

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Heather Pierce: This is an interview with Bob Gross on October 24th, 2017, located at 308 Forrest Avenue in Cocoa, Florida, at the Catherine Schweinsberg Rood Central Library. The interviewer is Heather Pierce. The cameraman and producer is Jeff Thompson. It is copyright © The Brevard County Historical Commission, 2017.

We're here today with Bob [00:00:30] Gross, a longtime resident of Brevard County. And today we are going to focus on the history of archaeology in Brevard and his involvement in the field.

Bob, could you tell us when and where you were born, and how you came to live in Brevard County?

Bob Gross: Well, I was born in Milwaukee in 1950. And my great-uncle, Peter Petruska moved down to Brevard County about 1950 and bought a motel, right on the border of Melbourne and Eau Gallie.¹ [00:01:00] Today it's where the Toyota dealership is. We came down the year before to visit and my dad ...We had—I come from a long line of bakers.² All my grandparents were German bakers. And my dad recognized that the big bakeries were taking over, the Wonder Breads, and that the little family bakeries were on the way out, so he sold out and then got into the insurance business, [00:01:30] which he hated.

And we came down here to visit, and of course Brevard County was booming with the Space Age at the time, and so he thought we'd move down here and he would be able to find a job. So, we came down to visit and stayed at my uncle's and decided to go ahead and move down here the following year, which we did in ... My dad came down first, and then we came down by train in March of 1958. [00:02:00] Rented a house while we were having one built.

Heather Pierce: That must've been quite a change for you from Milwaukee.

Bob Gross: It was. Actually, I had three friends who lived across the street from me in Milwaukee, three brothers, Johnny, Tommy, and Jimmy Sheriff. And when we moved down here, there were three brothers who lives across the street, the Ellis brothers, Russell, [00:02:30] Robert, and Kenny, so that was kind of fun. And they were from an old Florida family here. Their grandfather was in the dairy business and my great-uncle had been in the dairy business in Milwaukee³, so there was some commonality where I fit in.

¹ The motel was named the Highland Court Motel; Eau Gallie was a city just north of Melbourne separated by Ultch Street, today named Brevard Drive.

² By 1956 Bob's great uncle Peter Petruska had traded the Highland Court Motel for a bakery in Milwaukee, owned by Bob's father's brother, Ken Gross. Having equal equity in the bakery and motel, Ken came to own the Motel in Eau Gallie while Peter returned to Milwaukee.

³ The dairy farm was owned by Bob's great uncle Carl Petruska, the brother of Peter Petruska who owned the Highland Court Motel.

And what I think was really nice was we didn't buy a house in one of the new development neighborhoods. It was the Space Age boom and there were ... All [00:03:00] these new subdivisions were popping up and they were all new people. Well, we built in the Bluff area of Melbourne, which was an old '20s subdivision⁴ that went bust and then later on a few other houses trickled in, so there was a lot of old timers that lived there, plus new people, so it was a nice mix. And I got to know a lot of the old timers of Melbourne by living in that neighborhood.

The hardest part was school. [00:03:30] It was second grade when I came and they were teaching phonics here. Well, I had never heard of phonics, and so the different curriculum in the school really threw me off and kind of set me back for a while. That was hard.

Heather Pierce: So, what was your first impression of Brevard County when you came here in regards to the climate and that type of thing?

Bob Gross: Well, when we came initially, I mentioned the snake, that we had come to visit [00:04:00] and we saw this big yellow rat snake.⁵ Well, when they told me we were moving to Florida, I had nightmares. I kept dreaming that it was hot and I was in a room with no doors or windows and it was full of snakes. It was terrifying. Well, when we finally moved down here it wasn't a big deal, but it was great because there was a lot of woods. Where we lived in Milwaukee, it was all developed. There was one patch [00:04:30] of woods in the whole area where I lived called Hoppy's Woods. And it was, you know, maybe an acre. But down here, there were woods everywhere. I mean, we could build forts, we could run wild, camp, so that part of it was really fun. And the river was right there. And my uncle had that motel on the river. And we always had boats and fishing and gigging mullet. It was really a paradise for a kid.

Heather Pierce: Sounds like a lot of fun as a kid. And you mentioned [00:05:00] something, your neighbors in the Bluff. You want to tell me a little bit about Mrs. Frances Shave⁶?

Bob Gross: Yeah, she really had an impact on my life. I wanted to be outside all the time. I wasn't one of these kids that watched cartoons. I didn't know who Gumby was until I was like 36. So, I was always outside. Well, these were the days before air conditioning. And she was outside a lot and I got to know her. And I would go over there and play Chinese checkers [00:05:30] and Parcheesi with her, and she would feed me cookies and Kool-Aid. And she would tell me stories. And one day she said, "You know, Bob, I was born in a log cabin on an Indian mound." Well,

⁴ The Indian River Bluff Subdivision, located between the Indian River and the Melbourne Airport, was platted dedicated in October of 1925, the early houses of which were built in the old Spanish stucco style.

⁵ Bob's note: "While we were visiting my uncle Ken's motel in the summer of 1957, my dad and I crossed US-1 and were standing on the high bluff overlooking the Indian River. Looking at the ground before us was a very large snake, which I later learned was a harmless yellow rat snake, sometimes called a corn snake. We froze in fear as it slithered off."

⁶ Frances Shave was born Frances Arnold whose father, Edson O. Arnold, a prominent early Brevard pioneer who served at one time as a county commissioner, purchased 140 acres on September 10, 1870 south of present-day Malabar Road fronting the Indian River.

you tell that to a nine-year-old boy, you know, "Where? Where was this?" And she told me. She said, "Malabar." Well, I didn't know where Malabar was, but then she told me where it was and how to get there.

That weekend, I rode my bike down there. Now, this was before [00:06:00] I-95, before US-1 was four-laned. US-1 was a two-lane road with all the traffic going to Miami. There was no other way to get to Miami except 441 over in Holopaw. But there were semis, there were trucks, there were cars. It was dangerous. Well, I rode my bike down there. I didn't care. My parents would've died if they knew I was riding a bike down to Malabar. It was like eight or nine miles.

Well, when I got there, [00:06:30] a bulldozer had just taken a little chunk out of this mound. I found it right away from her description. And I put my bike down. And right where I put my bike down, I looked, and here was a metal object and a big piece of Indian pottery. And I don't know that I had ever seen a piece of Indian pottery before. But I don't know if it was instinctive or maybe I saw one in a museum, but I knew right away what it was. Well, I picked up the metal hinge, which is right here. [00:07:00] It's a hand-wrought forged metal hinge.⁷ I just knew it came off a treasure chest. I mean, I was so excited-

Heather Pierce: Of course.

Bob Gross: ... that later on I had realized it was probably a hinge to a cabin, maybe her cabin. And I showed it to her and she didn't recognize it, so it could've been from the 1840s when the Armed Occupation Act settled this area originally, but it's very old. And I treasure it. It's, like I [00:07:30] said, the first artifact I ever found.

Heather Pierce: So, that must've got you hooked, huh?

Bob Gross: It got me hooked. I was hook, line, and sinker.

Heather Pierce: What do you classify as an Indian mound? What does that term mean?

Bob Gross: Well, Indian mounds mean a lot of things. In Brevard County, there's really two basic kinds. There's ... well, maybe three. There's shell middens⁸, which are their living areas. And they would harvest shells. They're nothing more [00:08:00] than garbage heaps where they lived. And they would move to an area that had multiple ecosystems, the river, a fresh water stream, oaks, palms, where they could best gather food. And they would live there until they exhausted the supply, and they would move to another one somewhere up-river or maybe over to the St. Johns. And then eventually, once that area recovered and they exhausted the

⁷ Bob's note: "The hinge was probably from a cabin or shed door, though there were no evident signs of prolonged wear from the weight of a door opening and closing."

⁸ There are two basic types of shell middens; fresh-water shell middens on the St. John's River and its tributaries, composed mostly of mussels and apple snails; and brackish-water middens on the coastal lagoons composed mainly of oyster, venus clams, or coquina shells, or some combination of them with less common native shells.

area they went to, they would come back. [00:08:30] So, over thousands of years, these mounds built up of shells, bones, pottery, and broken tools.

And then you had sand mounds, which were their burial mounds where they'd bury their dead. Not all Indians buried their dead in mounds, but the later ones did. And then there were a few ceremonial mounds, too, that were in Brevard County.⁹

Heather Pierce: [00:09:00] So, could you tell us some of the history of archaeology in Brevard County?

Bob Gross: Well, it goes back. Really, the first archaeologists were the Indians themselves in Florida. We have reports ... I think it was Richard Keith Call, one of our early governors, was on the expedition to pick Tallahassee as the state capital's town. And there was already Indians living there nearby. [00:09:30] And he was interviewing the Indians and there were some mounds there. And it was obvious that there were some holes dug into the tops of the mounds. And the Indians told him that they had found Spanish artifacts and really they were treasure-hunting. They were looking for treasure, and so the Indians themselves were the first ... Previously, there were the Apalachee Indians that lived there, so these were Creeks that had moved down there later. [00:10:00] And they were the ones that were digging in the Apalachee mounds.

Later on, specifically in Brevard County, one of the earliest, it was haphazard. People would find things. Well, even further back, back in Paleolithic times when they had ... Clovis points were really unique, distinct fluted spear points. Sea level used to be way down, so Brevard County [00:10:30] extended maybe 20 miles, maybe 30 miles, out into the ocean today. Well, as sea level came up and it eroded away, just like people find arrowheads today, the Indians would find these, like a Clovis point, and "What's this? I mean, it's so different from what we have today."¹⁰ So, you know, they would pick things up.

And then later when the Europeans came, one of the earliest records I can find was Douglas Dummett¹¹, who [00:11:00] is credited with being the founder of the Indian River Orange. Well, he first homesteaded on Banana Creek on Merritt Island. And I found an 1847 newspaper article where he had found Spanish coins, so that was pretty exciting. And then later on, specifically in mounds, people would find things. Word would get out [00:11:30] and then people, more people, would dig in mounds looking for basically treasure. They were treasure hunters.

⁹ There are also what are known as black-earth middens, which are composed of black earth, containing very few, if any shell. Locally, these are generally found in the drainage basin of the upper St. John's River. Additionally, sand mounds can also be found in this region, which are generally conically shaped burial and ceremonial mounds. There have been recent discoveries of sand ring mounds whose purpose(s) are yet to be known.

¹⁰ Clovis lithics (spear points) are some 10,000 years old and would have been a mystery to later North American Indians.

¹¹ Douglas Dummett was born in Barbados and came to Volusia County by way of Massachusetts with his parents in the early 19th century. He subsequently came to present-day Brevard County in 1843 as an "Armed Occupation Act" settler. He has been given credit for the development of the famous "Indian River Orange."

Heather Pierce: So, as we move out of that treasure-hunting stage and get into archaeology, maybe more as a professional field, who were some of these founding members?

Bob Gross: Well, one of the earliest was Jeffries Wyman¹², who came to Brevard County with George ... I think you pronounce it Peabody, [00:12:00] the famous Peabody Family. And they came down like in 1869, may have even been earlier than that, on an expedition. And they came up the St. Johns River and were investigating Indian mounds. Jeffries was a professional archaeologist. And they made a collection, which ultimately became part of the Peabody Museum with Harvard. In fact, [00:12:30] I think they've redone their collections now, but originally session item number one in the archaeology Department was an artifact or an object from Brevard County-

Heather Pierce: Wow.

Bob Gross: ... yeah, which is kind of neat.

And then after that, there were quite a few others that would come down. Mostly they were northern archaeologists who came down here on vacation in the wintertime. And they would get involved and find out about mounds and would investigate. [00:13:00] Probably the most ... Well, one of the early ones was J Francis Le Baron, who was a civil engineer. He was actually the Brevard County surveyor. And he was curious about the mounds. And he made a particular study of them, not only in Brevard County, but other parts of Florida, too. And he wrote a report, which was published in the Smithsonian in one of their annual reports¹³, [00:13:30] I think. And it was quite extensive. And he listed some of the early mounds that he was involved in, documented them for the first time.

And then, after him, probably the most famous was Clarence B. Moore¹⁴, who was a very wealthy individual who just loved archaeology. And he traveled all over the South, but particularly Florida. [00:14:00] He was so rich that he bought a steamboat called the Alligator and outfitted it as his ... where he lived and he would investigate mounds wherever he could take the boat. And I recently found a record where he actually made it up to North Indian Field in Brevard County, which is south of US-192. I think that's the furthest a steamboat ever got in the St. Johns River. [00:14:30] It's the only ... the furthest north of anyone I've ever heard of, so the water must've really been high for him to get that ... That boat was really a fairly big steamboat.

Heather Pierce: Right.

¹² Jeffries Wyman was an early American naturalist who became the first curator of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethology in 1866.

¹³ *Prehistoric Remains in Florida*, by J. Francis Le Baron, U.S. Engineer, Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution for the Operations, Expenditures and Condition of the Institution for the Year 1882.

¹⁴ Clarence Bloomfield Moore, a native of Philadelphia, PA made his fortune through the family business, the Jessup and Moore Paper Company which subsequently allowed him to pursue his passion—archaeology.

Bob Gross: And he also investigated mounds in the Indian River a few years later, particularly he mentions the Sams Family. Brevard County has a park on Merritt Island, the Sams [00:15:00] House, John Hanahan Sams. And there's a burial mound there, and Moore investigated that along with some others along the river.¹⁵

Heather Pierce: Wow.

So, Bob, we've been talking about these founding figures in archaeology. Can you tell me a little bit about Matthew Stirling?¹⁶

Bob Gross: Stirling was another one that was connected with the Smithsonian. There were actually some other locals that were playing around [00:15:30] in the Indian mounds. One of them was Packard¹⁷, who had a transfer company in Cocoa. And he made a collection. Actually, there were a few people before all that, that would ... Because of tourism and stuff, there were a few people that had curio stores in Cocoa, Melbourne. And they would collect various things: seashells, alligator teeth, Indian stuff that came out of the mounds, and they would sell for profit.

[00:16:00] Well, Packard would dig things on his own in some of the mounds. He found quite a bit of stuff. He dug in burial mounds. He dug in habitation mounds. He had a display in his store in Cocoa. Well, I think he had written to the Smithsonian and got their interest. And Stirling came up with an idea to investigate the Indians that met Ponce de León, [00:16:30] and so they wanted to explore the various mounds on the east coast of Florida. Well, they got a grant, this was during the New Deal, and they got federal money. I think it was the Civilian Works Project, the Civilian Works Administration.¹⁸ They got a nice chunk of money.

And in Brevard County, they were authorized to hire a hundred laborers to work [00:17:00] on these mounds. They had three, what they called "mechanics," I think two or three, which were more like professional archaeologists. And they investigated the mounds on Merritt Island, on the peninsula, what we now know as the Carter mounds up in Canaveral, the town of Cape Canaveral. They did some on Merritt Island, the burial mounds, some middens. That [00:17:30] was probably the biggest excavation ever done in Brevard County professionally next

¹⁵ Clarence Moore visited the burial mound on the property of John Hanahan Sams, today owned and managed by the Brevard County Environmentally Endangered Lands Programs: Pine Island Conservation Area, North Merritt Island, Florida.

¹⁶ Matthew Stirling was an American ethnologist and archaeologist working for the Smithsonian Institution.

¹⁷ "There are many people in this section of Brevard County who do not know that Roy M. Packard, the man who advertises 'Been here for 39 years, what do you want to know?' has a very excellent collection of skulls and bones of the earlier inhabitants of the Florida peninsula and cooking utensils, weapons and what-not taken out of the burial mounds and camping mounds on the peninsula section near here, which reveal to some extent the mode of living of the people of whom we know nothing of, and which we may never know anything unless some expert from the Smithsonian Institute or some other institute comes down to study the skeletons, pottery, weapons and utensils taken from the mounds." (*Cocoa Tribune*, February 20, 1930).

¹⁸ Civilian Works Administration (CWA) was a short-lived New Deal Program under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Administration to put unemployed men to work.

to the Windover, which happened much later. And that got a lot of, again, got a lot more people interested. And that started, I think, around 1933, in that timeframe.

Yeah, that was a big deal. And it pumped--It actually pumped cash into the economy because that was the bottom of the Depression [00:18:00] and times were hard. To hire a hundred people, even unskilled labor, was kind of a benefit to the county.

Heather Pierce: And what about Irving Rouse?¹⁹

Bob Gross: Irving Rouse was another one. He actually was a contemporary of Stirling. He also was connected with ... I think he went to Harvard and he was connected with Smithsonian. And he came down in the mid- to late-'40s to do [00:18:30] what resulted in a survey of Indian River archaeology and a study on South Indian Field. There was a local archaeologist, a man by the name of Albert Theodore Anderson, who moved here about 1921. He married a local girl and they ... or his father-in-law²⁰ had property out on the St. Johns Prairie near Lake Washington²¹. And it happened to have a huge Indian [00:19:00] mound on it. Well, he went to dig a well and started finding pottery and bones. There had been big excavations in Brevard County, which I forgot to mention, in the '20s, when they found mammoth bones and human bones in connection with them on the Melbourne Golf Course in and at F.I.T.²² And at that time, they thought it might be [00:19:30] at Vero too, they had found some, around 1916, thereabouts. But at the time, they thought this was the early evidence, the earliest evidence of man in the New World.

Heather Pierce: Wow.

Bob Gross: At the time, it was really exciting, made national, international headlines. Well, some of those people involved with that dig were still around, and Anderson consulted with them about this stuff that he found.²³ So he made a lifelong career of digging in these mounds [00:20:00] out where he lived.

Well, Rouse went out there and met with him. And Anderson took him around to other sites in Brevard County. And I think Rouse ended up recording like 127 different sites, just in Brevard County. And he also did Indian River County, all along the Indian River down to Stuart and some in Volusia County and on the St. Johns River. It was really the most comprehensive study of archaeology in Brevard

¹⁹ Irving Rouse was an American archaeologist and Yale graduate. He later became a full professor of Anthropology at Yale and a research associate at Yale's Peabody Museum.

²⁰ Albert Anderson's father-in-law was George Nehf.

²¹ Bob's correction: Should be Lake Hell-N-Blazes instead of Lake Washington.

²² Florida Institute of Technology, whose campus encompasses a portion of the upper drainage of Crane Creek where the initial supposed early man site was discovered in 1923 by workers hired by Charles Singleton to spread muck on his new orange grove.

²³ One of whom was Charles Singleton.

County [00:20:30] up to that time.²⁴ Really, up to this time, too, from an individual.

Heather Pierce: Wow.

Now, a little bit more about you, Bob. What is your educational background?

Bob Gross: Well, as I said, I went to grade school here in a Catholic parochial school, Our Lady of Lourdes in Melbourne, and then I went to Central Catholic for one year. But at that time, Mel High²⁵ was rated as [00:21:00] one of the best high schools in the country. I think they were in the top 10. B. Frank Brown was a real innovator in education.²⁶ And they had what they called an "independent study," and that intrigued me, so I ended up transferring to Mel High.²⁷ In independent study, you could pick your own course. Well, mine was archaeology. And they actually would let me leave in the afternoons to go dig in the mounds as part of my high school [00:21:30] education. It was really a boost to me. And we did sciences fairs, and ultimately I won the local science fair in the earth sciences, the state fair, which was held in Jacksonville that year, and then ended up going to the International Science Fair in Dallas, Fort Worth. And I came in fourth place there, so that was really an ego boost, [00:22:00] I mean, to go that far in archaeology.

Heather Pierce: That's fantastic.

Bob Gross: Yeah, it was because I was never really an outstanding student, you know. I did well in the courses I liked, but the courses I didn't like, I didn't do quite so well. But I ended up going to the University of Florida. And I got a Bachelors of Arts degree. They don't give degrees in archaeology, and I emphasized ... In the Bachelor of Arts, I emphasized anthropology [00:22:30] archaeology, so I have an undergraduate degree in that.

Heather Pierce: Now, back in your high school days, it says here ... Let's see, you were elected president of the I.R.A.S.

Bob Gross: Yeah, that's Indian River Anthropological Society. And that's an organization. Again, that got started as a result of treasure hunting, about 1950 ... early 1950s, [00:23:00] maybe '51. Somebody found 17 Spanish coins up on Playalinda Beach.²⁸ Well, that made the papers. Everybody got excited. Everybody was a

²⁴ Yale University Publications in Anthropology: A Survey of Indian River, by Irving Rouse, Number 44; Chronology at South Indian Field, Florida, by Vera Masuius Ferguson, Number 45. 1951.

²⁵ Melbourne High School

²⁶ B. Frank Brown, known as "Mr. Educator," won national recognition as the innovative principal of Melbourne High School in the late '50s and early '60s. Later, as a director with the Charles F. Kettering Foundation, he led scores of international seminars focused on achieving excellence in secondary school. As the '80s began, he chaired the much-acclaimed Governor's Commission on Secondary Schools.

²⁷ Bob's note: "Melbourne High School was proudly known as a school whose library was larger than its gymnasium and as the first high school to offer Chinese as part of the curriculum. Dr. Brown was a supporter of the non-traditional student."

²⁸ 16 Spanish silver coins dated 1677 were reportedly found in 1951.

treasure hunter. And that really kicked off the treasure hunting boom, which still goes on to some extent.

And there was a retired archaeologist living here at that time by the name of E.Y. ... I'll think of it in a minute,²⁹ [00:23:30] but anyway, he got together with some locals. And they formed an organization to do archaeology on a real basis, not treasure hunting. And they formed a group. In 1953, they picked the name Indian River Archaeological Society. And in 1956, they became an official chapter of the Florida Anthropological Society.³⁰ [00:24:00] And I got involved with them fairly early. They actually—there were a few articles in the newspaper about me and my digging in the mounds. I had displays in the library on different occasions and one time in an insurance office in downtown Melbourne. And that made the newspapers. Well, one of the members, one of the founding members of that group, was Cliff Maddox.³¹ He had a company, an electronics [00:24:30] company ... I forget the name of that, but he contacted me and wanted to know if I wanted to join that group, which I did.

And the very first dig I went on with them was at the [Youngerman 00:24:47] mounds, just south of the Eau Gallie Causeway, and Guernsey ... Guernsey, that was his name. E.Y. Guernsey. Guernsey was there. I think George Long might've been there.³² [00:25:00] Cliff Maddox and maybe Griffin³³ or Sears³⁴ from the Florida State Museum.

Heather Pierce: How old were you, Bob?

Bob Gross: Oh, boy. I was probably 16 or 17 at that time.³⁵

Heather Pierce: Wow.

Bob Gross: But anyway, after graduating from high school, they elected me president of that group. I mean, I was ... [00:25:30] I think just—I wasn't even 21 and I became president of that group, which was ... I was over my head. And I said, "You know, I can't do this. I'm going to the University of Florida. I'm not going to be here." But anyway, that was my first involvement with them, which continues today.

²⁹ Dr. E.Y. Guernsey was a retired archaeologist from Bedford, Indiana, who at the time of the discovery of the Spanish coins was living at Cocoa Beach.

³⁰ The Indian River Archaeological Society subsequently changed its name to the Indian River Anthropological Society before becoming a chapter of the Florida Anthropological Society in 1956.

³¹ Cliff Maddox was chief civilian engineer of the Air Force Missile Test Range, founder of DBM Corporation, trustee of Florida Institute of Technology and the Missile and Space & Range Pioneers, and past president of the Indian River Anthropological Society and the Florida Anthropological Society.

³² George Long was the first anthropologist/archaeologist hired by NASA through a subcontractor to conduct archaeological surveys on NASA property in Brevard County. He also served as a longtime professor of Anthropology at the University of Central Florida in Orlando.

³³ John W. Griffin, at this time was an archaeologist with the National Park Service who later became the Director of the St. Augustine Historical Society.

³⁴ William H. Sears, an archaeologist, was at this time working for the Florida State Museum in Gainesville, Florida. He later became affiliated with Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton.

³⁵ Bob's note: "On reflection, I must have been younger, 14 or 15. It was before I could drive a car legally."

Heather Pierce: What about this apprenticeship with an A.T. Anderson?

Bob Gross: Yeah, that was even earlier. There was A.T. Anderson, who I mentioned dug in this mound out in Malabar, [00:26:00] West Malabar, the very end of Malabar Road on land he got from his father-in-law.³⁶ There was an article in the newspaper about him. And one of my friends had a car.³⁷ I couldn't drive. I think I was probably 14 at the time, so that would've been about 1964. He knew I was interested in archaeology and he said, "Well, let's go out there and see the guy." So, we drove out there. Anderson wasn't there. He [00:26:30] happened to be in Washington. His brother-in-law had died and they were up there settling the estate, but there was a young archaeology student minding the place for him. And he showed us around.

Well, later on when Anderson got back, I went out there and we kind of hit it off. And I ended up working for him some summers in high school. And even on weekends, sometimes during the week, I would go out there and stay and help him. And not so much digging as ... Well, we did dig [00:27:00] a little bit, but I helped him. I mowed. I hoed. It was a really great place to be. There was a camp that I would stay in. It was his son's, but his son had moved on³⁸, but it was an old Melbourne City bus that was ... I think it was a 1942 Chevy bus that he had gotten and put up on blocks. That was where I lived for [00:27:30] quite a while.

Heather Pierce: So, you had a lot of experience before even going off to college.

Bob Gross: Yeah. I went to BCC, or BJC, Brevard Junior College, before I went to University of Florida.³⁹ And there was a teacher there, Tom Dooley⁴⁰, who taught anthropology, and another old retired geologist, Bud Knoderer.⁴¹ They were connected with the Indian River Anthropological Society. And they had local digs, which I participated [00:28:00] in quite a few of them. And I organized another dig out at Anderson's with students from BJC one time. We dug a well. And Anderson had us dig a well. He had dug half of this well.

The Indians out there would ... South Indian Field used to be on Lake Hell 'n Blazes, but after time all these peat bogs developed in the lake. [00:28:30] And the island,

³⁶ South Indian Field was owned by Anderson's wife, Lora Nehf Anderson, who inherited the property from her parents, George and Elnora Nehf.

³⁷ Bob's note: "Otis (Odie) Willis was the friend who first drove me out to Anderson's South Indian Field.

³⁸ Albert and Lora Anderson had only one child, a son named George Nehf Anderson.

³⁹ Bob attended Brevard Junior college beginning in the fall of 1969 graduating with an AA before moving on the the University of Florida. Brevard Junior College (BJC) subsequently became Brevard Community College (BCC) and is today (2018) known as Eastern Florida State College (EFSC).

⁴⁰ Tom Dooley was a retired Major of the Marine Corps who graduated with a MS degree in Sociology/Anthropology from Florida State University. He joined the faculty at BCC 1965-1982 Associate Professor and Rollins College as Adjunct Professor teaching Anthropology, Sociology, and Archaeology.

⁴¹ C.F. "Bud" Knoderer; he was a retired geophysicist, a former employee of Gulf Oil in Venezuela who retired to Brevard County and developed Lake Poinsett Homes. He was a charter member and former chairman of the board of trustees of the Brevard Museum of History and Natural Science. He taught classes in local archaeology for Brevard Community College night adult education classes. He also conducted archaeological excavations with Tom Dooly, who taught anthropology and social science classes at the college.

or the Indian mound, became isolated from the lake with these vast bogs of peat. They still had a trail, a canoe trail that would get to South Indian Field but in dry times they didn't have a source of fresh water, so they would dig wells. And after these wells were used, they would use them as dumps.⁴²

Well, Anderson had half excavated this one well. It was well number six on a chart developed by Rouse. And he wanted us to finish [00:29:00] it, so I got a bunch of my high school buddies and we finished excavating this well.⁴³ And it went down really deep into the water table. We had pumps going. We found a tremendous amount of dog skulls-

Heather Pierce: Wow.

Bob Gross: ... which was, they were obviously eating dogs, and they would throw the remains into this old well. I ended up taking a course in zooarchaeology at the University of Florida with Dr. Elizabeth [00:29:30] Wing.⁴⁴ And my project was the analysis of these dog skulls, so that was kind of fun.

Heather Pierce: And speaking of the University of Florida, afterwards you did some training in St. Augustine, some fieldwork.

Bob Gross: Yeah. Part of your archaeological training was to do a field school. And I was fortunate enough ... My mentor up there was Dr. Charles Fairbanks, who was fabulous.⁴⁵ We all called him Uncle Chuck. He was just a great guy. And he was a product, too, of the WPA [00:30:00] era archaeologists, but he was fun. And he led the expedition over to St. Augustine. And we excavated the house of Maria de la Cruz⁴⁶, who had a house pretty close to the fort, kind of outside the cannon range, which they didn't allow houses to be built real close to the fort. And she was a little bit away. I forget what street the house was on. There's nothing there now, [00:30:30] but that was fun. I met a lot of other ... Kathy Deagan, who was famous for her colonial work in St. Augustine and the Caribbean. She was a regular visitor with us when we were working there. There was a lot of others that would come through.

Heather Pierce: Now, you've already told us about some of these sites, but what are some of the most memorable sites that you worked on here in Brevard?

⁴² Bob's note: Not all Indian wells at South Indian Field were subsequently used as dumps.

⁴³ Bob's note: Friends who helped excavate the well were Steve Atkins, Mike Montagne, Greg (Woody) Wood, and Harry (Buzzy) Underhill.

⁴⁴ Dr. Wing initiated a program of zooarchaeology in 1961 at the Florida Museum of Natural History, Gainesville, she continues as of 2018 to research and write papers.

⁴⁵ Dr. Fairbanks was another Depression Era archaeologist who got his start during the depression with the New Deal's Works Progress Administration's (CWA and PWA) funding of Tennessee Valley Authority archaeological projects. A graduate of the University of Michigan, he subsequently became a professor of Anthropology at the University of Florida.

⁴⁶ The house of Maria de la Cruz was on the west side of Spanish Street.

Bob Gross: [00:31:00] Well, there were so many. You know, working as a kid, the things we did back then are federal offenses today. Back in the old days, you could dig in a burial mound. When you talk about "skeletons in the closet," well, I had a bunch of them. In fact, that science fair project, what the theme of that was was a comparison of the Indians on the Indian River to the St. Johns River. And so I had skulls, a skull from [00:31:30] Grant burial mound on the Indian River and one from Little Spade Island on the St. Johns River. And it was ... You know, I was a kid. I didn't know what I was doing, but you know a comparison of the skeletal material and the pottery and stuff. I didn't know at the time, but they were also different periods of time, and that accounted for ... They were really the same people in different periods, but the ones I were comparing weren't from the same period, so it was kind of a bogus science [00:32:00] project, but it got me fourth place in the International Science Fair.

Heather Pierce: Yeah, kept your interest going.

Bob Gross: Yeah. That was ... But as far as with Bud Knoderer and Tom Dooley, we did a dig out at Lake Poinsett where the little ... There's a little restaurant out there now. And there were actually burials there. In fact, we're doing ... One of the projects [00:32:30] we're in now is doing an audit of all the mounds that have been recorded to see what their statuses are. And I have some old pictures of that dig at Lake Poinsett. And we recently went out there and took pictures from the same location, the same area where the dig was. And it's really neat because nothing's changed. They had an old cooler behind the building. That old cooler is still sitting there, even though I don't think they're using it. But that was an interesting dig.

[00:33:00] As I mentioned ... the Youngerman mound.

Heather Pierce: What about this Honeymoon Hill in Merritt Island?⁴⁷

Bob Gross: Honeymoon Hill, there were a couple of digs up there. It's a midden. There's also a burial mound. We never dug in the burial mound, but I understand Bud Knoderer did later. I wasn't on that particular dig. There was the old cistern into the house. That was one of the earliest houses in Brevard County-

Speaker 3: Wittfeld.

Bob Gross: Wittfeld, yeah. Dr. Wittfeld [00:33:30] had a house on the top of Honeymoon Hill. He had come, actually, I think before the Civil War. I think he may have had something to do with the Second Seminole War⁴⁸, maybe acted as a doctor with them, but he was probably the first doctor to live in Brevard County. So everybody would come to him when they were ill. In fact, Douglas Dummett when he was ill

⁴⁷ The area today known as Honeymoon Hill and Honeymoon Lake on Merritt Island was the homestead of Dr. William [Wilhelm] Wittfeld, one of the earliest settlers of present-day Brevard County. He referred to his 152 acre homestead as Fairyland for which he obtained clear title in 1878, though he is known to have lived there much earlier.

⁴⁸ Dr. Wittfeld may have served in the 3rd Seminole War (1856), not the Second (1836-1842) as stated.

came [00:34:00] there and died there. And I believe he was buried there, not by the Indian burial mound but a little bit away from there. But we excavated the cistern to the house and part of the midden. That was back in the ... oh, I think the early '70s. That was an interesting dig.

I did a lot of work with professional archaeologists. Carl Clausen⁴⁹ [00:34:30] and Ripley Bullen came down and worked the Cato site. That was, I think, 1967. I was 17 and some kids, I think the [Lassiter 00:34:42] brothers, were ... By that time, treasure had been found on the beach down there. And I think they were kind of treasure hunting. And there had been a storm and the beach was eroded. And there was a black lens in the beach where sometimes you get a cliff. And skeletons [00:35:00] were eroding out of ... below high tide. Well, they ended up getting a hold of ... well Real Eight⁵⁰ happened to be working on a boat right offshore there. They got ahold of them, showed them what they found. They got ahold of Homer Cato.⁵¹ Homer Cato got ahold of the State Museum, so Ripley Bullen⁵² and Carl Clausen came down. We helped them, a few of us from the Indian River Anthropological Society, do some excavation [00:35:30] right here on the beach in between tides. And that was real exciting.

I actually had met Bullen before then. I had been digging for fossils. One of my Mel High teachers, Gerald Einem⁵³, had collected fossil bones from the Melbourne Bone Beds, part of this deal from the 1920s. And so I got interested in that and I would dig in the Melbourne Golf Course, [00:36:00] some places in Eau Gallie. And I had uncovered the shoulder bone and forearm of a mammoth. And right among the bones was a human jaw.

Heather Pierce: Wow.

Bob Gross: And I assumed, you know, the same age. Well, my dad got ahold of the State Museum, and Ripley Bullen, who was one of the top archaeologists in the state, came down with his wife. And they examined it and I took them out to the site. [00:36:30] And I don't remember the date of that, but it was before ... I think I was like 14 or 15 at the time. And he felt the weight of the human bones versus the mammoth bones, and they had a different density of fossilization, so he didn't think that they were related. But that was the first time I met Ripley.

⁴⁹ Carl Clausen was the State of Florida's first underwater archaeologist.

⁵⁰ Founded in 1961 by Kip Wagner et al, the Real Eight Company was awarded a nonexclusive salvage lease agreement with the Florida Internal Improvement Fund for a lease from Sebastian Inlet to Stuart, Florida for salvaging treasure from sunken along the Florida Coast.

⁵¹ Homer Cato was a long-time area resident, a surveyor by trade. He was a treasure hunter and a collector of local Indian and historical artifacts. The Cato Site was named for him.

⁵² Ripley P. Bullen began his career in archaeology working at the Robert S. Peabody Foundation for Archaeology at Phillips Academy at Andover, MA. By the early 1950's Florida's Museum of Natural History established an Anthropology Department and hired Bullen to become its first archaeologist. He is famous, for among other things, his typology of projectile points.

⁵³ Gerald Einem was an innovative educator hired by B. Frank Brown in the early 1950's as chairman of the Melbourne High School Science Department. He received a National Science Teacher Achievement Award in 1958 and helped the school win national recognition. He subsequently became an adjunct professor of Science Education at Florida Institute of Technology.

And then, let's see ... Who after that? Probably the biggest one, [00:37:00] one of the most interesting one, was out west of Cocoa at one of the trailer parks near Maple Wood. They were expanding the trailer park and digging a ditch. And the heavy machine operator noticed something roll out of the backhoe he was using. And he looked. It was a human skull. Well, they called the sheriff's department thinking it was a [00:37:30] murder again, realized it was Indians, and they called the state. The state sent down ... There goes my mind again. Calvin Jones, who was a great old archaeologist. Calvin had instincts.⁵⁴ He was kind of ... I kind of pattern myself out after Calvin.

Anyway, we did an extensive dig there and the [00:38:00] Indian River Anthropological Society provided a lot of the slave labor, and other people in the neighborhood helped. And I forget how many bodies were taken out of there, but it was an archaic cemetery. And at the time, they thought it might be ones of the oldest cemeteries in the state of Florida. And there was no surface indication that there was anything there. It was something really unique. There was quite a few artifacts, and it was pre-ceramic. It was before [00:38:30] there was any Indian pottery. And I think the dates were 5,000, somewhere in that range, 5-6,000. Maybe.

Subsequent to that, they found the Windover site up in the Windover Farms area, west, southwest of Titusville. And again, a subdivision, a backhoe operator, a skull rolling out of the bucket. And these [00:39:00] were really unique burials in a pond. Glen Doran was the head of that expedition, a multi-year thing.⁵⁵ He had offered me a job to work on the crew and I accepted, but at the same time I got an offer to do consulting work out in Colorado that paid like six times what he was offering me, so I didn't get to work on that job, but it allowed [00:39:30] me to make some money that I could retire early, which brings up a point.

When I graduated from college with a degree, undergraduate degree in archaeology, there were no jobs. It was 1973. It was the oil crisis.⁵⁶ I had one job offer, and that was ... sounded like a dream job, be on supervise a diving crew off the Dry Tortugas on the treasure wrecks. Wow. [00:40:00] It paid \$100 a week. I mean, try and live in Key West on \$100 a week, so I ended up working at Harris Corporation, an electronics firm in Palm Bay. I had planned to go back to graduate school and get a graduate degree in archaeology, but all my buddies and girls I kept in touch with that stayed and went on to get their Master's [00:40:30] right away, you know, I kept in touch with them and they were making like \$6,000, \$7,000 a year you know working, which was a livable wage back in those days,

⁵⁴ Bob's note: Calvin Jones was a Florida State archaeologist who had a certain "old school" instinct for locating archaeological sites. He would review a survey someone had done of a certain area and think to himself, "This can't be all." Walking over the same area he would discover significantly more sites that had been missed. Calvin could smell a site.

⁵⁵ Other members of the Indian River Anthropological Society worked many hours for Dr. Doran on the Windover Site, some as paid staff and some as volunteers.

⁵⁶ The 1973 Oil Crisis began when the Organization Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) began in October of 1973 an embargo of oil to countries they believed supported Israel during the Yom Kippur War. The whole U.S. economy was on edge and companies resisted hiring until the issue was resolved.

but I was making \$10,000 at the electronics firm. "Do I really want to do this?" So, I ended up staying in the defense industry. And I kept on with the archaeology you know [00:41:00] as I could, but I wasn't deeply involved for many years.

Heather Pierce: So when you first arrived here in Brevard County and you were getting involved with the archaeology, what was that community like, and has that grown, would you say?

Bob Gross: No, there was a core group of people back when I first joined the Indian River chapter. There were maybe 15, 20, maybe at the most 30 people at any one time, but there were really only 10 to 15 that were active. [00:41:30] And that's really true today, too, because we've you know... Treasure hunters always want to get involved because they want to know where these sites are, but we've never allowed treasure hunters to be part of the group because they tear up sites, and we try and document and preserve sites. And most of the work we've done over the years was not on our own. Once I got [00:42:00] my degree and realized you know, the right and wrong way to do things, we didn't do a whole lot of archaeology. We mostly supported other archaeologists that were working in the area. And today the community, right now we have probably 35 members, but we really still only have about 15 that are actually, actually involved in going on our field trips and participate in digs.

Heather Pierce: [00:42:30] So, you were a founding member of this society?

Bob Gross: Not the Indian River. There were other societies. I was a founding officer of the South Brevard Historical Society, which was about the same time, I think '66, '67, somewhere in there. I'm a life member of the Florida Anthropological Society and I currently serve on their board. And I'm their unofficial archivist. I'm a life member of the [00:43:00] Southeastern Archaeological Conference, which was the smartest thing I think I've ever done. I bought these life memberships back in the early '80s thinking, "How long do I have to live before I make a profit on these? I'm going to have to live to 45. Gee, I smoke four packs a day. Will I live that long?" Well, I ended up quitting smoking, and it was the best investment I've ever made.

Heather Pierce: So, back to some of these sites. What are some local [00:43:30] threats that these sites are facing today?

Bob Gross: Oh, it's always development. Brevard County had wonderful sites. We had huge middens, I mean, huge middens. But one of the reasons they're not here anymore, starting because of bicycles, of all things. Bicycles? What do bicycles have to do with Indian mounds? Well, in the 1890s, people liked to ... Bicycles became the fashion and everybody wanted a bicycle. [00:44:00] Well, bicycles are kind of hard to maneuver in sand, and all we had were sand roads. I mean, horses, wagons, it was pretty difficult to ride a bicycle in Brevard County. So, the city of Titusville, which was the county seat at the time, "How can we make our roads better? Well, we need to pave them somehow. Well, we can't afford bricks. We can't afford ... Ah! But we have shell and Indian mounds!" So they would mine Indian mounds to get shell to put on the roads. [00:44:30] And they did that from

the 1890s up through the '20s, 1920s. And they just, they destroyed so many mounds, so they're crumbled to dust now under our present day roads. US-1, the old Dixie Highway, was partially paved with Indian ... in fact, one of these loads ...

And Brevard County commissioners would go outside of Brevard County to get these mounds. They would go into Volusia County and buy mounds, [00:45:00] run railroad spurs to them, and haul shell down here to pave our roads. One time, they were dumping out a load of shell in Titusville, and somebody spotted a coin that came in. It had great antiquity. In fact, there was speculation that it was a Turkish coin.⁵⁷ Well, how would a 15th century Turkish coin get into shell, you know, dumped?⁵⁸ They would find things all the time when they were doing that.

Heather Pierce: And [00:45:30] the looting is a problem as well, right?

Bob Gross: Looting. Well, you had guys like Packard that would loot mounds out of curiosity. You have me, you know, as a kid. My buddies and I would dig mounds. Today that's looting. We didn't ... And it was kind of accepted. I mean, Carl Clausen was one of the state archaeologists. And we invited him to come see what we were doing at the Grant mound when we were digging there. And he saw what we were doing. He said, " [00:46:00] You know, you really shouldn't be doing this," but he really didn't do anything to stop us. I mean, it wasn't like, "Don't do this, you know--You shouldn't be doing this." So, it was more or less accepted back in those days, though we know much better now.

But erosion, you know, sea level rising, is a big threat right now. I told you about the Cato mound⁵⁹ where the bodies were buried below low tide.⁶⁰ Sea level—Man's probably been [00:46:30] around here for possibly 20,000 years. We know, we're pretty sure 15. Well, sea level was way down, so there were hundreds of sites down off the coast. And you know, as sea level rose, the people moved to higher ground. Well, all those early sites are destroyed by the active wave action now. And just like today, sea level's still rising and these sites [00:47:00] are being destroyed.

And looters. The St. Johns River, they're allowing air-boats to run up on these mounds and they're washing away.

Heather Pierce: Has the county been involved in protecting these sites?

Bob Gross: No, unfortunately. You know, we have a wonderful program in this county called the Environmentally Endangered Lands Program, where they buy environmentally endangered lands. Well, I wish they would've bought some of these Indian mounds. As a matter [00:47:30] of chance, a few mounds have been

⁵⁷ The Florida Star Newspaper reported in the 1890's that Captain Rice found an old coin in a load of shell from the Packwood place with a date of 1677. Some of the people in Titusville thought it was a Turkish coin.

⁵⁸ 1677 should have referred to a 17th century Turkish coin.

⁵⁹ Bob's correction: "I should have said Cato Site, not 'Cato Mound.'"

⁶⁰ Bob's correction: "...were buried below high tide..."

preserved because they happen to be on EEL's property, but they didn't buy that property because of the mounds⁶¹. So, mounds are being destroyed every day. In fact, the county ran drainage pipes through a big mound out at Lake Washington, which ... How they ever got a permit to do that, I'll never understand. And we monitored what they did and we were able to salvage, you know, quite a bit of material we use [00:48:00] in education programs today.

Heather Pierce: And the introduction of NASA in the Cape, also.

Bob Gross: That breaks my heart. When Patrick Base⁶² came back in the late '30s, and then after World War II when the Air Force took over the actual Cape and NASA took over a good chunk of Merritt Island, they basically leveled everything that was out there. [00:48:30] There was a huge hunting lodge near where Pad 39A and B are today. There was a big Indian mound there. They leveled it. They burned the hunting lodge for fire practice. They burned the lighthouse keepers' cottages for fire practice. They leveled every trace of human occupation out there [00:49:00] before the Cape. I mean just--They did move some houses, some of the people they evicted, they allowed to move their houses, but they weren't fabulous houses. I mean, there had been some fabulous buildings out there before. They're all gone. There's no ... Nobody knows, you know, the extent of stuff. There was a bohemian colony out there. [00:49:30] A lot of the mounds have been preserved, but a lot have been destroyed. Houdini's widow spent a couple of winters out there.

Heather Pierce: Really?

Bob Gross: Yeah. There was a ... Fabulous things went on in Brevard County, and a lot of it's been destroyed by government. Brevard County, they ... and developers, they don't want to know about archaeology because it stops up construction. It can stop a construction project. It doesn't always. It [00:50:00] doesn't have to. People don't realize on a mound, if you want to build ... In fact, they built a house on an Indian mound, part of a burial mound, down on the South Beaches, and they were allowed to do it because they didn't hurt the mound. What they did is when they put in the sewer lines, they excavated the sewer lines. When they built a house, they filled in on top of the mound, so the mound has been encapsulated, so the mound's still there. It's fine. They just were able to build [00:50:30] on top of it without damaging it. So, it costs, you know, some extra loads of dirt. And people don't realize that it doesn't mean the death knell of a construction project. But people don't understand that.

⁶¹ Brevard County Environmentally Endangered Land Program: Pine Island Conservation Area, North Merritt Island, Florida.

⁶² The Banana River Naval Air Station was built in 1938/39 which was decommissioned after World War II. Shortly thereafter the U.S. Air Force secured the old station for testing rockets, renaming the facility Patrick Air Force Base. Soon afterwards they acquired all of the peninsula north of Canaveral Harbor to the Brevard County line and beyond, including Cape Canaveral proper.

Heather Pierce: As far as some important discoveries that makes this area stand out, you want to talk a little bit about the Melbourne Bone Beds?

Bob Gross: Well, those were the bone beds that were found in the '20s. In fact, [00:51:00] a guy by the name of Singleton⁶³ had an orange grove near F.I.T. And he had workers there digging muck out of the Crane Creek basin to put on the orange grove as a fertilizer, and they found some bones. Well, Dr. Loomis⁶⁴, I think, had been down ... again, one of these northern people coming down here in the wintertime to visit. [00:51:30] And I think he was consulted. And he had done work down in Vero. I think that he had already been doing work in Vero, and they brought him up. And they ended up finding just about a whole mammoth and mastodon in F.I.T gardens in that area. In fact, they're mounted at Amherst College in Massachusetts.⁶⁵ And I drove up there one time to see them and they're spectacular.

The [00:52:00] people of Melbourne ... Actually, Singleton offered them to the city of Melbourne because it would be a good tourist attraction. And they were going to mount them in the old Melbourne Hotel, down there on US-1 and New Haven, but they couldn't raise the money to do it, so they ended up ...

In fact, that's the tragedy of Brevard County: with our rich archaeological history, that the county hasn't built a museum of any kind. I mean, they've left it to private enterprise [00:52:30] and we have a nice museum out, which is now owned by the Florida Historical Society and managed by them, but they struggle with it. They get virtually very little public support. And it's really--Brevard County has one of the ... I would wager Brevard County has the richest history of any county in the United States, [00:53:00] of any county, when you consider all of the things that have happened here over the years, from Ponce de León naming the very first geographical landmark Cape Canaveral in 1513, I mean, the very first thing, and sending man to the moon. The French were here. The Spanish were here. The British were here. We have a tremendous ... All of the different Indian tribes [00:53:30] that passed through here. We just have a tremendous history here and we don't capitalize on it. We don't preserve it. It's a tragedy.

Heather Pierce: So, what are some of your hopes for the future of archaeology?

Bob Gross: That we get a county commission that can appreciate what we have here and take steps to help preserve and promote.

Heather Pierce: Is there anything else you'd like to add, Bob? Any mentors or interesting information [00:54:00] that we should know about?

⁶³ Charles Singleton

⁶⁴ Frederic Brewster Loomis was a professor of mineralogy and geology at Amherst College, Amherst, MA.

⁶⁵ The Mammoth and Mastodon are mounted in the Beneski Museum of Natural History at Amherst College, Amherst, MA.

Bob Gross: Our group, the Indian River Anthropological, really acts ... We really do for free what the county should be paying for. We're doing an audit right now of all the historic sites in Brevard County. We have over 3,500 registered historic sites in Brevard County.⁶⁶ A lot of them are mislocated. A lot of the files are incorrect. A lot of them have been destroyed and the state [00:54:30] records don't show that, and so we've made it our ambition to investigate all 3,500 of these sites and assess their present condition. It's a huge job. I didn't think it was going to take this long, but it's going to take years to accomplish because we're finding so many errors in the record.

And what the tragedy is that because of the Historic Preservation Act of [00:55:00] 1966, as amended, communities, states, cities, counties are supposed to take in account historic preservation. And on public projects especially, there's supposed to be an archaeological survey and assess any damage. Well, what happens is because these files are so wrong, when somebody goes to do a project over here and they check the files, there's no record of anything being there, so they go ahead and dig and build [00:55:30] and whatever. And then because the site's over here, they've got it in the wrong location. And then some poor slob over here has property and he wants to do something. He goes to pull a permit and there's a record of a site being there, so he pays for a survey to be done and they find nothing because it was mislocated. So we find errors like that all the time, all the time.

Heather Pierce: And a recent site you've been working on is one is [00:56:00] Melbourne Village.

Bob Gross: Right. We're doing, like I said, most of the work that the Indian River Chapter has done over the past years is salvage on these projects. When developers find something, they cover it up because they're afraid a project will be stopped, so that's a huge destruction. We help visiting archaeologists like on Windover and Gautier sites. They have what they have now are CRMs, contract [00:56:30] resource management organizations, that come in and do these archaeological surveys. We give them assistance.

We've discovered that a lot of sites that we thought were recorded aren't. We never really had ready access to the site files before. We always had to go to Tallahassee, and like I said, there's 3,500. Now we have digital access to the sites and we can see. And we see so many sites that aren't recorded that we know are there. One of them was in Melbourne [00:57:00] Village. And we recently did an excavation there, very limited, just to prove that it is a site, and we did prove that it is a campsite. And the people of Melbourne Village have already preserved this site and will continue, but now they have more of an appreciation for the history of this site.

We found another site out at Lake Washington that we've known for years that it's been there. It's on the old maps, but it was never recorded. [00:57:30] You

⁶⁶ The 3,500 does not include the same sites that may have been recorded twice or sites for which a site number was assigned but no report ever filed.

know, how could they have missed this site? So we did a little bit more extensive work out there and we've documented it. And we know, in fact, there was a log cabin on it way, way back, so it's not only an archeological site pre-Columbian, it's also got some interesting ... In fact, the Houston family may have lived there when they first came here in the 1850s.⁶⁷

Heather Pierce: Early family in Brevard.

Bob Gross: Yeah, one [00:58:00] of the earliest families in the southern part of Brevard County.

Heather Pierce: What about this half-built canoe?

Bob Gross: Yeah, another thing we respond to is people find things and they contact us. And they want to know about this and that. And we got a call from one of the ranches out on the other side of the St. Johns River. And they said their grandsons had been out hunting and they think they found a dugout [00:58:30] canoe. Could we come out and investigate it? Well, we went out there and it was really hard to get to, but we got to it. And it sure looked like a dugout canoe. I mean, it was ... But then we started to uncover it to figure out how long it was, and it was like 51 feet long, which is huge for a canoe. But when we--half of it was buried. And when we went to uncover the part that was buried, well, there was still bark. [00:59:00] It hadn't been hollowed out. Only like half the canoe was hollowed out, which made me feel this may not be a canoe. Maybe this is some natural ...

Well, when the boys first found it, what got their attention, there was an alligator living in it. He was laying in the hollowed out part, a big alligator. So I got to thinking, maybe his coming and going off of this is what hollowed it out? So, anyway, I brought it to the attention of the state. And there's two people that are [00:59:30] the canoe experts, Julie Duggins⁶⁸ and Donna Ruhl.⁶⁹ And they're the canoe experts, and they want to come down and see this. It may be a canoe that was in the process of being made and they abandoned it, or it may be natural. We just don't know at this point.

But we do a lot of that, when people come with things. Every couple of months, we get somebody that has found something that wants to know. Recently with the drought, [01:00:00] a boy out on the St. Johns, on one of the ranches too, found a wooden bowl. I mean, a beautiful, beautiful wooden bowl that has great antiquity. I mean, it could be thousands of years old. It was preserved in the mud. So, you just never know what's going to turn up here.

⁶⁷ John Carroll Houston (born in 1813) moved from the shores of Lake Monroe, Volusia County, FL to Brevard County in 1858, first living on the shores of Lake Washington and later purchasing land at the junction of the Indian River and the Eau Gallie River.

⁶⁸ Julie B. Duggins, an expert in Florida dugout canoes, is a state archaeologist who, at the time of the oral history (2018), is a supervisor of Public Lands Archaeology under the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources (Tallahassee).

⁶⁹ Donna Ruhl is an expert in Florida dugout canoes who is employed by the Florida Museum of Natural History as the Collections Manager/Florida Archaeology (Gainesville).

Heather Pierce: Just recently with our storm, there was another canoe that washed up, right?

Bob Gross: There was another canoe that washed up from the last hurricane, Hurricane Irma, [01:00:30] which was really exciting. We weren't involved in that one. They got ahold of the state directly. And they came and took it. And they're going to preserve it. The last I heard, the carbon date on it came back about 1640.

Heather Pierce: Wow.

Bob Gross: So, it's a historic canoe. And from the picture in the paper, I haven't seen it yet, but it looked like it was made with metal tools and it had some square cut nails in that I don't know ... they must've been forged square nails, [01:01:00] I would think, if it's that old. And it looked to me like it might've been rigged for sailing. Now, there was a lost mission here, a Spanish mission, back in the 1600s, so possibly it may have had something to do with that.

Heather Pierce: And I see you have one more artifact there. Is that anything you'd like to talk about?

Bob Gross: Yeah. This is, talking about the Melbourne bone beds, this is the mammoth tooth that [01:01:30] was found with the human, part of the human jaw back that-

Heather Pierce: It's incredible.

Bob Gross: It is. It really is. And these animals wandered all over here. There's a lot of them still buried in the ground here, and there's evidence of early man here, which really needs to be investigated and hasn't been because we have undisturbed sites here of this era. And they spent hundreds of thousands of dollars [01:02:00] down in Vero on a site recently that has been greatly disturbed.⁷⁰ And we have sites up here that are undisturbed, but we don't have hundreds of thousands of dollars. Anybody out there-

Heather Pierce: Donations welcome.

Bob Gross: Yeah.

Heather Pierce: Alright, and your chapter from the Indian River Anthropological Society was recently recognized.

Bob Gross: We were, which was very gratifying to me. Our parent organization, [01:02:30] the Florida Anthropological Society, at their last annual meeting awarded our chapter the Arthur R. Lee Chapter Award, which is a recognition of our good work. And again, we do a lot of work that the county ought to be paying for that we're doing for free in an effort to ... in fact, our ... I need to read this because I can never remember it. Kind of our motto, which is on our stationary [01:03:00] right

⁷⁰ It has been reported that some 2 million dollars has been expended at the Vero Man Site.

now, it's: "64 years of public service dedicated to the study of Florida's," Brevard in particular, "Florida's anthropological, archaeological, and historical resources through investigation, documentation, interpretation, preservation, and, most importantly, education." And that's kind of like the last thought I'd like to leave you with.

Heather Pierce: Well, thank you so much for being here with us, Bob. I really appreciate it.

Bob Gross: Thank [01:03:30] you.