I still remember, with a mix of embarrassment and grief, an afternoon when I was maybe fifteen, eating mullet with my mother at a mom-and-pop restaurant in Panacea, a destitute fishing hamlet near our hometown of Tallahassee, and she suggested she buy me a book on display, Jack Rudloe’s *The Living Dock*. At the register, I picked up a copy of *The Living Dock*, a chronicle of biological specimen collecting. Rudloe is a bit of a local hero—or Yankee environmentalist, if you ask the folks who across the decades have sunk his specimen collecting boat, slashed his tires, and vandalized his aquarium—and my mother knew that our precious awareness of tidal flats and estuaries, horseshoe crabs and nurse sharks, stingarees and lightning welks, was due to Rudloe’s aquarium. He had taught the Florida Panhandle what a wetland was.

The book didn’t look professionally printed. Examining it closer, I wondered if it was a vanity press. If it was a serious book, it couldn’t possibly be written by someone from Panacea. I put it down and told my mother something like, “It doesn’t look very good.” If you wanted to be “successful,” you had to leave Tallahassee, and it followed that serious writing happened elsewhere, too. Many of my studious high school classmates have followed paths similar to the one I have taken over the years, leaving town for university, which in my case involved studying Mandarin and asking questions and traveling places that far exceeded the provincialism of home. It may seem strange to attach the emotions of “embarrassment” or “grief” to the rejection of a book, but that moment is diagnostic of more than just my youthful arrogance, or an almost cliché violation of the golden rule of not judging a book by its cover. It gets to the heart of whose knowledge is valued, and why. It is a question as banal as content distribution, and it determines how places are defined and how people choose to inhabit them.

A decade after that afternoon, I have read *The Living Dock*, and aim to be the world’s foremost Rudloe scholar (or, perhaps more sadly, its only Rudloe scholar). His writings of Florida’s Forgotten Coast are as essential as the work of Aldo Leopold, Marjorie Stoneman Douglas, Annie Dillard, and deserve to sit amongst the nation’s foremost latter-day nature writers. As a graduate student in cultural anthropology and an ethnographer, I am writing about regional belonging and the sometimes tense struggles of commercial fishermen and environmentalists in the region. The collection whose bibliography I submit here is local writing from the Forgotten Coast and Red Hills, most of it nature writing or at the intersection of natural and cultural heritage. It comprises books, brochures, and postcards, many of which have never been nationally distributed and, sadly, never found an audience.

What sets my library apart is that I did not amass it—it amassed me. Years of books fallen into my lap, given by a friend, found in a Goodwill, purchased on impulse, were not gathered with a goal or project in mind. Even more, I would argue they were not gathered based on a unified interest (surely my interest was in the place I am from, but this was almost something that did not register in my conscious). Haunted especially by so many projects in which my own autobiography is caught up—the overdevelopment of Florida which has wrecked its environment, the genocide of Florida’s first peoples...
through settlement, the enslavement of Africans to feed Middle Florida’s plantations—
curiosity led me here, or there, and, like an ethnographer entering the field, one book
would introduce me to another, and then to another, until finally I could feel the
community of scholarship and perhaps that intellectually I could be a part of it. As I
studied Chinese-owned resource extraction in the Peruvian Andes, but found myself
eager to read John Muir’s *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* and Edward Baptist’s
account of the settlement of Tallahassee in my free time, I realized, drawn by the call of
texts, that there were worthy questions to be asked of northern Florida, and that it could
be a site of anthropological attention.

At first, this claim about the importance of my collection seems entirely personal,
and sentimental. Furthermore, you could ask: what could be more mundane than a
collection of books for one’s dissertation topic—that is exactly what so many scholars
possess! I contend that the way this collection designed me, rather than myself designing
collection (and I admit that this must always happen in some way in a private collection,
but especially so here), is symptomatic of the state of education today: it would have been
difficult to conceive of the collection in advance, just as it was difficult to conceive of
anthropological research in my home region. Growing up, the official education of my
generation was remarkably evacuated of the local. Part of the modernist project, the
textbook industry, and the movement toward education accountability, we learned of the
environment, not of the local environment. Of national and world history, not of state or
local history. This came home to me after reading *Longleaf: As Far as the Eye Can See*, a
book I found at the bookstore in Apalachicola, Florida, an oystering town near Panacea.
The book paints the story of the possible rejuvenation of the Longleaf forests—what was
once a seventy-million acre forest stretching from Texas to Virginia. The longleaf is
different than other pines—they survive lightning fires, grow spread apart, and through
those brush-clearing fires provide one of the brightest understories of any forest,
brimming with insects and flowers, now recognized as highly biodiverse. Those forests
through European settlement were reduced to only three percent of their historic range,
and most of the longleaf forests’ residents are threatened, endangered, or extinct.

Until last year, reading that book, I barely knew there were different pine species.
I had certainly never heard of longleaf, or at least never had it form a lasting impression.
Yet I grew up not only in a tract subdivision house built on what was once almost
certainly longleaf forest, but near some of the final remaining stands of longleaf on quail
hunting plantations in the Red Hills north of Tallahassee. A treasure in our
own backyard, of which most of us are entirely unaware.

*Far as the Eye Can See* led me to Janisse Ray’s *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*,
a memoir inflected by nature writing that has influenced how I understand cultural and
natural heritage in Florida and the Southeast. I began realizing that I was not so much
collecting a niche of regional literature—specializing, say, in environmentalist tomes—but
that the environment was the very defining of feature of the Forgotten Coast and Red
Hills life, as so many activists sought change from so many of the harms inflicted in an
era of commercial expansion and racial segregation. These voices were the cries, pleas,
dreams, and hopes of the elementary school teachers who reared my classrooms and I, of
communities struggling to make a meaningful path into the twenty-first century. Yet that
same era pushed us to look past freshwater springs toward parking lots and chain stores,
past the passing pine forests with life hidden by monotony toward the asphalt horizon.
My collection, seeking a different horizon, is young. Although some, such as *Voices of the Apalachicola*, I have had for a decade, bequeathed by the author, a folklorist for the water management district in Tallahassee who was the mother of a high school friend, most of the books and ephemera have only been in my life for a few years. I see their value not in their rarity as finds (although some of them are finds), but as instruments for further use. Indeed, in a sacrilege that a library prize committee might find abhorrent (I ask you my forgiveness), I have scribbled my notes in pen in many of the texts, even the rarest. They are not a temple but a schoolhouse.

I hope not only to add books of my own writing to the collection—an ethnography of Florida ecological lifeways, and a Tallahassee *bildungsroman*—but to inspire this collection in others that I meet, trading recommendations and ideas such as with Caty Greene, the librarian of the Apalachicola Municipal Library who has the only northern Florida collection I have found that outran mine (that libraries with far more relevant volumes exist is beyond a doubt, but my educated guess is that they are not so focused and explicit on this regional bounding, or as accessible to those in the region or made of use by them).

As both a collector and a writer, I look forward to the day when my scholarship of those who have worked so tirelessly for northern Florida, such as Jack and Anne Rudloe, is printed as a monograph, and I ask it to be displayed on the counter at The Coastal Restaurant in Panacea, wherever the heck it is. May it be a time in the history of education when a young person, aspiring to great things, may pick up that utterly local book, recognize its value, and imagine where on a shelf it might fit.

**Bibliography**


Account of the settlement of Tallahassee as a slave-fueled plantation frontier.


Paperback facsimile. Outside of the Forgotten Coast and Red Hills region, but essential work of Florida nature writing.


By leading Florida environmental journalist.

Locally printed collaborative project of short essays by leading Florida nature writers rallying against the prospect of offshore oil drilling and galvanized by the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill.


This seventy-page brochure encourages readers to “Explore Undiscovered North Florida.” Given to me by a member of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, it is perhaps the key reference for the tri-county region of The Forgotten Coast and Big Bend.


First edition paperback. Several dozen chapters of nature writing from the Tallahassee region.


Oral history volume, signed by editor.


I recommend this coffee table book to everyone I meet. It takes a pine forest that looks monotonous and dull and, through attention and love, transforms it into one of the most compelling landscapes you could find.


An account of an escaped slave in Spanish Florida who joins the Maroon community at the Negro Fort on the Apalachicola River. Recommended to me by Diane Roberts, author of Dream State.


Paperback with afterword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Novel by acclaimed anthropologist and folklorist of Crackers working in turpentine industry on Suwanee River.

This first-edition hardcover, whose illustrated maps of northern Florida on the endpapers include towns that no longer make the map, is likely the work closest to an ethnographic monograph that has been published in the Florida Panhandle. Jahoda, trained as an anthropologist and following her husband to a professorship in Tallahassee in the 1960s from Chicago, is one of the first authors to define the Florida Panhandle in opposition to southern Florida in terms of lack of development and modernization.


Self-published collection of dozens of tales involving encounters with wildlife by the founder of the Spring Creek Restaurant, dedicated to local foodways. Purchased in a grocery store in Crawfordville, Wakulla County, Florida.


This text was acquired at the Gulf Specimen Marine Lab and The Back Door Press claims to be situated in Panacea (a town without a red light or a gas station, so I doubt it has a publishing house), but I do not know where it was printed. I believe it was self-published. It recounts the adventures of a fisherman and biological specimen supply assistant in Panacea. Ribald humor, as if the beat generation meets mullet fisherman.


Reprint of 1885 adventure novel by Harper and Row regarding a schooner arriving in Wakulla County (the home of Panacea). Likely the author never traveled to Florida. Found in a Goodwill.


First published 1916. Although Muir never walked along the Forgotten Coast he was waylaid for several months in neighboring Cedar Key along the Gulf Coast with malaria.


Memoir of town mayor.

Published by the Apalachicola Area Historical Society. Signed by Apalachicola Municipal Librarian Caty Greene.


This issue contains “A Sausage Run with the Band,” by Padgett Powell, a write-up of visits to Bradley’s Country Store and the Bradfordville Blues Club in Tallahassee, and “Find Your Ground,” concerning the preservation of Tallahassee’s Frank Lloyd Wright House. This issue has value to me because when I subscribed to *Oxford American* this first arriving issue included a piece by Powell, my former writing mentor, and by Roberts, who I did not know at the time but who now has become a mentor. Both inspire me to write about Florida and the South.


Perhaps the most acclaimed environmental text of the U.S. South.


Family history and state history mixes in this hilarious book, by a professor I am now proud to call a mentor, focused in large part on Wakulla County where her grandparents lived.


Meditations on solo retreats in the swamps around Panacea.


Reprint of a 1977 publication by Alfred A. Knopf, including illustrations by Walter Inglis. Hardcover.


First edition signed by the author.


A paperback by a globally known author that address environmental conflict in the Florida Panhandle.


Considerable environmental history of the St. Joe Paper Company, which once owned the majority of the Florida Panhandle. Given to me by author June Wiaz, the mother of a friend from college.