

A Third Ceremonial Tablet From the Goodnow
Mound, Highlands County, Florida: With Notes on
Some Peninsular Tribes and other Tablets

by Ryan J. Wheeler

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A THIRD CEREMONIAL TABLET FROM THE GOODNOW MOUND, HIGHLANDS COUNTY, FLORIDA; WITH NOTES ON SOME PENINSULAR TRIBES AND OTHER TABLETS

George M. Luer

Reported here is a third metal ceremonial tablet from the Goodnow Mound (8HG6) in Highlands County, south-central Florida. Metal tablets are a hallmark of the historic contact period and date to the 1600s and early 1700s when a number of indigenous Florida Indian tribes, such as the Ais, Jororo, Mayaimi, and Calusa, still lived in the central and southern portions of the Florida peninsula. In addition to a third Goodnow tablet, this paper briefly presents new or updated information about several other tablets.

Background

In an attempt to investigate the poorly known historic contact period, archaeologists John W. Griffin and Hale G. Smith excavated part of the Goodnow Mound in early 1947. Portions of this aboriginal sand burial mound already had been disturbed badly by vandals, but Griffin and Smith (1948) nonetheless salvaged many archaeological data. Their work at the site produced information which continues to be some of the best available about the aboriginal historic contact period in central and southern Florida.

One of the artifacts recovered by Griffin and Smith was a small silver ceremonial tablet. It was found "... lying on a mass of over 1500 white seed beads together with one large blue bead" which were associated with the remains of two individuals labelled "Burial No. 21" (Griffin and Smith 1948:22). Although a number of tablets had been found in Florida by 1947 (Griffin 1946), this was the first tablet to be excavated by archaeologists. Today, it is still the only one more tablets have been found.

In 1984, Griffin and Smith's Goodnow tablet was catalogued as "Metal Tablet #20" in a catalog of 50 metal tablets (see Allerton et al. 1984:MT#20, Fig. 10A, Fig. 19). That catalog also attributed a second previously unreported tablet to the Goodnow Mound which was a large silver specimen found by diggers around 1954 (see Allerton et al. 1984:MT#21; Fig. 10B, Fig. 18).

The same individuals also claimed to have found another tablet at the Goodnow Mound, but they did not show it or furnish a photograph or description of it. It was one of the 10 metal tablets which Allerton et al. (1984:7) had heard about

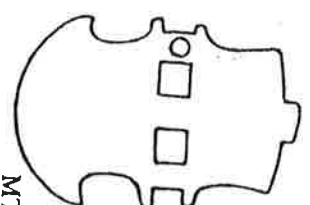
but did not include in the tablet catalog due to insufficient data. However, after the catalog was finished, the tablet's custodians retrieved it from safekeeping and showed it to the author. This is the tablet described below.

Artifact Description -- MT#51

The third tablet from the Goodnow Mound is shown in Figure 1. The shape of its outline conforms to a particular stylistic variant known previously from only seven other metal tablets restricted to east-central and south-central Florida (see Figure 2's "Zone 3"). The peculiar outlines of six of these Zone 3-style tablets are shown by Allerton et al. (1984:Fig. 4, Row 5). Some are shown also by this article's Figure 2.

This stylistic variant contrasts with a more common and widespread form of metal tablet (see Allerton et al. 1984:Fig. 4, Row 6, left). The two tablets reported previously from the Goodnow Mound are of this more common form. Thus, the Goodnow Mound is the second site (after nearby 8GL72 -- see Allerton et al. 1984:MT#43 and MT#44) for which both of these forms of tablet have been reported.

The third Goodnow tablet has no incised designs. This lack of incising resembles most other Zone 3-style metal tablets (MT#6, MT#7, MT#32, MT#43, MT#47, MT#48). The more common and widespread form of metal tablet usually has incised designs.



MT#51

Figure 1. A Third Metal Tablet from the Goodnow Mound, MT#51 (actual size).

The third Goodnow tablet is very well-made. It is thin (approximately 1 mm maximum) and is tapered to a very thin edge at both its tenoned and spatulate ends. It measures 3.75 cm in maximum length and 2.50 cm in maximum width. It displays bilateral symmetry except for smaller lateral projections and a round perforation along one edge. The perforation is near the left edge when looking at the tablet's slightly convex obverse side. The reverse is slightly concave.

The tablet's round perforation, occurring with the two square central perforations, is an unusual feature among metal tablets. The arrangement is similar to two other previously reported tablets (Allerton et al. 1984:MT#7 and MT#47). Both other tablets are also of the Zone 3 stylistic form. Two additional tablets (MT#6 and MT#32), again of Zone 3 style, also have a round perforation but either lack the central perforations (MT#32) or have one central rectangular perforation replaced by a round one (MT#6). These features suggest that MT#6, MT#7, and the third Goodnow tablet were suspended sideways, whereas MT#32 and MT#47 might have been suspended at an angle since they also have holes in their tenons. In contrast, most other metal tablets appear to have been suspended vertically through a hole in the tenon.

Finally, the third Goodnow tablet might have been hammered and cut from a Spanish silver coin or cob. The unaided eye can see faint traces suggestive of a cross from a Spanish coat-of-arms on both the tablet's obverse and reverse. The reverse also displays very fine scratched lines around the

central perforations and lateral projections. After the apparent coin or cob had been hammered into a slightly rounded thin sheet, the artisan probably applied these lines to help determine the tablet's proper shape so that its features could be cut out and finished. These scratches as well as the trace of a cross are similar to those on the convex reverse of another Zone 3-style tablet (see Allerton et al. 1984:MT#43, Fig. 14A-C).

Temporal and Cultural Placement

While wood and stone tablets may have considerable antiquity, metal tablets date to historic contact times. Goggin (1949) hypothesized that metal tablets may date to the early 1500s, but available evidence now indicates that they belong to the 1600s and early 1700s.

Griffin and Smith's Goodnow tablet (MT#20) is particularly helpful because its associated glass beads can be dated. Brain (1979:98) dated them to no earlier than A.D. 1650, and he dated the beads from the overall Goodnow Mound as having a mean date of A.D. 1700.

In addition, new data also bolster a 1600s or early 1700s age for a number of other metal tablets. Two of these, MT#3 and MT#4, came from Mound Key (8LL2) which is believed to have been the main town of the Calusa chiefdom in the 1500s through mid-1700s (Goggin and Sturtevant 1964; Lewis 1978; Hann 1991b). Archival research (Luer 1985) shows that the tablets were part of a cache of items, dug from a nine-foot

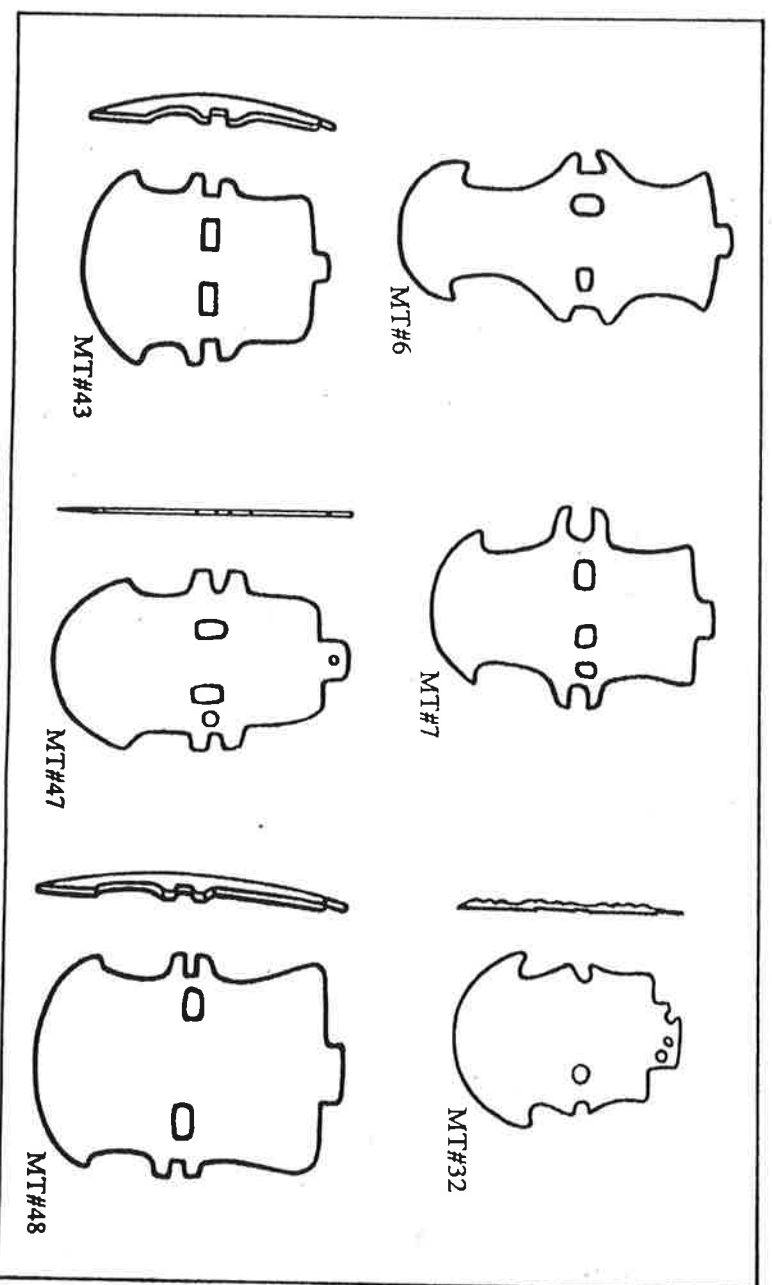


Figure 2. Some Zone 3-style Metal Tablets (actual size).