

Historic Resources at the Pineland Site,
Lee County Florida

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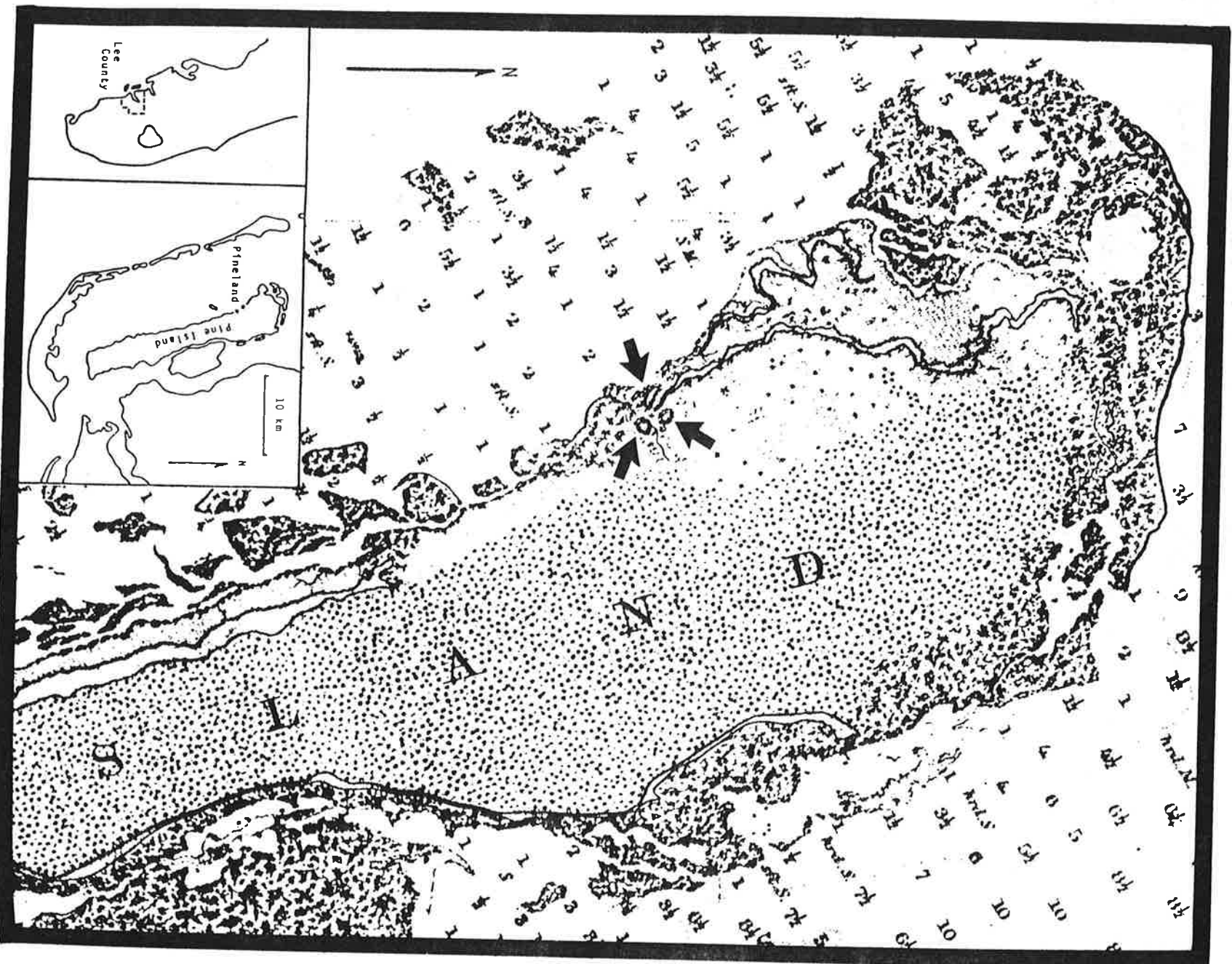


Figure 1. Pineland's Mounds on 1883 Coast Chart. Arrows point to three mounds (probably 8LL33, 8LL36, and 8LL39). Wavy line between mounds represents the west end of the Pine Island Canal (8LL34). Note tidal marsh (now filled) extending between mounds from north.

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HISTORIC RESOURCES AT THE PINELAND SITE, LEE COUNTY FLORIDA

George M. Luer

Introduction

This paper describes archaeological and historical resources at the small rural community of Pineland on Pine Island in Lee County, southwest Florida. These resources are significant to the region's prehistory and history, but have been poorly documented, severely impacted, and overlooked for many years. It is our task to understand and to protect these resources, and this paper is an attempt to help in that process.

In the last few years, Pineland has begun to receive the public appreciation and scholarly attention which it deserves. This improving situation is largely due to the unselfish efforts of Patricia and Donald H. Randell of Pineland. They have encouraged publicity, education, and preservation of Pineland's cultural resources. In addition, they have contributed financially to archaeological work in this area.

Perhaps the Randells' greatest contribution is that they have helped to establish broad participation in the exciting inquiry into the past. They have promoted visits to Pineland by school children and grown-ups, and they have fostered archaeological work by the Florida Museum of Natural History (FMNH) of Gainesville. Excavations by FMNH have allowed many people to enjoy archaeological field work, including members of the Southwest Florida Archaeological Society (SWEAS) and Time Sifters, both chapters of the Florida Anthropological Society.

Some Glimpses of Pineland History

Few people are aware of Pineland's interesting history. In the last several years, Pineland's prehistoric mounds and canoe canal have gained publicity (see *The Florida Anthropologist*: June 1989, and *Calusa News*: May 1989, and May and October 1990). However, Pineland's history has remained obscure.

Much of Pineland's history, presented below, is assembled for the first time. Much more will be found. It will be a continuing challenge to unravel this history, to discover how it relates to Pineland specifically, and to determine its significance to the region in general.

The following chronologically-arranged narrative is divided into three informal periods: 1) "ranchito period," 2) "settlement period," and 3) "Randell period." These periods can be characterized, respectively, as follows:

- 1) Seasonal or sporadic occupation by Spanish, Spanish-Indian, and Black fisherfolk and, later, by Anglo-Americans;

- 2) permanent settlement accompanied by extensive land alteration and agriculture; and
- 3) a still-unfolding period when Pineland's charm will be either preserved or lost.

Ranchito Period. As a coastal frontier, southwest Florida was inhabited sparsely in the 1700s and 1800s. In this watery wilderness, early fishermen and their families were attracted to Pineland's shell mounds. The mounds were important because they provided one of the few landings on Pine Island's swampy shore. Their high, dry ground provided rich soil for gardening, and ample space for necessary activities such as drying fish.

The identity of early inhabitants is unclear, but there were several Cuban fishing stations or "ranchos" in the area by the 1820s and 1830s. At this same time, Pine Island reportedly had a "little colony" of runaway Black slaves who "made a living cutting timber and fishing" (Covington 1959:121). Although it is not known where this "colony" was located, its members probably were aware of Pineland's mounds. These early Pine Islanders were said to have been "protected by several armed Spanish vessels" which presumably were associated with the Cuban mullet fishery based on nearby Useppa Island (Covington 1959:121).

Many Cuban fishing ranchos were abandoned after the United States acquired Florida in 1821 and as a result of hostilities and deportations during the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). At this time, the mounds at Pineland were so prominent that they were depicted on a Second Seminole War military map of the Florida peninsula (National Archives 1845). When U.S. Military personnel inspected the area in 1849, they made note of "prior fishermen who had cultivated the high ground on Pine Island" (Gibson 1982: 163). This "high ground" could easily refer to the fertile shell mounds at Pineland.

A decade later, Pineland played a role in the first detailed U.S. Government mapping of the coast. Government surveyors were attracted by the conspicuous height of Pineland's mounds, and by their proximity to the open water of Pine Island Sound. They established a permanent surveyors' station, which they named "Brown, 1860" on one of Pineland's mounds (National Geodetic Survey 1978). According to the historian Gibson (1982:29, 31, 206) two of the U.S. Coast Survey Office's original survey drafts, dated 1859 and 1860, refer to Pineland as "Brown's" and show four buildings at the site.

Interestingly, the Brown who lived at Pineland might have been a Union sympathizer. A letter dated December 29, 1862, refers to "a person by the name of Brown" who resided on Pine Island and who gave assistance to the crew