

History of Sunday Bluff

Very Early Indian Era: (10,000 BC to 1700's)

Paleo-indians first migrated here. They came across the Bering Land Bridge perhaps 15,000 years ago. The sea level was as much as 350 feet lower resulting in more land mass between Asia and Alaska. This became a superhighway for herd animals and the nomadic people who followed and hunted them. The abundant plant and animal life attracted them to enter the Florida region as early as 13,000 to 10,000 B. C. Their campsites are found from Alaska to Florida.

Florida itself had a land mass more than twice of what it is today. The shoreline along the Gulf of Mexico was anywhere from 100 to 200 miles west of its present location. Florida was much drier, lacking our present day streams, rivers, and lakes. As a result the water in deep springs and limestone catch basins for rain became of the utmost importance. These limestone deposits are found throughout Marion County and are one of the reasons for the modern-day horse industry here.

The area was scrub vegetation and open, grassy prairies, known as savannas. The Big Scrub (Ocala National Forest) and Paynes Prairie reflect those habitats presently. Paleo-indians hunted mastodons, mammoths, horses, camels bison, and giant land tortoises, slaughtered and consumed the animals at the watering holes, stops in their nomadic travels. They also hunted deer, rabbits, squirrels and raccoons. Tools and weapons made of bone and stone are found today along the river bank here and roads after a heavy rain.

The basins where these people hunted are now part of the rivers. As the great continental glaciers began to melt and retreat about 9,000 years ago and sea levels began to rise, the climate began to get wetter until conditions reached what we consider normal today, about 3,000 years ago. The paleo-indians stayed in one place longer and moved fewer times. Their camps have been found on Paynes Prairie, at Silver Springs, and at Scott Springs. The sites are characterized by deposits of shells, the remnants of thousands of meals. Such a site can be found about 1 mile south of here along the "Tram Road" and may be marked by a sign. One of these sites near Silver Glen Springs covers a land area of approximately 20 acres near the outlet into Lake George.

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It was not until 750 AD or later that these St Johns people began cultivating maize. As a result populations increased. These villages were inhabited in the early 1500's when Europeans first entered eastern Florida and traveled up the St. Johns River. They gave firsthand descriptions of the Timucuan-speaking people and their culture. The tribe living along the Oklawaha River were called the Acuera by these early explorers.

The Alachua people also migrated from the river valleys of southern Georgia into this region, around 800 AD They became the Potano Indian tribes. The Safety Harbor culture from the Gulf Coast added to these two tribes in this area to become the Ocale Tribe.

The three Timucuan-speaking tribes, Ocale, Potano, and Acuera, were the major cultures found in the area when Juan Ponce de Leon discovered the land he named La Florida in 1513. The native population of the state has been estimated at 350,000 people. By the early 1700's these original inhabitants of Florida existed no more because of slave raids, warfare and most of all, because of diseases of European origin.

Seminole Indian Era (1700 - 1860)

In 1715 the English defeated a rebellion in the Carolinas known as the Yamasee War. The refugees settled here where the Silver Springs Run and the Ocklawaha rivers meet. They gave the Ocklawaha it's name meaning swamp or dark water. Some Creek towns located close to the English-held lands in the Carolinas Georgia, and Alabama migrated to this area. They became the Seminoles. The word is an English derivation of the Spanish word "cimarron," which means wild one or wild people. The Spanish sent Diego Pena among the Lower Creeks to try and convince them to move here and aid them in their fight on the English. They underwent an age of prosperity and growth before the United States acquired Florida. The deerskin trade with the British stimulated prosperity. By 1821 there were nearly 40 Seminole towns in the area. Tensions began to mount between the Seminoles and the new American residents of Georgia. This eventually led to armed conflict in the border regions, the Patriot War of 1812-1814, the first Seminole war of 1818 and the inevitable cession of Florida to the United States. One

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of the major points of contention were the runaway slaves joining the native tribes. Georgians hoped to re-enslave the Black Seminoles. Osceola, the great Seminole chief lived near Grahamsville on the Oklawaha, 7 miles north of Silver Springs Run.

The second Indian War was from 1835 to 1842. At that time the Indians were driven south to the Everglades.

A wagon train of 14 families lured by the promise of free land left North Carolina and reached Marion County around 1848. They founded Ocala. It was built around a small spring. Indians were in the area, so it was necessary to be near Ft. King. Though a county seat, it had only a few houses, a trading post, and a livery stable. Indians were still in the area and uprisings occurred. During the Indian Wars of the 1850's many settlers moved back from the river to Ocala for safety. Forts were every 20 miles along the transportation routes for the protection of white settlers. The Oklawaha River was the main transportation route to Ocala. The fine sand in this area was too much for a horse and wagon, thus the development of river traffic, then railroads. Any other trail was almost impassable. Commodities were brought up by river boats and barges. Pole-barging was the first laborious method of propelling a vessel with goods and supplies up the river to the small settlements, by hand!

Steamboat Era: (1830's to 1900)

Fort Brooke was situated at Orange Springs on the Oklawaha. It was probably served by the first steamboat in the Indian wars between 1830 and 1840. The war did not reach the Oklawaha, but remained on the St. Johns River. In 1855 during the Third Seminole War troops were shipped to Tampa by steamer from New York to Jacksonville, by small steamboat to Palatka, and by stage, horseback, and ferry to Tampa. During the blockade of the Civil War, the Oklawaha River became a supply lifeline. Ships landed at New Smyrna Beach. Goods were transported to the St. Johns River, then to the Oklawaha and Fort Brooke. From there by land to north Florida and supply the

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Confederacy. Turpentine, rosin, and cotton were exported from this region during the Civil War.

Hubbard Hart was a promoter and financier by instinct, though no navigator. He wanted to transport northern immigrants to the flat sand shores of the lakes at the headwaters of the Oklawaha. In 1860 he purchased the first inboard paddlewheel steamer, the “James Burt”, a sternwheeler. A family of boats made the run from Palatka to Silver Springs from the 1870’s. Around 1870 there was a push to bring Yankees to Florida for vacations as well as settling. Jacksonville was the town for tourism. With fewer than 200,000 residents, and half of them freed slaves, Florida was both the least populated and the poorest southern state. The tourist trade was small and young. Jacksonville had become the “most frequented resort, and the entrance gate to over two-thirds of the travel of the state.” Visitors enjoyed excursions on the river and often journeyed on to St. Augustine by boat then railroad, described as “the worst in the world.” “It was not a special honor for me to ride on the water tank with a pine knot for a footstool, for it was shared with other passengers. The fact is there are but two passenger cars on the road, and they had been monopolized by a group from Jacksonville.” Rather than building a bridge through the swamp, the railroad company had created a causeway out of logs. “The engine slowed to about a mile in five hours; the bridge cracked and the locomotive groaned.” Similar experiences with steamboats kept even some determined tourists away from more remote locations, such as Silver Springs. Harriet Beecher Stowe turned down a trip because of the appalling appearance of the vessel Ocklawaha. “We had always dreaded the boat as the abatement of pleasure,” she recorded. Without glass windows, it resembled a “coffin in the twilight.” Imagine how the mosquitoes and no-see-ums must have been at night on the river! She moved to the St. Johns River town of Mandarin and attempted to attract other northerners with her writings. She promoted Florida tourism and settling. She, her brother, and the Stowes had taken on the challenge of the freedmen. In addition, her articles in the *Christian Union* gave a vivid account of her trip “up the Ocklawaha”. She went “on a

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bushwhacking tour through swamps of alligators.” “We found a neat, well-ventilated cabin, with berths for eight ladies, as comfortable as could be desired.” “In the middle of the night we were wakened by the scraping of the branches against our little boat, and looked dreamily out to see that we were gliding through palmetto forests and weird grottoes, lit up with blazing pint torches.” As one might have expected, the steamer came upon alligators and various birds:” In the morning the passengers sat on a platform in front of the wheel house to observe what could be seen. At times the steamer passed a landing in the forest or a few hunters. In homemade clothing and peaked hats, they were formidable in appearance: ”They seemed a grave taciturn, unsmiling race, long-haired, bearded and roughly attired; with sallow complexion and dark eyes.” They brought provision for the cook to the steamer and oranges for the passengers. The women had headaches in the heat and the men added to her discomfort by shooting wildlife: “the cry, ‘dar’s a gator’ was a signal for a perfect fusillade more dangerous to us than to the alligators, who generally dove and paddled off.” Many birds were not so fortunate. At about two o’clock in the morning they arrived at their destination, Silver Springs. “We were all gathered on the lower deck, looking down into transparent depths that gave the impression that our boat was moving through air.”

During the 1880’s there was a boat leaving daily and sometimes two to handle the traffic. It was a run of 135 miles. **Sunday Bluff** was listed at mile 90 from Palatka (45 miles from Silver Springs Run). Eurika is 4 miles downstream. The vessels traveled at night as well as day. Atop the pilot’s house was a large iron box with pitch pine or pine knots. “Utter incredibility by firelight” was one of the boasts of the day. Hart promoted the run for Yankee tourist to enjoy Florida’s unspoiled nature and the beauty of Silver Springs. The trip to Silver Springs took two nights and a day and the mosquitoes were horrible.

By the 1900’s the railroads were in the drivers seat for transportation. The boats were primarily for tourist trade to see the river. An exception to this was the Mills Steamboat Line from 1908 to 1919. They used a

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gas engine to power the paddlewheel to haul commercial freight, principally turpentine from Moss Bluff down to Delks Bluff near Silver Springs Run (upriver of Sunday Bluff). Turpentine at Grahamsville area along with oranges were in full swing. The “Sharpshooter” was named because of the popping noise of the backfire while it was idled down. It was just under 65 feet in length. It connected the Oklawaha Valley Railroad at Silver Springs with Palatka. **Sunday Bluff** was listed as a regular stop. They also hauled oranges, hides, food-stuffs, and stock for the stores along the river and anything else that people wanted to ship. The “Hel-Kat” replaced it in 1917. World War I slowed business and young men. The operation was closed.

Rail Era: (1905-1920's)

Henry Flagler, having made his fortune in Standard Oil began to develop St. Augustine in 1885 by building one of the country's great luxury hotels, the Ponce de Leon. This meant modernizing rail connections with a new line to Jacksonville. The Oklawaha Valley Railroad started around 1905 between Silver Springs and Ft. McCoy. It was used by the E. P. Rentz Lumber Company. This connected with the rails between Silver Springs and Ocala, called the “Seaboard Airline Railway”. These were wood burning and would go several miles before another cord of wood had to be loaded. Wood chopping was important for both the steamboats and railroad. Often the train wouldn't make it and everyone would off load with their axes until enough wood was gathered to get to the next stop. The primary use of the rails was for logging.

Around 1912 there was a move to connect all the short lines between Palatka and Silver Springs. For the first time passengers could board in Palatka and go all the way to Ocala. It followed the river valley and was named the Oklawaha Valley Railway. For the first time it had special little cars for passengers, one created from an old Reo bus and one from a Buick auto. They had an engine on either end and were self propelled. Pine, cedar, oak, and hickory were carried on the flatcars. By the 1920's much of the timber had been cut and sections of the track were taken up and moved to other areas.

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Logging Era: (1884 -1920's)

Around 1500 Spanish conquistadors paddled primitive boats up the Florida rivers. These were the first white men to see the giant cypress trees of this region. These were over 1,000 years old, over 100 feet high and ten feet in diameter. The cypress trees are one of the few members of prehistoric species surviving the changes from before the Ice Age. Because of its lasting quality, the cypress played an important role in the development and economy of this region.

The lasting quality of cypress wood created its high value. The cypress doors of St. Peters in Rome served over 1,100 years were still sound when replaced. Cypress played an important role in the development and economy of this region.

The cypress mill in Palatka dates back to 1884. In 1891 the Wilsons bought the small mill and brought in more efficient Michigan practices. The region began developing with this change. Canals were dug so that large pull boats could drag the logs out of the swamp to be rafted. These were 60 feet in length and drew 6 feet of water. They had cables which would pull from as far as a mile away in the swamp. They ran to the highest two spar trees in the area with a system of pulleys to extract the huge logs. Steam engines rotated the drums. Crews, made up primarily of Afro-Americans were housed in houseboats.

Railroads on filled ground replaced the pull boats. The **“Tram Road”** existing today along Eaton Creek south of the **“Landing”** was the first attempt at rails. In 1903 the Wilson Cypress Company established a railroad logging camp at **Sunday Bluff**. Seventy-five to one hundred men were employed here. Two thirds of them were Afroamericans. The engines for the train were from the New York Elevated Railways.

The trees were girdled a year in advance to kill them and make them buoyant. The logs were dragged from the forests with overhead cables and loaded on flatcars. The logs were dumped from a trestle (seen south of the landing) into Eaton Creek. Around the landing area they were tied into rafts 25' wide by 30' long. They were connected into 150 foot sections. Tow men would stand on the raft with long poles

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and push off the banks to guide them down the river. The men were paid \$1.00 a day. Six of these were joined together in the St. Johns River and towed to the mill in Palatka.

By 1910 the logging was almost entirely by railroad. In 1913 a record of 1,097 million feet of timber was cut! By 1926 the Wilson Cypress Company had become one of the largest lumber manufactures in the *world*. About 1,000 men were employed in the manufacture of cypress. There was always 30 million feet of lumber on hand curing and drying. The largest tree had a diameter of 15 feet. Most were 3 to 7 feet.

Citrus Industry:

Citrus was a huge money maker and attraction for settlers following the civil war. Jacksonville was the center. The benign weather pattern had persisted since 1835. In 1880, temperatures in the twenties damaged the trees and a freezing rain destroyed the oranges. Harriet Beecher Stowe “wept at the destruction” in Mandarin. This was slight compared to the winter of 1894-1895. The great freeze wiped out of existence a hundred million dollars worth of property in a night, and men walked the streets with stricken faces and discouraged hearts” Henry Flagler then became influential in moving it toward Miami.

Corps of Engineers:

The river in the early 1900’s was as clear as the Silver Springs Run. The Corps of Engineers dredged it in an effort to straighten and make shortcuts. Following this the river ended up dark and murky. Their second folly came in the 1960’s and 1970’s. An attempt was started to establish the Cross Florida Barge Canal. This was said to be in the interest of shipping to cut off the trip around the Florida Straits. Land was taken from property owners along the river to the intended high water line of the new canal. (This “Take Line” is the west border of our property along the river.) Locks were constructed and the local high bridges built to allow the barges clearance. Fortunately the ecological concerns were heard and the plan was finally put to rest.

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The Scrub:

Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, of nearby Cross Creek wrote of this region known locally as “the Scrub”.

Leonard V. Newton recalls the 1900’s

Recent history:

Dad, Bill Haines, and Ted Carlson hunted together around Crystal River in the early 1960’s. Around 1965 they began coming here and camping along Eaton Creek at the area known as the “Landing”. Around 1978 they purchased an acre and placed the “Boars Nest” trailer and cabana high on the hill. Around 1980 they pruchased “Shasta,” a larger trailer and cabana for \$3,500 in Bradenton and brought it here.

We first came here with Eric in 1978 and stayed overnight in the Boars Nest. We purchased Ted Carlson’s one third portion in 86? . The East Acres area burned around 1985. We started using Shasta regularly for hunting and outings in 1986. We visited with the owner of Sunday Bluff Lodge, Beaufort Vaughn and his wife and dreamed about how neat it would be to have a place like that. At the time they had a large vegetable garden, a 2 room “dogkeepers house” fifty feet east of the kitchen, and a pumphouse just outside the kitchen door. There were very few windows, and the inside was dark wood and old paper wallboard.

We purchased it in the fall of 1993 . It was loaded with old furniture and beds. It hadn’t been lived in for about ten years. The river view had grown over. Beside the cookhouse where the pond is now was a sandy field. We added the pond and waterfall in 95. It was almost impossible to walk through the woods due to dense vines and thickets. Turkeys were rare.

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