; Alana, 1743). Each of these early maps shows the position of the inlet near 25°48'N in what is now known as Miami Beach.

Among the next maps to use the name "Boca Raton" were those by Jefferys (1763), Gibson (1763), and Kitchen (1765). These three maps appear to have been based on a single source; the latter two were perhaps copied from Jefferys. All label a site "Boca de Ratones" near latitude 26°15'N. This latitude is undoubtedly in error since many of the Jefferys's maps were off by about one degree. Subsequent maps by Jefferys call the site near that latitude "Raton" (Jefferys, 1768) and "Ratones" (Jefferys, 1792). In fact most of the maps of the last half of the 1700s label the site on upper Biscayne Bay with "Boca Ratones" or some variant of that name (Puente, 1768; DeBrahm, 1770, 1772; Romans, 1775; Sayer & Bennett, 1776; Sartine, 1780; Anon., 1786; Sinibaldo, 1791; Anon., 1792; Purcell, 1792).

Some of the maps drawn during the nineteenth century call the same site "Boca Raton," but others substitute other names or place "Boca Raton" at other locations. DeBrahm (1765 fide Chardon, 1975) was apparently the first to call the inlet at 25°48'N the "White

Inlet." This name was continued by Stork (1767) and by Jefferys (1769) in the map he drew for the third edition of Stork's book. White Inlet appears on a variety of later maps (Cary, 1806; Darby, 1821; Lucas, 1822, 1823; Buchon, 1825; Hinton, et al., 1832; Illman & Pilbrow, 1837).

Bahamians seem to be responsible for the origin of the name "Bear Cut" (Chardon, 1975) which Romans (1775) placed at the inlet north of Key Biscayne. Vignoles (1823) confused this inlet with the original Boca Raton and labeled it "Bear Cut or Boca Raton." This inlet has retained the Bahamian name "Bear Cut" (Tanner, 1823, 1839; Williams, 1837; Burr, 1838; MacKay & Blake, 1839; U.S.G.S., 1971). At the same time Vignoles (1823) confused these two sites when he gave the original Boca Raton at 25°48'N the new name of "Indian Creek." This Indian Creek persists in greatly altered form on Miami Beach today (Chardon, 1975).

Some time after Vignoles's (1823) map a new inlet opened north of modern Virginia Key. MacKay & Blake (1839) shifted the name "Boca Raton" to this site and later maps followed them (Bruff, 1846; Ives, 1856). Eventually this became known as "Norris Cut" and the name "Boca Raton" was entirely lost in the Biscayne area.

(B). Our modern Boca Raton, a lake and inlet associated with the city of Boca Raton in Palm Beach County, appeared with a different name in the late 1500s and early 1600s. The name of the site at 26°21'N on the early maps was "Rio Seco" (Anon., 1550-1600?; Anon., 1630?; Jansson, 1642, 1650; Sanson, 1656, 1657, 1679, 1683). This name persisted for the same locality through the 1700s (Arredondo, 1742; Anon., 1742; Delisle, 1750; Jefferys, 1763, 1768, 1775; Gibson, 1763; Martinez, 1765; Kitchen, 1765; Puente, 1768; Romans, 1775; Sayer & Bennett, 1776; Sartine, 1780; Bew, 1781; Anon., 1786; Sinibaldo, 1791; Anon., 1792; Purcell, 1792). The name even appears in the 1800s (Vignoles, 1823; Tanner, 1823; Anon., 1834), but most later maps translate the name into the English "Dry Inlet" (d'Anville, 1794; Cary, 1806; Darby, 1821; Lucas, 1822, 1823; Buchon, 1825; Hinton et al., 1832; Illman & Pilbrow, 1837).

It was not until the 1820s that the inlet at 26°21'N became known as "Boca Raton" (Vignoles, 1823; Tanner, 1823; Hood, 1838; MacKay & Blake, 1839; MacKay, 1845; Bruff, 1846; Ives, 1856; Williams, 1870). Vignoles also initiated the name "Boca Raton Sound" and this name, widely publicized by Tanner (1823, 1839), stayed with the lake and stream until after the turn of the century (Poinsett, 1838; MacKay & Blake, 1839; Bruff, 1846; Ives, 1856). At present the lake and inlet continue to be called "Boca Raton" and a town by that name was incorporated in 1924.

Bernard Romans (1775) gave one of the most complete early commentaries on conditions at the Boca Raton inlet and lake at 26°21'N. In the directions to navigators in the appendix to his book, Romans (1775: 243) made the following comments: "The mouth of Rio Seco....is very seldom open, having a narrow bar of dry sand before it, [and] the coast forms here a small kind of cove...."

Later Ives (1856) made reference to Lake Boca Raton and the waterway for ten miles to the north which he called the Little Hillsboro. This stream was difficult to pass in the first six miles below Lake Worth, but became a respectable waterway below Orange Grove Haulover (now southern Delray Beach between Atlantic Avenue and Germantown Road). From this haulover to Lake Boca Raton, a

distance of about seven miles, the stream increased in width. In the first two miles the increase was from seven to fifty feet in width, and by the time it passed two lakes (present Lake Rogers and Lake Wyman, which were unnamed at the time) and reached Lake Boca Raton it was one hundred feet wide. The southern two-thirds of this stream was renamed the "Spanish River Lagoon" some time after the turn of the century (Long, 1921). No one appears to know when this change took place or when it was shortened to the modern "Spanish River" but the last change was before the 1930s (FIND, 1931; Butler, 1939).

Spanish River was fresh in the late 1700s and was so indicated by Romans (1775). The region continued to be labeled as "fresh marsh" into the 1820s (Vignoles, 1823; Tanner, 1823). Ives (1856), who described the expedition of Captain Wade in 1842, said that most of the passage from Orange Grove Haulover south was dominated by sawgrass marsh, indicating fresh water. Charles Pierce lived in the Orange Grove House of Refuge (in the present city of Delray Beach) for part of the period between 1876 and 1890 (Pierce, 1970). Pierce makes a point of recording that this portion of the Spanish River was freshwater sawgrass marsh even during the low water regime of winter.

Today Spanish River is virtually non-existent (Austin, 1976). Condominiums sit on most of the river at the Boca Raton and Highlands Beach border. Those parts of the river between the lakes in Boca Raton have been channelized since 1895 (Handbury, 1896). One small prong of the river less than a quarter-mile long remains on the west side of the Intracoastal Canal north of the fortieth street bridge in Boca Raton, but a public park named the "Spanish River Park" is the most obvious reminder that the waterway once existed.

Of Lake Boca Raton Ives (1856) said that it was a "sheet of water....a mile and a half wide and three-quarters of a mile long. The sand bank which separates it from the sea is, in one place, only a hundred yards wide." No open inlet had been recorded since 1822 for this lake and even Romans (1775) said that the lake was rarely connected to the sea. Ives (1856) said "here there was once an inlet." According to him the timbers of an old wrecked ship were still lying partially buried in what was the former inlet. The Indian scouts for the army survey party forming the basis for Ives's Military Map reported that the wrecked ship had drifted onto the bar "many years ago" and was left there by the receding tide. Sand collecting around the skeleton of the ship had closed the inlet.

The original inlet to Lake Boca Raton was located, as it had been seen by DeBrahm (1773) and Romans (1775), on the northeastern side of the lake. Some time before the 1820s, presumably near the 1769 hurricane (Romans, 1775) or later, another inlet opened on the southeastern side of the lake. By 1822 this inlet was closed (Vignoles, 1823) and remained closed for several years (Baldwin & Cradock, 1834; MacKay, 1845; Williams, 1870; Pierce, 1870-1890 in 1970; Barbour, 1883; U.S.G.S., 1884). Most of the inlets between Jupiter and Biscayne Bay have opened and closed many times in the past one to two hundred years (DeBrahm, 1773; Romans, 1775; Ives, 1856; Corse, 1939). Many inlets, such as the one in Boca Raton, would be closed now if they were not dredged periodically.

Few records are available for the Boca Raton Inlet between the 1890s and 1920s. One of the few was published by Harshberger (1914) and the inlet was still closed. Records in the Public Works Department of the City of Boca Raton show that the city had dredged the old 1820s inlet by 1925. This channel opened 1000 feet south of the modern inlet. In 1926 a new channel was dug east through the dune to form the present opening. Large areas of beach front were filled to the south and much of the modern Cabana Club sits on the 1926 beach fill.

The Solution

How can the stories of pirates and storm shelter be true for a lake and inlet closed most of the time? We believe this is a case of confusion between the two Boca Raton. The southern Boca Raton was only one of several entrances to Biscayne Bay and pirates are known to have used various parts of the bay. Black Caesar's Rock on the southern part of the bay is one of the most famous localities (Morris, 1974). Caesar, a former Negro slave, was a lieutenant to Blackbeard (Anon., 1939), and Blackbeard figures prominently in the legends of Boca Raton. Biscayne Bay is also known to have provided protection against hurricanes (Barcia, 1723; Douglas, 1947).

The conclusion must be drawn that the modern Boca Raton not only received its name from the south, but also many or all of the legends. Evidence from historical records [inter alia Barcia (1723) for the Spanish period; DeBrahm (1773) and Romans (1775) for the English period; Ives (1856) and Pierce (1970) for the American period] shows that the southeastern coast north of Biscayne Bay was sparsely inhabited. There is a long history of wreckers and pirates on Biscayne Bay (Douglas, 1947; Morris, 1974). With the movement of people up and down the coast stories must have been related, and often as not, confused and changed. Since there were two Boca Raton between the 1820s and 1850s it is easy to see how stories from one could be transferred to the other.

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Waldron, A. 1971. Origin of Place Names, p. 309-351. In: Morris, A. compiler. The Florida Handbook. Peninsular Publ. Co., Tallahassee.

Wisehart, B. 1972. "A city of many rich memories." Boca Raton News, Sept. 23, 1973, p. 20, 101.

Cartography

The following annotated list of maps examined includes names at or near A-26°21'N and B-25°48'N. Only maps cited in the text are included.

Anon. 1550-1600? No title. A map of Florida west to Louisiana, western Cuba and Yucatan. Photocopy from Library of Congress. P.K. Yonge 1044. A-Rio Seco; B-Boca Raton.

Anon. 1630. Carta particolare dell'Isola di Cuba e di Iamica con il Kapo della Florida e l'Isola Intorno. P.K. Yonge 33. A-R. Seque; B-C. della Florida.

Jansson 1642. *Insulae Americanae in Oceano Septentrionali cum terris adiacentibus*. Amsterdam. Lowery 125, p. 138. P.K. Yonge 39. A-R. Seque; B-Cabo de la Florida.

Jansson 1650. *Insularum Hispaniolae et Cubae cum Insulis circum jacentibus*. Atlas Pl. 35, Vol. V. Lowery 140, p. 145. P.K. Yonge 47. A-R. Seque; B-Caio de Biscaïnos; abra de M. de Moure.

Sanson 1656. *Le Nouveau Mexique, et La Floride: Tiree de diverses Cartes, et Relations*. Plate 31 in Cumings, W.P. (The Southeast in Early Maps, Chapel Hill, N.C. 1962). A-R. Seque; B-C. de Florida.

Sanson 1657. *La Floride*. In: Sanson, N. *L'Amerique en Plvsivrs Cartes*. Paris. No. 4. 1657. Lowery 149, p. 148. P.K. Yonge 41. A-R. Seque; B-C. de Florida.

Sanson 1679. *Florida*. In: Sanson, N. *Geographia Exactissima. Die Ganze Erd-Kugel*. Frankfort. America, p. 23. 1679. Lowery 175, p. 160. P.K. Yonge 54.

Sanson 1683. *La Florida*. In: Sanson, N. and Sanson, N. fils. *L'Europe [l'Asie, l'Africae, l'Amerique,] en Plusierus Cartes*. L'Amerique No. 3. Paris, 1683. P.K. Yonge 733. A-R. Seque; B-C. de Florida.

Arredondo 1742. *Descriptio Geographica, de la part que los Espanoles poseen Actualmente en el Continente de la Florida, etc.* Plate 56 in Cumings, W.P. (The Southeast in Early Maps, Chapel Hill, N.C. 1962). A-R^o Seco; B-C^o Biscaino.

Anon. 1742. *Plano de la Costa de la Florida del Cayo Biscaino Hasta St. Agustine De La Florida Levantado y Delineado...Possibly* Pl. 51 from the *Cartografia de Ultramar*. P.K. Yonge 205. A-Rio Seco; B-Boca Raton.

Alana 1743. *Cayos de los Martyres*. from the *Cartografia de Ultramar*, Plate 52, with the legend "Boca de Ratones, sacada por el Padre Joseph Samer de Alana. Ano 1743. Que fue el 22 de Junio, con su compan^o el P^e Monaco a la combercion de aquellos Yndios." B-Boca Raton.

Anon. 1743. *Plano e descripcion de los Cayos de las Martires desde Boca Raton asta cay de buesos con las brasas de Fondo*. Photocopy in P.K. Yonge (1336,) from Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. B-Boca Raton.

Delisle 1750. *Carta Geographica Della Florida Nell'America Settentrionale*. In: DeL'Isle, G. *Atlante Novissimo*. Venice, 2: No. 41. 1750. Lowery 397, p. 302. P.K. Yonge 152. A-Fiu. Seque.

Jefferys 1763. *Florida from the Latest Authorities*. In: Roberts, W. *An account of the First Discovery, and Natural History of Florida*. London, 1763. A-Rio Seco; B-Boca de Ratones.

Gibson 1763. *A Map of the New Governments, of East & West Florida*. In: *Gentleman's Magazine*, 33: opposite p. 552. London, Nov. 1763. A-Rio Seco; B-Boca de Ratones.

Martinez 1765. *Descripcion Geographica de la parte que los Espanoles poseen actualmente en el continente de la Florida*. A copy of Arredondo 1742. A-Rio Seco.

Anon. 1765. *Provincias de Florida*. Archio R. Gil Miguel. P.K. Yonge 195. B-Boca Ratones.

Kitchen 1765. *A New Map of North & South Carolina, & Georgia*. In: *The London Magazine*, 34: opp. p. 168. April 1765. A-Rio Seco; B-Boca de Ratones.

Stork 1767. *New Map of East Florida*. In: Stork, W. *A description of East Florida, with a journal kept by John Bartram, etc.* London. P.K. Yonge 962. A-New Inlet; B-White Inlet.

Jefferys 1768. *Pais Cedés, Sheet II, Containing the Peninsula & Gulf of Florida, with the Bahama Islands*. Lowery 519, p. 351. P.K. Yonge 61, from a photocopy in Library of Congress. A-Rio Seco; B-Boca de Ratones; Pueblo de Indios; Raton; Cayo Bizcayno.

Puente 1768. *Nueva descripcion de la Costa Oriental y Septentrional de las Provincias de la Florida, etc.* Photocopy in P.K. Yonge 1317, from Library of Congress. A-Boca del Rio Seco; B-Boca de Ratones.

Jefferys 1769. *East Florida from Surveys made since the last Peace, etc.* In: Stork, W. *A description of East Florida, with a journal kept by John Bartram, etc.* 3rd edition. Photocopy from Library of Congress. A-New Inlet; B-White Inlet.

DeBrahm 1770. *Map of the General Survey of East Florida*. In: DeVorsey, L. Jr. 1971. *DeBrahm's Report of the general survey in the southern district of North America*. Univ. S. Carolina Press, Colombia. A-Baracuta Inlet; B-Boca Ratones.

DeBrahm 1772. Chart of the South End of East Florida and Martiers. In: DeBrahm, W.G. The Atlantic Pilot, a Facsimile Reproduction, Univ. Florida Press, Gainesville, 1974. B-Boca Ratones.

Jefferys 1775. The Peninsula and Gulf of Florida or Channel of Bahama with the Bahama Islands. P.K. Yonge 124. A-Rio Seco.

Romans 1775. Part of the Province of East Florida. From the maps to accompany: Romans, B. A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida. Reprint, 1962 (see References Cited). A-Rio Seco; B-Boca Ratones.

Sayer & Bennett 1776. East Florida. 15 Oct., London. P.K. Yonge 211. A-Rio Seco; B-Ratones.

Sartine 1780. Carte Réduite des Côtes et de l'Interieur de la Presqu'île de la Floride. Photocopy from Library of Congress. Lowery 631. A-R. Seco; B-Bouche de Ratones.

Bew 1781. A Map of East & West Florida, Georgia and Louisiana. 31 May, London. Lowery 638. A-Rio Seco.

Anon. 1786. No title. Photocopy in P.K. Yonge (193) from Library of Congress; Karpinski 200. A-Rio Seco; B-Boca Ratones.

Sinibaldo 1791. Description containing the coasts of Tierra Firme, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Yucatan, Florida, Meridional, Islas de Cuba, Jamayca and Lucayos. P.K. Yonge 894. A-Rio Seco; B-Rio Ratones.

Anon. 1792. Carta esferografica del seno Mexicano, etc. P.K. Yonge 125. A-Rio Seco; B-R. Ratones.

Jefferys 1792. A Map of the Isle of Cuba with the Bahama Islands, Gulf of Florida and Windward Passage. In: Jefferys, T. A Description of the Spanish Islands and Settlements on the coast of the West Indies. Reprint of 1792 edition. AMS Press Inc., New York, 1970. B-Ratones.

Purcell 1792. A Map of the States of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia...also East & West Florida. In: Morse's Geography, London. Lowery 695, p. 428. P.K. Yonge 118. A-Rio Seco; B-Ratones.

d'Anville 1794. A new and complete map of the West Indies comprehending all the coasts and Islands known by that name. London. A-Dry Inlet.

Cary 1806. A New Map of part of the United States of North America, containing the Carolinas and Georgia, also the Floridas and part of the Bahama Islands &c. 1 Feb., London. A-Dry Inlet; B-White Inlet.

Darby 1821. Map of Florida. In: Darby, W. Memoir on the geography, and natural and civil history of Florida, etc. Philadelphia. Photocopy from Library of Congress. A-Dry Inlet; B-White Inlet.

Lucas 1822. Geographical, Statistical and Historical Map of Florida. In: Carey, H.C. and Lea, I. A complete historical, chronological, and geographical American atlas, etc. No. 37. Philadelphia.

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Vignoles 1823. Map of Florida. In: Vignoles, C. Observations upon the Floridas. New York. Photocopy from Library of Congress. A-Boca Ratones, Rio Seco or Dry River Inlet now (1822) shut; B-Indian Creek Inlet now (1822) shut; Bear Cut or Boca Ratones.

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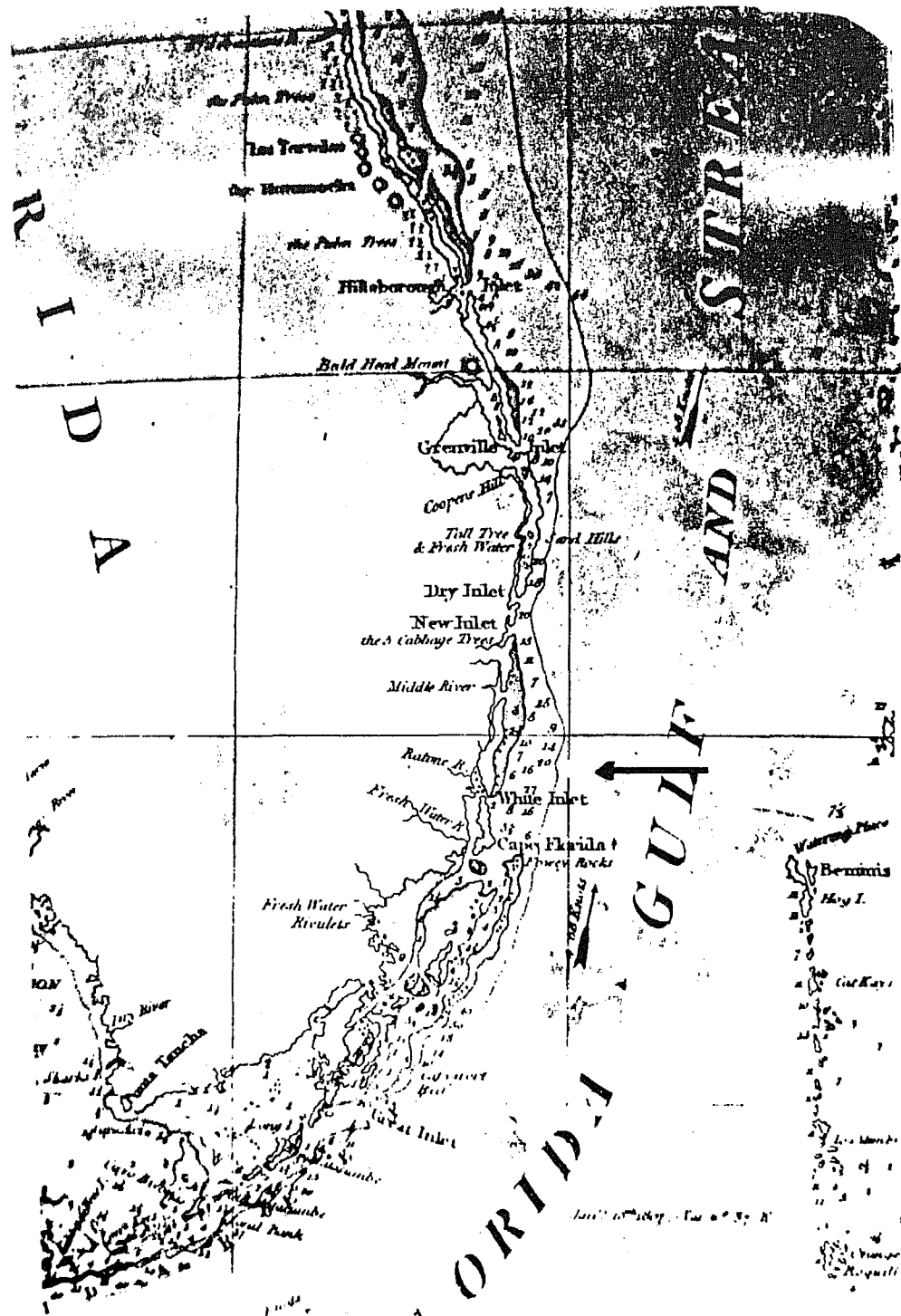
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