

Glass Bottle Analysis of E.R. Bradley's The Beach Club on Palm Beach Island, Florida

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Introduction

In the summer of 2017, the Preservation Society of Palm Beach began a \$2.7 million renovation of the historic Bradley Park (Wenzler 2017). Among the renovations included the demolition/relocation of several trees, and massive trenching through out the property for irrigation, plumbing, and electrical lines. The Archaeological and Historical Conservancy (AHC) conducted an archaeological assessment and monitored all ground-disturbing activities in the park. A segment of the irrigation trench and subsequent archaeological excavations revealed a historic trash pit from E.R. Bradley's gambling house, named The Beach Club. The club was in operation from 1898 to 1945. The excavation yielded large amounts of glass bottles and decorative china. An analysis of the bottles provides a glimpse into the drinking habits and consumer lifestyle of the establishment.

Brief History of the Town of Palm Beach

The historic name for the abutting waterway and local area was Lake Worth named after the

Second Seminole War major general, William Jenkins Worth. The first permanent settlers arrived in 1872 creating homesteads and farms. In 1878, a ship carrying coconuts from Havana, Cuba for Barcelona, Spain wrecked off the coast. The nearby Lake Worth settlers used the coconuts to create coconut plantations. In 1886, the farmers renamed the town Palm Beach to reflect the new coconut industry (Town of Palm Beach).

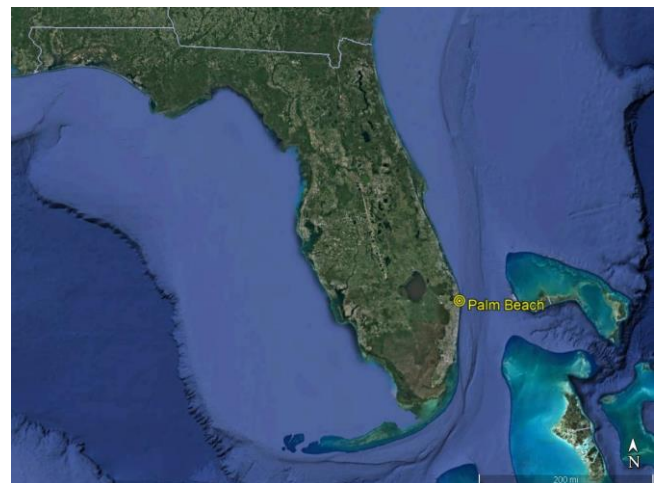


FIG. 1. General map of the Florida Peninsula with the location of Palm Beach

¹Archaeological and Historical Conservancy Inc.,

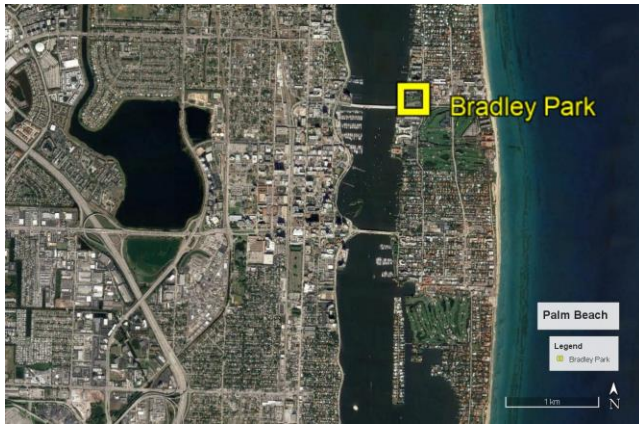


FIG. 2. Location of Bradley Park in Palm Beach

The town began to shift from farming to the tourist trade in 1880, the island portion of the town known as Palm Beach Island. The Coconut Grove House was the first hotel built to welcome tourists from the North. The town began to grow with restaurants and construction of winter homes for the seasonal boom. In 1896, Standard Oil magnate, Henry Flagler built the Royal Poinciana Hotel to service visitors using his railroad line, The Florida East Coast Railroad (Town of Palm Beach). The prime business opportunity created by the influx of the wealthy northerners caught the eye of Colonel E.R. Bradley.

E.R. Bradley and the Beach Club

Colonel Edward Riley Bradley (1859-1946) was an entrepreneur from Johnstown, Pennsylvania. He amassed a fortune through varied professions such as steel mill laborer, prospector, and gambling. Eventually running several gambling halls in Arkansas, Tennessee, Missouri, and a hotel in Chicago, Illinois (NMRAHF: 2016). He moved to St. Augustine in 1891 and then to Palm Beach seven years later (Florida Department of State: 2000).

In 1898, E.R. Bradley built the Beach Club on Palm Beach Island just north of the Flagler Resort. The Beach Club was a members only club, tea house, restaurant and illegal gambling den. The gambling hosted a variety of games including roulette, hazard, and chemin de fer. Vice was very heavily regulated through out the 47-years. Drinking and smoking were relegated to the dining area. Men and women could gamble but only

to the limit of 5,000 dollars. Membership to the club was very exclusive as only men could join and they could not be Florida residents. According to Tom Bohne, secretary to E.R. Bradley, the Colonel only wanted money from tourists, not money from locals (Historical Society of Palm Beach County).

E. R. Bradley was a major philanthropist during his time on Palm Beach Island. A devout catholic, he donated heavily to the local churches including an organ to the Methodist church (Historical Society of Palm Beach County). Bradley also donated to Saint Mary's Hospital and West Palm Beach Public Golf Course (Department of State: 2000). He closed the Beach Club in 1945 and died in 1946. He stated in his will, the property would be given to the city for the construction of a park. The entire club including staff quarters was razed, leaving only the historic tea house preserved (Preservation Society of Palm Beach 2017). Only a portion of the tea house remains standing today.



FIG. 3. Colonel Edward Riley Bradley (1859-1946)

Bradley Park Archaeological Survey and Monitoring

A phase 1 cultural resource survey documented a prehistoric site within the northwest quadrant of the park. Subsequent excavations and monitoring yielded prehistoric ceramics, and a large shell midden containing extensive shell refuse and faunal remains. Across the park, several historic artifacts from the early 1900's were found including bottles, glass inkwells, and even a small porcelain doll's foot. Just east of the tea house, a utility



FIG. 4. Front entrance of The Beach Club, ca. 1940



FIG. 5. The Beach Club facing South ca. 1945. Blue = beach club, red = staff quarters, green = the tea house

trench excavation uncovered an approximated 4-meter wide trash pit containing large amounts of historic glassware. AHC archaeologists collected all diagnostic fragments of glass from the trench and excavated a 1 x 1-meter test unit on the western border of the trench. Whole bottles of various makes, china decorated with palm trees, and preserved champagne labels were collected providing insight into the daily consumption of casino guests.

Glass Bottle Analysis

This assessment was based on the number and typology of the bottles. The bottles were divided in four groups: whole, neck fragments, bottom fragments, and undiagnostic fragments. At the time of excavation, only diagnostic parts were collected. The bottom of the bottles contains maker marks, factory scars and other useful traits for placing time and origin. Likewise, the neck

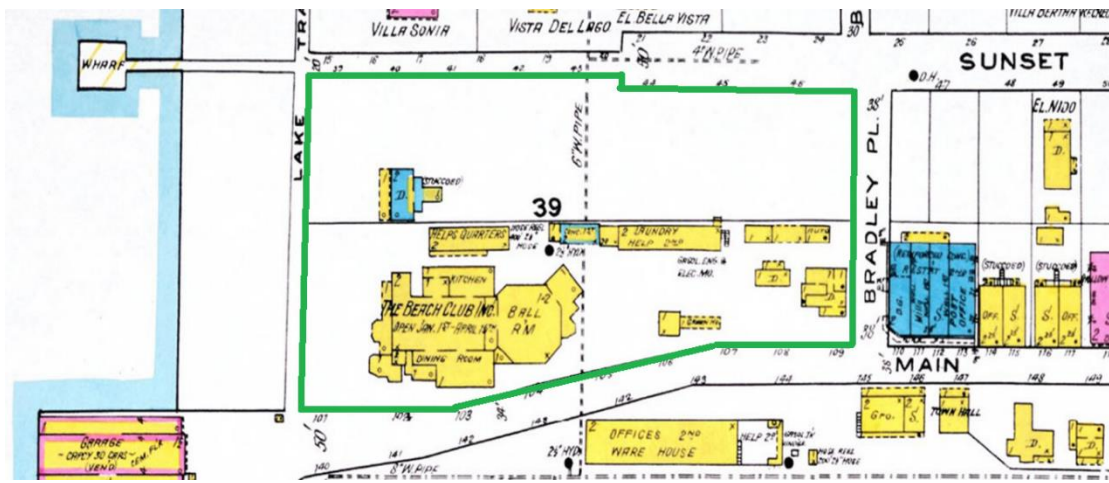


FIG. 6. Historic Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of The Beach Club (property marked in green) ca. 1919



FIG. 7. Historic trash pit in Bradley Park

and lip provided diagnostic attributes to determine chronology and type.

The broken bottom of the bottles may match up with the upper portion fragments. To avoid the redundancy of counting a bottle twice, only whole bottles and the upper portions (ie. necks and lips) were used in the count. There were far more upper halves and they were more useful for identification.

Several sources were used for the identification of the bottles. The first source was “The Historic Glass Bottle Identification & Information Website” created by Bill Lindsey¹. It has a vast

¹ Lindsey was an employee of the Bureau of Land Management, and voluntarily created this data base hosted by the Society of Historic Archaeology.

set of pictures and catalogs for identifying historic bottles by their parts. The second major source used was Crystal Geiger’s Master’s thesis “Seminole and Settlers on The Florida Frontier: Using Glass Bottle Analysis to Reconstruct Daily Life at Stranahan’s Trading Post, Fort Lauderdale”. The thesis focuses on historic glass specifically in South Florida, which gives a much narrower geographic database to focus on.

The majority of the bottles were wine and spirits. Beer was identifiable by their brown color, cylinder body, and crown top. Beer was the most plentiful in terms of the number of bottles but if one takes into account volume, champagne and wine were the most imbibed. The champagne bottles held their iconic Burgundy wine shape



FIG. 8. North profile of test unit 1



FIG. 9. Left: mineral water bottle. Center: “Dry” champagne label. Right: China with palm tree decoration

with champagne cork top (Lindsey 2014). There was only a small quantity of heavy liquors such as whiskey, scotch and gin bottles with only six identifiable bottles.

The third-largest category was the mineral water bottles. They were the largest quantity of non-alcoholic beverages as there were only three soda bottles. They are identified by their torpedo

shape, light blue color and applied blob lip. Their specialized shape was to help package them on their sides on overseas voyages (Geiger 2015). These carbonated waters may have been drunk alone or in a cocktail.

Outside of beverages, there were 6 bottles with various possible household functions. These include bitters, medicine and condiment bottles.

These may have come from the kitchen, bar, or the staff quarters as they lean towards both a domestic service and a hospitality service.



FIG. 10. Soda bottles

This study is a preliminary assessment of the artifacts collected, but it indicates that the casino clientele preferred lighter alcohols such as champagne and beer. According to the historic record, the club owners tried to downplay heavy drinking as much as possible. In the words of Tom Bohne:

“It was difficult to control,” said Bohne, especially during Prohibition, when diners brought their own beverages: “They would be called to the telephone [and Bradley would] meet ‘em and say, ‘Young man, you’re drinking a little heavy tonight. Come back tomorrow and

everything will be settled.’ If the fella got unruly, he was out. But it was done in a nice manner.” (Historical Society of Palm Beach County).

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