



**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Earliest Known Map of Florida Goes on Exhibit at the Tampa Bay History Center**

**The 1511 map, one of only 20 known copies in the world, anchors a new exhibition of rare maps in the History Center's Touchton Map Library.**

(Tampa, Thursday, Sept. 10, 2020) --- Every school kid knows that Spaniard Ponce de Leon was the first European explorer to “discover” Florida. But, was he?

A new exhibition of rare, early maps at the Tampa Bay History Center includes one map that suggests otherwise.

“The Shape We’re In: Early Maps of Florida” opens Saturday, Sept. 19 at the Tampa Bay History Center and includes one of the rarest Florida maps in the world.

Printed in 1511, the “Peter Martyr” map as it’s commonly known, is the first to show the Florida peninsula, two years before Ponce de Leon arrived on Florida’s east coast in 1513.

Incredibly rare, there are only 20 Martyr maps known to exist worldwide, and Tampa is now home to one of them.

“It really is a map of firsts,” says Rodney Kite-Powell, the Touchton Map Library Director at the History Center. “It’s the first printed map of the Caribbean, the first map to use the name “Cuba,” and the first map to hint at a large land mass north of the Caribbean,” he said.

The 16th century Martyr map is the centerpiece of an exhibit that includes some of the oldest - and often inaccurate - printed maps of Florida, one of many in the exhibit to show European settlers' evolving understanding of Florida's geography.

Also featured is a 1513 map, which might depict Florida or might depict Japan; a 1594 map, which is unusual in that it features a sea monster along with the Florida peninsula; and a 1601 map of Florida that, though not particularly accurate, includes the place name Tampa on a printed map for the first time.

While some maps distort the shape and coastline of Florida, others show features – or omit features – within the peninsula. Some geological inaccuracies survived well into the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, such as a mountain range shown on a 1768 map of East Florida.

“Early map makers struggled with Florida,” said Kite-Powell. “Many of the maps featured in this exhibition show mountain ranges, islands in the interior of the state, sea monsters and other inaccuracies,” he says. “You can really see the shape of Florida come into view as the centuries pass, and as people begin to better understand the contours of the peninsula. It’s really neat to see this evolution through maps.”

“The Shape We’re In: Early Maps of Florida” is on view in the Tampa Bay History Center’s Touchton Map Library beginning Saturday, Sept. 19 through Sunday, July 4, 2021. For more information, visit [tampabayhistorycenter.org](http://tampabayhistorycenter.org) or call 813.228.0097.

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Map images for media use available on request.

Located on Tampa's Riverwalk, the **Tampa Bay History Center** includes three floors of permanent and temporary exhibition space focusing on 12,000 years of Florida's history and culture. A Smithsonian Affiliate museum and accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, the History Center includes the Touchton Map Library and Florida Center for Cartographic Education and the Witt Research Center, and is home to the Columbia Cafe. One of Tampa's premier cultural venues, the History Center's hands-on, interactive exhibits and theaters provide an entertaining and educational experience for visitors of all ages. For more information, visit [www.tampabayhistorycenter.org](http://www.tampabayhistorycenter.org).