

## The Discovery of Wekiva



**Mill Creek with Wild Iris Stand**

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Columbus Day is coming and I am wondering, again, who cares? Christopher has been given all the credit for the western hemisphere and that date is just about the only one you can expect an entire class of college students to know. Meanwhile, the man who discovered the cell in 1665, a hundred years after the founding of St. Augustine, is forgotten entirely and his date is lost.

The cell is ten thousand times more important than the West Indies or Florida. It belongs to all of us in the great chain of living beings. If we give Columbus credit for the whole of the hemisphere, we could give what's-his-name credit for all of life and our understanding of it. The cell is such a marvelous continent, not to mention a galaxy of creative activities. Christopher himself could not have been born without it.

It is irrelevant whether Columbus was the first, some say, because he was the first after whom so many have followed; but the string of discoveries following Columbus would be a sequence of places on the map that gradually got itself into a realistic shape. Now there are surely no places left to be discovered by the children of Columbus and then of course had he stayed home or gone fully astray, the natives here would merely have filled the continent as well and eventually perhaps have poured over into Europe.

The sequence of discoveries about the cell, by contrast, is endless. Right now you can see your cells, read their alphabet, follow the evolution of your kind in the cells, and soon you will be able to create whole new species of living creatures by cell-cultures that will go beyond the fearful myth of Frankenstein. It wasn't that way for our seventeenth-century explorer of the microworld of organisms.

His name? Robert Hooke, a member of the Royal Society of London who invented and discovered a great many things, but has not, before recently, been of any great note. Hooke invented a state-of-the-art air pump that allowed Boyle to discover his law for the compression of gases. However, his great claim to fame was his book of microscopy *Micrographia* which includes elegant pictures of the world below normal sight. The hundreds of scientists working for the St. Johns River Water Management District can't do without that.

The problem with crediting Columbus with a great discovery is that it makes land and its concomitant power more important than the community of earthkind that inhabits land, more important than body and mind, those cellular things that are so often credited with leading us astray. As a small "d" democrat, I would much rather celebrate Hooke Day because it entails all of us, our individual powers, and the powers of the human quest for objective understanding and healing truth than memorialize the bigotry and greed which characterized much of the spirit of the conquistadors of all the imperial countries of Europe.

Imagine if Columbus had only waited for Hooke and his followers to complete their discovery before he set sail. Then he might have known enough about the cell to stay home and keep his diseases to himself. Well, that's silly, I know, and all discoveries are in some sense as inevitable as narrow. But navigation of the seas, while an important human mastery long ago achieved by many species of birds, fish, and mammals, is nothing compared to navigation of the pathways of metabolism by which a thousand enzymes and reactants traffic back and forth from head to toe.

When I think of the fruits of discovery of every kind, looking to the future, I am overwhelmed by the potential for good in microbiology. In faithful dedication to such things, we look past all the features of human culture and politics which often cause the greater ills of the planet to the simple, healthful truths of life itself, those divine details, by which all of us organisms live. Many creatures have died for these truths, mostly non-human, and many others have survived otherwise deadly injury and disease because of the steady traffic of the navigators following our Captain Hooke.

In Europe and many other cultures of the earth as well, the world was pretty much always imagined as round, but someone had to sail around the sphere to show it. Columbus didn't actually prove the world was round, but falsely concluded his experiment when it hadn't yet succeeded. Hooke did just about the same. People had imagined small units of matter, atoms, but no one conjectured that life was all cellular. Hooke, looking at oak bark through an early thirty-power microscope, saw the truth, but concluded it was a feature of the species of oak to be so organized. It was left to others to expand that truth. Buddha Thor knows that science and discovery gather like a storm on the high seas and rain down upon our river.

The spherical shape of the earth is conducive to communication of all kinds and on the larger scale mirrors the felicitous size of the cell. The cell lives and operates in the Wekiva Zone, a special system of cycles and recycles where chemical actions are usually in balance, coming and going in a relatively timeless mode. History counts for little in this realm of non-stop flow.

We don't know the name of the first human to discover Rock Springs. William Delk seems to have been the first with a property title to it. Dr. Howard Kelly was perhaps the first to see its value for posterity. More important than all of these firsts, however, is our discovery, our first and then repeated coming to the headwaters of Wekiva and floating down the run. Every year, half a million of us make this discovery throughout the basin and confirm thereby the fact of the community we are building here and its preservation for all of earthkind. Our cells are us.



**The Rise and Fall  
of  
Mill Creek Cellulose**