

An ethnographic look at the archival process—rediscovering the Mann-Wagnon family history

By: Jessica Rubano  
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Project Director: Antoinette Jackson

## **Acknowledgements**

Under the direction of Dr. Antoinette Jackson of the USF Department of Anthropology, the Heritage Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) was designed to help prepare participants to study emergent social-cultural research and resource management issues faced by communities interested in heritage as a key cultural resource in areas such as quality of life programs and policies; education; tourism; historic preservation; youth activities; civic and environmental empowerment; and neighborhood revitalization. It is conducted in collaboration with local community groups, including groups in Sulphur Springs and Spring Hill in Tampa, Florida. An analysis of the Sulphur Springs and Spring Hill communities – both past and present – will be profiled through specific research projects and presentations prepared by USF undergraduate researchers as part of this program.

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## Introduction

This research paper and ethnographic profile is the product of research done during a six week course in heritage research and preservation Florida entitled, *Researching American Culture*. It is based on fieldwork and archival research conducted as part of the Heritage USA REU Summer 2010 program at the University of South Florida. The course examines issues associated with conducting ethnographic fieldwork and analysis in an American cultural setting and asks what is American culture and how do we conduct research in an American cultural context.

This paper examines the property, history and heritage of the Mann-Wagnon family, who once resided in the neighborhood of Sulphur Springs in Tampa, Florida and inhabited the property that is now designated as the Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park. Three non-profit organizations, The Sulphur Springs Museum and Heritage Center, Community Stepping Stones and The Moses House are currently located and operating in buildings that were once owned by the Mann-Wagnon family. The property has become the site of the Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park since the death of its former owner, Cecile Wagnon, and has faced various circumstances regarding its future. It is worthwhile to investigate the history of this property and the heritage of this family not only for its own sake, but also because of the fact that this site provides space for community organizations to function and positively impact the residents of Sulphur Springs. Moreover, it is beneficial for the community at large to have access to this kind of historical information about previous members of Sulphur Springs, and their contributions to its development as a neighborhood of Tampa. This research project serves to build upon an already existing ethnographic/ethnohistoric profile, through the collection of relevant documents for this property and examination of archival data about this family.

This account is set within the context of Section 3 – Training the Young – of Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd's book, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture*. Of particular relevance are chapters 14 (The Things Children Learn) and 15 (Those Who Train the Young), because my research is

primarily concerned with information that relates to these categories. History is one of the major subjects taught to each generation of youth, and historical information can be presented, shared or passed on by a number of people and organizations. Preserving the history and heritage of Sulphur Springs, as well as providing a home from which to educate people today about such a rich and diverse history, are among the central goals of the Sulphur Springs Museum and Heritage Center. This non-profit seeks to educate the youth about the history of its neighborhood and engage them in activities that positively shape the community. By consulting and inspecting various resources related to the Mann-Wagnon family, I plan to address the topic of training the young as it pertains to the Sulphur Springs community and museum in particular. In framing my analysis within the context of researching an American community as outlined by the 1929 Lynd study of Middletown, I approach this discussion from the perspective of education. This is because I anticipate that this information will be used to help educate the community about the Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park, and help the community educate others about the history and heritage of Sulphur Springs, of which the Mann-Wagnon family is a part.

### **Literature Review**

A major emphasis of the USF Heritage REU is to fill in the gaps left by untold or unknown histories and to preserve those stories and heritage information for future generations to learn and enjoy. My research aims to follow that lead, and to provide the Sulphur Springs Museum and Heritage Center with historical data about Cecile Wagnon, her family and her old property that is located at 1101 E. River Cove St. along the Hillsborough River. It is my hope that the materials I have been able to gather from multiple sources will serve the interests of the museum and be utilized for educational and/or exhibit purposes. Most heritage research that has been done on Sulphur Springs relates to the Arcade, Water Tower, Pool Complex, Theater, Harbor Club, the Springs and other prominent features that epitomized the thriving community of the 1920s. A Self-Guided Walking Tour has been made available

on the museum's website, mapping out and describing these historic markers in the neighborhood. One stop especially stood out to me: #10 Robles Family House. This family and property possess historical significance, and their story is shared with the public. This is perhaps where my research could help fill in or add to the family histories already being documented and presented to others in the community.

A key article that provided insight into the ethnographic approach within a community setting, and which assisted me with my own research, was Antoinette Jackson's *Conducting Heritage Research and Practicing Heritage Resource Management on a Community Level – Negotiating Contested Historicity*. In her concluding paragraph she writes, "By engaging diverse segments of the community's population and addressing a range of periods of time, a public profile of Sulphur Springs is emerging that is more representative of the breadth and depth of experiences, memories and activities of all community residents, former residents, and visitors on a variety of levels" (Jackson 2009:10). In conducting research on the family and property of Cecile Wagnon, it became evident to me that exploration of various time spans was necessary. I needed to obtain deed records, census documents, court accounts and newspaper articles that ranged from the 1880s to present day. Although my project did not solicit the participation of diverse members of the community, it did assist in building upon the public profile of Sulphur Springs by adding parts of the Mann-Wagnon family's life, activities, genealogy and unique history to the present record. As former residents of the area and as donors of some fairly significant riverfront property, it makes sense to include their stories (as incomplete as they still are) in the broader narratives already being told about this once-thriving community in Tampa.

Jackson mentions how collection of oral histories, analysis of housing patterns, examination of archival data and studying leisure activities were great starting points for ethnographic research (Jackson 2009:10). Of these, the most appropriate and applicable for me to employ was the examination of archival data. The sources and documents that would become available via this method would prove to be invaluable in my pursuit of information and further knowledge of the Mann-Wagnon family and

park. I also appreciated the overall description of the Sulphur Springs/Spring Hill communities and history in this article, especially the inclusion of Table 1, because the timeline helps to create a context within which to place the life and history of the Mann-Wagnon family. Particularly relevant is the Segregation 'Jim Crow' Period, encompassing the years 1883 to 1964.

Excerpts from John Spradley's *The Ethnographic Interview* were helpful in carrying out the process of ethnography as well as learning the proper techniques and skills required for successful research. In Part Two: The Developmental Research Sequence, the claim is made that "the best way to learn to do ethnography is by doing it" (Spradley 1979:42). I would have to agree with this assertion after having undergone six weeks of intense learning and rapid application of ethnographic principles and methods. It is one thing to read about survey construction, interviewing techniques, participant observation and archival research strategies, and quite another to really "get" them. It was important for me to have background knowledge, but it was also critical for me to jump in and begin experimenting with the ways in which ethnographic data is collected, recorded and described.

Spradley also mentions how essential it is for the researcher to begin writing an ethnography (written cultural description) *early* (Spradley 1979:42). By doing so, one is able to think critically about the data collected, interpret it, recognize patterns, suggest further questions and explore more leads that arise from the process of writing and analyzing. Further, the task becomes less and less menacing as steady chunks of the research paper begin to materialize. I was thankful to have weekly reports due as the research project developed and progressed; without these compulsory assignments I may have been tempted to do what Spradley warns against, which is "wait[ing] until after all the data are collected to begin writing, [for] it will be too late to follow the leads that writing creates" (Spradley 1979:42). There was many times that this advice came in handy, as I found myself pulled in different directions and tracking down various leads in the material pertaining to Cecile Wagnon, her family and her River Cove property.

In Step Three: Making an Ethnographic Record, I found his breakdown of field notes to be helpful, specifically, the “Field Work Journal” section since I did not have the privilege of conducting personal ethnographic interviews. It states that the “journal will contain a record of experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during fieldwork” (Spradley 1979: 76). This procedure of documenting events and feelings as well as updating advances or dead ends in research significantly shaped the way I pursued and found sources of information. It also provided a mechanism by which I could sift through the times that were productive and those that proved fruitless. Dating the entries and writing clearly were invaluable habits, and they made things considerably easier when it came time to recall series of events or particular research details. I appreciate a distinction Spradley makes when he says, “doing ethnography differs from many other kinds of research in that *the ethnographer* becomes a major research instrument” (Spradley 1979:76). During the weeks of ethnographic research, I most certainly felt like an instrument as I drove around downtown Tampa visiting city offices, speaking to important contact people and hunting down key files for my research.

Harry Wolcott also provided me with an approach from which to frame my own steps of research in his work, *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing*. In chapter three he describes ethnography as a way of looking, which involves experiencing, enquiring and examining. These three elements parallel the usual named categories of participant observation, interviewing and archival research. Most relevant for me was the last one, “an activity in which the researcher turns attention to what has been produced by others” (Wolcott 1999:47). In order to research the Mann-Wagnon family and property history I was compelled to look at documents and written records that were available for public viewing. I was not privy to private letters, diaries, photos or other personal papers inaccessible by others in the community, since the topic of my research related to a deceased person and park site that is now in the hands of three non-profits, along with the City of Tampa and Hillsborough County.

The closest I thought I came to participant observation was one day of surveying Sulphur Springs residents who lived on the streets near Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park, in an attempt to find out who knew about the park and museum. The majority of my time was spent examining written sources rather than experiencing and enquiring about the area and its people from a more personal, active level. Wolcott points out, however, that a fairly compelling case can be made that historians and biographers actually rely upon participant observation “for every move they make as researchers” (Wolcott 1999:58-59). My decision to follow one route of information and not another, or to visit one place and not somewhere else influenced the data I gathered and the subsequent analysis. In this way, I was a participating observer whose subjectivity and creative thinking informed not only my methodology but also my results and interpretation.

When Wolcott mentions how “written records can be a vital source of data” and “sometimes they are, or become, the major focus of it [research]” (Wolcott 1999:59) he might as well have been talking to me. Early on, it became clear that this was going to be the case for me. Virtually no one from the surveying knew much about the park, the former owners, its history or the heritage museum there. So, interviewing old-time residents was out of the question, and inspecting records from the past was the necessary focal point – whether they were deeds, wills, marriage licenses, censuses, newspaper clippings, or court-directed papers. He also affirms this kind of research when he says, “there is plenty of opportunity, and need, for including history in the work of the ethnographer” (Wolcott 1999:59). This speaks to my research because one reason I investigated the history of the Mann-Wagnon family in addition to the changing of the property site over time, was that the legacy of this family is Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park, a site where three non-profit, youth-oriented organizations have space to operate. It is important to answer the question of who these people were, especially in light of the fact that without their donated property/funds, present day community organizations may not be possible.



The last point that piqued my interest was regarding the tension between devoting enough time to doing original research and giving attention to archival sources (Wolcott 1999:60-61). Ethnographers, as opposed to historians, place great value on field work because this forms the crux of their inquiry. Background and archival information is useful and necessary, but it is only a support to the research rather than an end in itself. Generation of new research is desired so that new insights and information is available to place in the existing record of data, thus filling in gaps and broadening the story. On the other hand, knowledge of the present archives has to be factored in so that these gaps can even be identified in the first place. And it takes lots of time and patience to acquire exhaustive understanding. As for my research, there were not previous studies on the Mann-Wagnon family or park that I could look to, so in a way I needed to go about creating one for them. To do this, other archival records were crucial to initiating my investigation and giving me leads to follow, in addition to laying down the greater historical context of the early to mid 1900s Sulphur Springs community.

Russell Bernard's *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* gave me some final pointers in conducting literature searches, mostly using online databases. He writes that "if your library has LEXIS/NEXIS, don't consider any literature search complete until you've used this system" (Bernard 1995:135). Taking his advice, I made sure to browse this database to find articles from major newspapers in Tampa like The Tampa Tribune and St. Petersburg Times, which ultimately proved fruitful and helped me learn the skills of successful online searching not only with this database but others available through the library and elsewhere.

Lastly, *The Other Side of Middletown: Exploring Muncie's African American Community*, discussed important themes that arose when studying a particular culture and community. The one used to frame my research in the Sulphur Springs community was taken from chapter 5 – Training the Young. The theme of education was selected because the reason for gathering historical information about the Mann-Wagnon family and park site is educational purposes. The Sulphur Springs Museum and Heritage

Center lists as one of their goals, “to broaden awareness and educate the public about this historical community’s role which dates back to the 1920s” (<http://www.sulphurspringsmuseum.org/about-us.html>). As members of this community during that time period, the Mann-Wagnon family shares in its history and development. Also, as former owners of the property on which the museum now resides, they hold a special place of significance. If Cecile Wagnon did not choose to bequeath her estate to the city and county in her will, then it may not have become the memorial park it is now, with three non-profit organizations operating and serving the community.

In *The Other Side of Middletown*, one resident says, “I think that the home, school, church, relatives, and siblings should all come together to help young people at an early age to become students” (Lassiter 2004:134). There was great value placed on education in the town of Muncie. Likewise, there are numerous residents in Sulphur Springs who desire their youth to become educated. Places like the home, school, church and in this case also community organizations all play a role in training the young; they instill values, offer instructive activities and provide a safe, positive atmosphere to learn. The chapter also describes how, “information regarding black history and culture was not always covered adequately by the mainstream education and media” (Lassiter 2004:142). This applies to Sulphur Springs as well, where its predominantly black population does not get equally represented. Special programs, events or groups may be necessary to supplement their children’s education. The Sulphur Springs Museum is an example of one such place where further educational resources and historical perspectives are included, with African-American stories made more visible. Just as, “Muncie has numerous programs that encourage education, promote self-respect, and support family ties” (Lassiter 2004:154) these hubs of creativity and instruction for the youth in Sulphur Springs offer a way to promote life-long learning, community values and knowledge of one’s history.

## Methods

Through examination of available documents such as city records, historic maps, online databases, internet sources, city directories, newspaper articles, and other public accounts, I was able to conduct library and archival research on the Mann-Wagnon family and park property. I visited a number of places in downtown Tampa, and talked with various people who could provide me with or direct me to potential sources of useful historical information. I began my journey at a group meeting with the community partners, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson. It was there that I got introduced to the Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park and Sulphur Springs Museum. In selecting a research topic, it occurred to me that very little information was known about the previous owners of this property, aside from the fact that Cecile Wagnon bequeathed it to the city and county in her will for the purposes of museum buildings. Also, the county's parks and recreation department offices were located there at one time but had subsequently moved, leaving the property vacant and in disrepair. This minimal knowledge of the people after whom the memorial park is named sparked my curiosity and led me to dig deeper into the archive records in an attempt to discover who these former residents of Sulphur Springs were. Who comprised their family? How did they make a living? What was their former home and property like before, and how has it come to be like it is today? These were some of the questions I sought to address during this short 6-week research experience. And it was quite the experience!

In place of interviews and participant observation, reading and researching texts were my primary means of carrying out this ethnographic endeavor. Under the instruction of my professor, coaching from my graduate mentor and direction of the community partners, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, I set out to accomplish the task of researching the Mann-Wagnon family and River Cove property. I read through numerous background materials on Sulphur Springs that were made available to us as students of the course, *Researching American Culture*. Among this literature were previous ethnographies, articles by our professor, an essay entitled *Sulphur Springs Community Profile and Land Analysis*, two

theses *Reconstructing the Past: Heritage Research and Preservation Activities in Tampa Bay Communities and Mapping a Generation*, taped interviews and other relevant documents. Readings on qualitative research methods were also accessed in order to learn the principles and strategies of conducting ethnographic research well. With these helping to formulate background knowledge and approaches to inquiry, I moved forward to collect newspaper articles, public records, genealogical information and just about anything I could about the Mann-Wagnon family and property. Writing field notes and keeping a written account of my findings and experiences along the way proved to be an essential part of the ethnographic process. With each new piece of data I moved closer and closer to drawing a rough sketch of who these former residents used to be, along with how the present-day park site came to be.

### **Ethnographic/Ethnohistorical Analysis**

After a less than successful day of surveying the immediate houses near the River Cove property and Sulphur Springs Museum, it became apparent to me that no one really knew anything about the history of the Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park, and that oral histories/interviews would not be useful in collecting information about this family and park site. I discreetly remember one woman even saying “there’s a park down there?” So, it was off to the library, the city, the county, the internet, just about anything except the exciting realm of ethnographic interview. I first tackled what was immediately available on the internet, most of which were fairly recent articles from the Tampa Bay Tribune or St. Pete Times: “Sulphur Springs residents reclaim their park” reads one, and “Park could become arts hub” declares another. I also made several trips to the USF Special Collections in hopes that something would surface relating to this family or rather obscure park locale. Not much was there aside from city directories, sanborn maps and marriage license records, but I was glad at least that much was available and helpful.

The directories I examined were from 1925 to 1961, and revealed information about residencies, marital status and occupations. I learned that Cecile and William Wagnon were married and living in Sulphur Springs by at least 1925. They experienced a change of address once, between 1925 and 1929, from h585 S Spring to h7904 11<sup>th</sup> SS, an address that corresponds to property within the Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park. During the years 1929 to 1957 Cecile lived next door to her brother, Merton Mann, whose address was h7903 11<sup>th</sup> SS. Between 1925 and 1929, Merton married Eillen and moved to this new location. William Wagnon's occupations included salesman, real estate agent, auditor and accountant while Merton Mann was once employed as an architect, inspector and consulting engineer. Between 1944 and 1949, William Wagnon died, leaving Cecile a widow. The only marriage license I could obtain was for Leverett Mann (Cecile's father), who wed Ida Hale on October 29, 1907. The 1925 city directory showed that he and Ida lived at h es 15<sup>th</sup> 1 n of Hanna av.

The newspaper articles I found reiterated some of the basic information about the park's condition since the death of Cecile in 1961. For almost 20 years, it housed the offices of Hillsborough County's Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department until they vacated the property in late 2008. The property (spanning 2 acres) houses six buildings and a shed, and despite some deterioration, the structures are repairable (Clear 2009). Beginning in 2009, three non-profit groups – Community Stepping Stones, the Moses House and the Sulphur Springs Museum – underwent legal and administrative matters in order to make the park at 1101 E. River Cove Drive their new home. The museum has been collecting artifacts, oral histories and information about Sulphur Springs for many years, but will not be able to share these with the public until they formally open (precise time is yet unknown). The city and county now own the land, and are responsible for making sure that any plans or monies spent are in accordance with the will of Cecile Wagnon. Organization leaders say that “they hope the three groups' presence in the park will help neighborhood revitalization efforts” (Clear 2009).

It was interesting to discover that Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park was once home to a county natural history museum that evolved into what is now the Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI). The museum, a log cabin previously inhabited by Cecile's brother, offered exhibits, art and photography classes, but unfortunately suffered termite damage and was later torn down (Steele 2009d). MOSI evidently has in its possession many of the museum's artifacts. Cecile and her husband purchased the property in the 1920s, living in one house and renting two others. At her death, a friend lived in one of the rentals. One person described, "it was like a family compound" (Steele 2009d) and Cecile's sister actually owned property nearby during that time. In recent years, residents pass by the park site and don't realize that the non-profits are operating there; many assume that county offices are still there or that the area is closed to the public. This helps to explain why so many individuals surveyed around the neighborhood were uninformed about the upcoming museum at Mann-Wagnon Park.

The oldest newspaper article I found related to the park site was from the St. Pete Times in October 1973, entitled, " 'Progress' Shelves a Servant". It described how Professor Clyde T. Reed (age 83) was essentially pushed out of his position as director of the run-down museum on River Cove Avenue by Hillsborough County Commission officers. He had served as director since 1966 and was replaced by Murray Mayfield (age 44), former director of MOSI in Grand Junction, CO. The Tampa museum was inspected by a team from the American Association of Museums in Washington, D.C. and refused accreditation due to its poor condition and inadequate administration under Reed. He points to inadequate funding as the reason for building deterioration, and asserts that he "built it from nothing to what it is now" (Castillo 1973). The commission, however, had different plans for the financially-troubled museum, and decided to replace its leadership in order to bring new life to the institution. This story sheds light on the development of the initial museum in Sulphur Springs and the present MOSI.

The next logical step to take after I got my feet wet with library and internet research was to visit some offices downtown in a wild goose chase after the so-called "Mann-Wagnon papers" (I have

yet to believe these exist by the way, but perhaps a future researcher could prove me wrong). Everyone was convinced the Tampa Bay History Center had them, so I traveled there with a teammate to try our luck. To my disappointment, all they had on Sulphur Springs history was a medium-sized file folder of old newspaper clippings, most of which discussed the usual: arcade, water tower, springs, pool, tourist club, greyhound track, railroad bridge. It was not until I visited the City of Tampa's Clerk Office that I made my first "big find". I had never been to any of these official buildings before, and it was a little confusing if not intimidating when I first went. However, I was fortunate to meet a man in the Real Estate Division who was well-acquainted with the Mann-Wagnon case and who generously provided me with all kinds of documentation concerning the property's fate in court. There were old maps, probate records, reports about how the property was to be used, a few deeds, a couple agreements regarding the park and its buildings, and the official last will and testament of Cecile M. Wagnon! There were also some documents that I knew had some significance but the legal jargon completely lost me.

Obtaining a copy of the last will was crucial to my research because the fate of the Mann-Wagnon property relied significantly upon its statements. Cecile bequeathed to the City-County Cultural Committee of Tampa lots 1-8 inclusive of block 64 and lots 1-5 inclusive of block 72 to be used as a Memorial Park, in memory of her husband W.M. Wagnon and brother Merton M. Mann. She left many articles and books for the museum that was to be prepared there, and specified that no other buildings be placed thereon aside from museum buildings. It also indicated that any "remaining cash is to be paid to the City of Tampa and County of Hillsborough for the purpose of building a room included in the Museum to be built on the property" (1960 Will). She arranged to be cremated and have her remains kept in the Sylvan Abbey in Clearwater, Florida. Some cash, jewelry and other personal items were given to three of her friends, and the rest of her estate was left to her executrix.

The man from the Clerk Office also gave me a document called, "Agreement among Hillsborough County, The City of Tampa and The Arts Council of Hillsborough County, for the

Management & Operation of the Buildings at the Mann-Wagon Memorial Park”. It was a 12-page agreement signed in early 2010, specifying the duties, obligations and permissions of each party concerning the park property. It mentioned how both the city and county own undivided half-interests in the park, and that the property was donated to them in 1963 for use as a public park. The Arts Council was established to develop facilities for the use of the arts, and the Mann-Wagon property provided such a space without interfering with its desired use as a public park. The agreement was mainly concerned with providing for the management and operation of the park buildings by the Arts Council from that point forward (2010 Agreement).

Another document, entitled “Three-Party Agreement for the Refurbishment of Mann-Wagon Park” was drawn up in summer 2000, between the City of Tampa, Hillsborough County and Museum of Science and Industry. It offered some new information about the property, such as lots 1-5 of block 65 being acquired by the city and county through the estate of Eileen M. Mann, Cecile’s sister-in-law. They also received all remaining cash in the Wagon estate (following necessary payments), totaling \$18,000. In October 1963, the city endorsed its undivided one-half interest in the trust funds to the county for use according to the terms of the Wagon will, but not without the city’s consent. In July 1974, a resolution was passed by the Hillsborough County Board to renovate an existing building (#8), the Cecile M. Wagon Memorial Hall, and to designate the premises as Mann-Wagon Park. The natural history exhibits formerly on display in the Memorial Hall were moved to MOSI for proper care since the hall suffered deteriorating conditions that were later considered too impractical to repair (2000 Agreement).

The total accrued funds of the estate, totaling \$128, 504 as of April 1999, are for restoring and refurbishing the Mann-Wagon Memorial Park in the future. MOSI will retain all transferred articles and artifacts, and if any funds remain after enhancements to the park, these can be donated to establish a Mann-Wagon endowment at MOSI and collection display of the Wagon natural history artifacts. The last couple items from City Hall that proved useful in tracing the history of the property and its



exchanging of hands were two deeds. In the first, dated June 1959, Cecile Wagnon sold the estate of the late Eillen Mann (lots 1-5 of block 65) to the city and county for a sum of \$7,650. The other, dated April 1964, described the sale of block 63 of Sulphur Springs Addition to the city and county by Mabel Whittaker, a woman whose relationship to the Mann-Wagnon family is uncertain. Two maps of the property were also given to me, and were of use in associating property allotments with past decisions.

A couple trips to the Hillsborough County Courthouse and I just about lost it. The amount of time it takes to sit down and scan through a microfiche for deed and marriage records was so brain-numbingly meticulous I wanted to die. However, my graduate mentor and I got through it and we came out with some success. We were searching for evidence of how the Wagnons' (and Manns') came to own the River Cove property, and found at least three directly relatable documents. I felt firsthand the joy that accompanies hours and hours of intense document searching, and which is summed up by exclaiming in a somewhat higher tone than you intended, "Yay! I found something!" It would have been easier to be given a cluster of papers to inspect (like at City Hall) rather than seek them out on my own, but then I would have missed out on the entire process of archival research I had been reading about. So, in a way I was thankful to experience this aspect of my ethnographic journey.

The public records I found at the courthouse were all deeds, some of which pertained to the Mann-Wagnon park site. One set of documents were for indirect deeds (filed under those purchasing land) and these revealed how some of the River Cove property became home to the Mann-Wagnon family. In October 1921, W.M. Wagnon bought lots 1-5 of block 72 of Sulphur Springs Addition for \$10 from a married couple from TN. In May 1922, Merton M. Mann purchased lots 4 and 5 of block 65 of Sulphur Springs Addition for \$600. In November 1922, W.M. and Cecile M. Wagnon purchased lots 6 and 7 of block 64 of Sulphur Springs Addition for \$1500. I also came across a deed wherein Ruth Wagnon, a widow, sold property in Alice Kelley Subdivision of Hillsborough County to W.M. Wagnon (her son and Cecile's husband) in 1913. When I looked at listings for direct deeds (filed under those selling land), I

found two documents for Cecile Wagnon, a widow at the time. In July 1948, she sold property in South Tampa and in March 1951, she sold lot 18 of block 55 of Sulphur Springs Addition, each for \$10. This information shows that the Wagnons' did not only own the park property, but other property in Sulphur Springs and Tampa as well.

A final fieldtrip I took was to the Arts Council of Hillsborough County, where I received some duplicate information but also gained another map of Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park (showing the county's parks and recreation department administration office proposed changes) as well as property records from the Hillsborough county property appraiser website, detailing some building characteristics and values. Last but not least, I registered for a two-week trial at Ancestry.com in order to access online census records. There is so much information on this site that it got pretty overwhelming at times, as I sat there searching over and over again, combinations of names like Cecile Mann, William Wagnon, Cecile Wagnon, Merton Mann, Ruth Wagnon, Ruth Wagner, etc. Again it was tedious, but it had its rewards. I found at least 12 records spanning from 1880 to 1945 censuses. I should have examined more records from the Florida Death Index and Marriage Collections, but I ran out of time. Exploring Ancestry.com could be a project unto itself in my opinion, and the data collected from those records could easily fill an essay of its own. Rather than give details of the family profile here or synthesize all the information I found, I have decided to attach some of the census records in the appendix. These can serve as starting points for further researchers who may choose to investigate the Mann-Wagnon family in the future, or simply be available to those interested in such details about this particular family of Sulphur Springs.

## **Conclusion**

The research I was able to carry out over the six week period yielded a great number of documents and sources that relayed information about the Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park. This discussion was primarily focused on the background of the property and its exchange between owners,

in an effort to document this aspect of the Mann-Wagnon family and legacy. The River Cove property is a special area of Sulphur Springs because it is not only a memorial park near the river, but also a place where outreach to youth in the community is made possible. The Sulphur Springs Museum, Community Stepping Stones and The Moses House all benefit from having this property passed down to the city and county through the will of Cecile Wagnon. These two governmental entities, along with the Arts Council of Hillsborough County, are responsible for overseeing the park and making decisions (whether financial or otherwise) that agree with the spirit and intent of late Wagnon's last will and testament. So far it appears as though the terms and resolutions have not violated Cecile's final desires for her property. The property has indeed been designated as Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park, and at present it houses some museum buildings that hopefully will fully open and engage the community shortly.

In terms of building an historical and biographical profile of the Mann-Wagnon family, I have only begun the process by accessing census and death records through ancestry.com. It became clear how complicated and detailed family histories truly are as I spent hours searching for this family's information. It can become very confusing and frustrating, especially when names, dates, categories, occupations and such are written unclearly. It did give me a greater appreciation for genealogy research and the patience and dedication it must take to do that routinely. By conducting this type of research, it showed me how important it is to document a person's life and save written accounts about them. The Sulphur Springs Museum values family histories and previously untold stories of residents who once made a home and living in this neighborhood of Tampa, especially African Americans. They serve to broaden the perspective of the community and educate members (and visitors) about how Sulphur Springs has developed and changed over time. Things like businesses, recreation areas, properties, family ties, oral histories and community organizations give structure, shape and identity to this neighborhood. Though White and part of the dominant culture having its stories told, the Mann-

Wagon family was still part of Sulphur Springs, and through their legacy of the Memorial Park, they continue to be.

Some further research steps to take is organization of all the census record data collected and inspection of more public records available at the Clerk of the Circuit Court. It is clear that the Wagnons owned much property in Tampa, in addition to the park site under study, and it would be interesting to discover deeds for all land they had once owned. As it relates directly to the future operation of the Sulphur Springs Museum and Heritage Center, staying up to date with ongoing decisions and articles concerning the Memorial Park is important. Lastly, it would be beneficial to follow up with MOSI on the status of its Mann-Wagon natural history collection that is currently held there. I was only able to find out that some articles are on display in the library there, but it may be valuable for the Sulphur Springs Museum to remain aware of its status and potential as a source of educational material.

### **Notes**

My participation in this summer Heritage USA REU program is part of a long term heritage research and ethnographic study being conducted under the direction of Dr. Antoinette Jackson through the USF Department of Anthropology Heritage Research Lab. All data collected as part of my participation in this program will be stored in the USF Heritage Research Lab per terms and conditions of the University's IRB protocol.

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## Appendix

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- 1913 Property Deed between Ruth Wagnon and W.M. Wagnon
- 1921 Property Deed between J.H. McDonald/wife and W.M. Wagnon
- 1922 Property Deed between Birt/Carrie Jameson and W.M./Cecile Wagnon
- 1922 Property Deed between A.B./Annie McLean and Merton M. Mann
- 1948 Property Deed between Cecile Wagnon and A.P./Jewell Murphy
- 1951 Warranty Deed between Cecile M. Wagnon and Beuren T. Foster/wife

City of Tampa Clerk of the Circuit Court, Real Estate Division

- 1956 Easement Deed between Cecile Wagnon and the City of Tampa
- 1959 Property Deed between Cecile Wagnon and City of Tampa/County of Hillsborough
- 1963 Order Approving Accounts and Directing Distribution, Petition of Marjorie Vann
- 1964 Warranty Deed between Mabel Whittaker and County of Hillsborough/City of Tampa
- 2000 Three-Party Agreement for the Refurbishment of Mann-Wagnon Park and the Facilitation of and Enhancement to the Display of the Wagnon Natural History Collection at the Museum of Science and Industry.
- 2010 Agreement Among Hillsborough County, The City of Tampa, and the Arts Council of Hillsborough County for the Management & Operation of the Buildings at the Mann-Wagnon Memorial Park.