

Maximo Beach Archaeological Site
Maximo Park
HPC #91-05, Designated January 1992



The Maximo Beach archaeological site is one of the few large shell middens remaining in St. Petersburg. The site was occupied during the Paleo-Indian through the Spanish Contact periods, roughly 12,000 BP (Before Present) to 1528 AD. The Maximo Beach site consists of large shell midden deposits that date from the late Archaic through the Spanish Contact period. Artifacts dating to the Paleo-Indian and Early Archaic periods (10,000-5,000 BP) have also been found along the beach and in the offshore mudflats by collectors. These Paleo-Indian sites have become inundated by rising sea levels over the past 8,000 years and presently lie beneath the water of Boca Ciega Bay. During its later occupation in the Safety Harbor Period (AD 1000 to 1500) this site was probably related to the larger and extremely significant mound and midden temple complex at Maximo Point. Most of the known archaeological sites in the Central peninsula gulf coast region occur at points where streams enter the Gulf of Mexico. There, the- Indians could take advantage of several ecological niches within a short distance. Although agriculture may have been practiced, fish, shellfish and upland game were the major items of subsistence. It should be noted that it is certain that after glacial times the rise of the relative level of the gulf has drowned many sites, which now lie offshore.

Sherds (fragments) of Spanish olive jars (majolica) have also been found by collectors along Maximo Beach. These sherds are probably from the mid-nineteenth century homestead of Antonio Maximo Hernandez, reputedly the first white settler on the Peninsula. Maximo was a fisherman, businessman, guide, landowner and fishing guide for soldiers at Fort Brooke near the mouth of the Hillsborough River. He also took soldiers to Egmont Key in search of turtle eggs and aided the Army during the Second Seminole War. For this service he was reportedly given a land grant at Frenchman's Creek in 1842 after he provided assistance to Robert E. Lee when he and his troops came through the area looking for Seminole Indians. Lee took on Maximo as his scout and was led up the Caloosahatchee River, an effort leading to Lee's commendation of Maximo to the War Department. Maximo originally was to be assigned 160 acres as a land grant under the Armed Occupation Act, which stipulated settlers would be granted 160 acres if they built habitable homes, cleared at least five acre of land, planted crops and agreed to bear arms against the Indians.

Maximo was the owner of a "fish rancho" on the lower end of Pinellas Point (then called Punta Pinal) and a supplier for the Cuban fish market, an occupation wiped out in the 1848 hurricane and thereby causing him to return to his native Havana, where he died. The original fish rancho remained in the hands of Maximo's widow, Dominga Gomez, until she sold it in the 1880s. Dominga later married a Frenchman who lent his nationality to the naming of Frenchman's Creek, on which the original Maximo land grant was sited. The land was eventually sold for unpaid taxes and became City property. A marker is located on the Eckerd College property to commemorate the first homestead in Pinellas County, although an 1840s plat map clearly shows Hernandez's homestead in Section 10, within the park boundaries. Thus the exact location of the original buildings may never be known.