November 18, 2017 - Dr. Nancy de Grummond, Professor of Classics at Florida State University  
*Demons at the Door: To Hell, with the Etruscans*

Dr. de Grummond’s lecture reviews Etruscan beliefs about the afterlife. It was originally conceived of as a happy place for the deceased among the ancestors. In later times, however, it radically changed and became populated with a variety of monsters and demons, often hovering at the liminal point of the doorway to the tomb. In addition to these creatures, Etruscan tomb paintings and sculptures reveal numerous details of Etruscan concepts of the afterlife: the journey (on foot, by chariot, by boat, on horseback), the gate to the Underworld, activities in the afterlife (games, banqueting, love–making), the nature of the landscape, and the rulers of the Underworld. Finally, Dr. de Grummond compares the Etruscan concept of the Underworld with those among Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, and others.

October 21, 2017 - International Archaeology Day

The Archaeological Institute of America—Jacksonville Society and the Beaches Museum and History Park will present the fourth annual International Archaeology Day fair on Oct. 21, 2017 at the museum, 380 Beach Boulevard, Jacksonville Beach from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. A lecture by Vicki K. Rolland will take place at noon in the historic 1887 chapel in the park. See next entry below for further information on this lecture.

Sept. 16, 2017 - Dr. Terry G. Powis from Kennesaw State University  
*Early Monumental Construction and Middle Preclassic Maya Development at Pachitun, Belize*

The practice of sub–surface excavations of plaza space is not often a highly sought after method of investigation for those researching the ancient Maya. What is more, the usefulness of plaza excavations is generally thought to be limited to merely recovering datable artifacts belonging to successive construction phases associated with the buildings along a plaza’s edge. However, some archaeologists have begun to realize the utility of this investigative approach – one that emphasizes the search for early Maya buildings, or even entire communities, beneath plaza surfaces in site centers. The amount of data recovered can significantly impact one’s understanding of a site’s formation and development.

In the Belize Valley, there has been a concerted effort since the early 1990s to recover information about the Preclassic Maya through sub–plaza research. This approach has been very effective at Pachitun resulting in the recovery of an abundant amount of data pertaining to the earliest inhabitants of the site’s two main plazas, Plaza A and Plaza B. Initial occupation in the 9th century BC begins with the construction of domestic structures in Plaza B; its households focusing on the mass production of shell bead adornments. In Plaza A, we see the erection of the first non–domestic buildings occurring within the next two succeeding centuries. The first temples built are truly monumental in size and, given the separation of residential and non–residential space between Plazas A and B, they provide a glimpse into the nature, structure, and extent of sociopolitical changes at the site throughout the Middle Pre–classic (800–400 BC) period. These transformations observed at Pachitun can now be compared to other sites in the Belize Valley and elsewhere in hopes of identifying similar patterns of early Maya sociopolitical development.

May 20, 2017 - Peter Fink from Texas A&M  
*The Recovery of the La Belle*

In 1684, famous French explorer La Salle left France with plans to establish a colony at the Mississippi River but got lost on the way. Instead, he landed the colonists on the Texas coast between Galveston and Corpus Christi at a settlement called Fort St. Louis. His ship the La Belle sank in 1686 and was lost until the Texas Historical Commission began searching for the ship in 1995. The story of the ship’s location and excavation in Matagorda Bay, its conservation at Texas A&M’s Conservation Research Laboratory, and its reconstruction in Austin’s Bullock Museum is the subject of Peter Fink’s lecture. As the conservator and head of reconstruction, Fink knows every piece of the puzzle after working on it for around 20 years. It is a story of dedication and hard work by many archaeologists and workers in related fields with a rare complete ending – a reconstructed historic ship.

April 23, 2017 - Dr. William Keegan, Professor of Caribbean Archaeology at the Florida Museum of Natural History  
*Columbus and Canebills in the Land of Cotton*

In the decade prior to the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s voyage there was a mad scramble to “discover” where Columbus made first landfall in the Americas. Historians, geographers, geologists, navigators, computer specialists, journalists, and even archaeologists joined the hunt. In the process of solving this mystery (albeit three candidates still claim victory), it became clear that virtually everything we thought we knew about Columbus was wrong. Dr. Keegan’s lecture highlights archaeology’s contributions toward revealing what John Noble Wilford (NY Times) called “The mysterious history of Columbus.” In the process we’ll journey through lands of cotton and cannibals, and explore new research into production and exchange in the prehistoric Caribbean.

March 25, 2017 - Dr. Irving Finkel  
*The Ark Before Noah*

In his lecture, “The Ark before Noah,” British Museum expert Dr. Irving Finkel reveals how decoding the symbols on a 4,000-year-old piece of clay enabled a radical new interpretation of the Noah’s Ark story. A world authority on the period, Dr. Finkel’s real–life detective story began with a remarkable event at the British Museum: the arrival one day in 2008 of a single, modest–sized Babylonian coneiform tablet brought in by a member of the public. Such palm–sized clay rectangles were used by the Babylonians to create the first documents, and this particular tablet proved to be of quite extraordinary importance. Not only does it date from around 1750 BC, but it is a copy of the Babylonian Story of the Flood, a story from ancient Mesopotamia revealing, among other things, instructions for constructing a large boat. Dr. Finkel will also describe the further series of discoveries which allowed him to decode the Flood story in ways which offer unanticipated new revelations. The lecture will also describe how a replica of the boat, following the ancient instructions, was built in India—the subject of the documentary film The Real Noah’s Ark.

February 18, 2017 - Dr. Eugene Cruz-Uribe, Indiana University East  
*A Nubian Walks into a Christian Bar at Philae and Asks …*

During the Roman and Byzantine periods in Egypt, the frontier area at the south displayed a number of interesting long term interactions between various Nubian groups (such as the Kerake, Illemypts and Nobadaja) and the Roman rulers of Egypt. As with many frontier areas, there does not seem to have been a clear distinction of cultural identity, political control, and religious affiliation. This situation often led to serious conflicts with both sides claiming legitimate control of the temples and administrative places in the Awan area. The introduction of Christianity to Egypt exacerbated the situation and affected the local populations. This talk will look at these complex interactions and center them through the use of “A man walks into a bar …” scenario. Slides of the speaker’s own field research in the Awan area, especially at Philae temple, will be highlighted.

January 21, 2017 - Dr. Lee Newsom, Flagler College  
*Mastodon Trail Mix: foraging behavior of the ‘original forest elephant’ based on Auxcilla River ‘diggesta’*

Well preserved dung deposits at the Page–Ladson and Latvis–Simpson sites in the Auxcilla River provide evidence of mastodon (Mammut americanum) foraging patterns over a span of several thousand years. A distinct suite of fruits, nuts, and woody browse comprises the dung samples. These plant species demonstrate mastodon food preferences and provide an indication of the ecosystemic influences of this original forest elephant, including acting as a keystone species. This in turn lends insights into the landscape and natural resources available to the “First Floridians,” Paleoindians. The plant taxa in the dung samples also reflect a long history of co-evolution with mastodons and other extinct mega mammals, with specific adaptations for protection and seed dispersal. Mastodonts tolerated noxious plant compounds that guard against herbivory, allowing them to consume and benefit from otherwise unpalatable species, later dispersing the seeds in their dung, thus benefiting the plant taxa. In general, the results highlight the presence and some of the inter–species dynamics of an ancient no–analog forest community in Florida.