

NASSAU COUNTY HISTORY

Nassau County, situated in the northeastern corner of the State, contains about 645 square miles, or 412,800 acres. It is bounded on the north and west by the St. Mary's River, a stream navigable for nearly sixty miles by ocean going vessels; on the south by Nassau River, a stream with equal navigation possibilities, and on the east by the Atlantic Ocean.

The rivers and their numerous tributaries, together with the Seaboard Air Line Railway, the Atlantic, Valdosta and Western Railway and the Atlantic Coast Line Railway, which cross the county north, south, east and west, make nearly every acre of land accessible for rail and water transportation and accessibility to its natural resources is one of the leading features of the county, and in that respect cannot be equalled by any other county in the State.

The soil of Nassau County varies according to locality, from low, rich, black, swamp, and marsh lands to dry pine lands. The mainland of the county is mostly of a sandy character under laid with clay, at a depth of from two to six feet, a soil retentive of fertilizers and capable of the highest state of cultivation. The natural resources from our pine forests have somewhat retarded the progress of our agricultural developments, but the day is not far distant when Nassau County will take its proper place as one of the best farming counties in the State. Our farmers are commencing to see the possibilities of the soil, and from one single small country station over 12,000 bushels of sweet potatoes were shipped and paid for on delivery, netting over \$6,000 or nearly \$120.00 per acre, for a single item of crops in a three months season.

Cattle raising is one of the important factors of the farmers wealth in Nassau County. but is yet in its infancy and capable of large possibilities owing to low prices of good grazing land and the vast acreage of denuded timber land which will make the land available for pasturage.

The naval stores industry has just started in the county and thousands of acres are in the hands of operators who will very materially add to the immense business just developing in the State. Oats, corn, potatoes, sugar cane, cassava, cotton, long and short staple, and vegetables of all description are profitably raised in the county, and peaches, pecans, grapes, pears, quinces, plums and other fruits are peculiarly adapted to the character of the soil. Rice growing could be made as successful here as it is in Western Louisiana and Texas and would yield a profit of from forty to sixty dollars per acre. A large reward is in store for those who have sufficient capital and energy and are willing to embrace the opportunities offered. Thousands of acres are available for rice culture.

On Amelia Island, the edge of the mainland, and scattered along her rivers, are soils of calcareous sand, that are adapted for the finest qualities of long staple cotton, to the culture of the grape and olive, while the branch, fresh marsh, and black rush lands attached to them are especially suitable for gardening. These lands are easily reclaimed, rich, moist and close to the shipping opportunities, so that the shipping of early vegetables to Northern markets must soon form a considerable item in the list of profitable investments.

It is estimated that there are at least 20,000 acres of these marsh lands in the county which can now be bought: for a mere song, but when reclaimed, are worth from \$100 to \$1,000 per acre. In Connecticut these reclaimed marsh lands are considered the most valuable for gardening.

Our reclaimed marsh lands are particularly adapted to the raising of grass, rice and vegetables. This soil is as fine as flour and consists of vegetable matter which has been accumulating for centuries. There is not a twig or root growing upon this land, while it lies perfectly level. It is covered with a salt grass which is much relished by stock. To reclaim these lands it is necessary to build dams or levees to keep off the tide water. After eighteen months they will be ready for cultivation. There are hundreds of acres of this land which can be had for the reclaiming of them. When once brought into cultivation there are no lands in the United States which excel them in fertility.

Nassau County offers inducements to vegetable growers which can be found in no other section in the State. This is no idle boast, but can be demonstrated by cold facts. We have the express and fast mail to the North and West, as well as steamship transportation to New York. The vegetables or fruit can be gathered fresh from the garden and placed upon the steamship in first class condition, where they will not be disturbed or handled until placed for sale in the New York market. While there are many localities in the State which have fertile soil, yet the lack of quick transportation debars them from competing with the more favored sections.

Another feature which is of much importance to the truck raisers is that we never have extreme cold, as we are surrounded by water direct from the ocean, which tempers the winter winds, and vegetables come off as early on the island as if we were situated one hundred miles further south. This locality offers rare inducements to reclaim some of these valuable lands.

The total assessed valuation of Nassau County is two million two hundred and twenty-nine thousand dollars, with a taxation rate for state and county of 16 1/2 mills. The number of inhabitants in the census year was tabulated at 9,654, of which number 4,559 were white and 5,095 were negroes, but owing to the large influx of people, due to the naval stores and other industries, the present population exceeds 12,000.

Nassau County supports fifty-seven public schools, attended by 2,830 pupils, and the school board owns \$18,750 worth of property. Forty-one of the schools are attended by white pupils and the other sixteen are devoted to the education of the colored population. Eighteen post offices and twenty railway stations offer postal, transportation, express, telegraph and telephone facilities within easy reach of every inhabitant of the county, and churches of leading denominations are to be found in every hamlet.

Nassau County is practically free from debt; the total indebtedness, including that of school board, will not reach twenty thousand dollars, with the tax levy for 1902 still uncollected.

The finances of the county are in a prosperous condition, it may be said that the individual is also financially well fixed. Only one commercial failure in twenty years is an unequalled record of prosperity for any county and it can also be said that fewer mortgages are to be found on homes

and real estate in Nassau County, in proportion to valuation, than is any county in any other Southern State.

Heavy drafts have been made upon our pine timber, but we have yet enough left to supply our mills for another quarter of a century. The hardwoods of the hammocks and river bottoms are still undisturbed. Many varieties of merit and beauty are waiting the certain coming demands of industry.

The waters of Nassau County abound in fresh and salt water fish, in hundreds of varieties, Diamond back terrapins, clams, oysters, prawns, shrimp and crabs. The shad fisheries of the St. Mary's River and Nassau River are of commercial importance, the prawn packers on Amelia. River are doing a prosperous business and our several oyster canneries are realizing handsome profits to their

There are but few towns in the county. Fernandina is the county seat, Callahan is next in size and importance. It boasts of having a quiet, moral, law-abiding citizenship. It has two churches, Methodist and Baptist, and 3 good public school. They also have an up-to-date sawmill and blacksmith shop, a first class rice mill, which is still busy cleaning last year's crop. The brick business also adds largely to the revenue of the town, as it employs considerable labor. Turpentine and timber are both industries that benefit the town, also the getting of ties, logs, wood, etc. Lands produce well, and the people are energetic and industrious.

Callahan is located at the intersection of the Savannah, Florida and Western Railroad and the Seaboard Air Line. Other towns are Dyal and Hilliard, on the A. C. L. R. R., Yulee and Evergreen, on the S. A. L. Ry., Crawford and Kent on the A. V. & W. Ry., Chester, Crandall and King's Ferry on the St. Mary's river have large lumber mills, whose outputs running into millions of feet, are loaded at the mills into ocean-going vessels.

These are all small but prosperous communities of industrious, hospitable people, ever ready to welcome the stranger and new comer, for whom there is plenty of room and golden opportunities.

Nassau County has no poor house and none is wanted, only a few physically disabled persons are on the pauper list. The improvident, the idler and the shiftless are unknown among our people and are not wanted in the county.

We are accustomed to regard good health as our normal condition, our people as prosperous, our soil as productive, our surroundings as pleasant and comfortable, our climate as unequalled and our continued prosperity as almost assured.

All we need: more laborers for our fields and turpentine camps, more farmers to extend our agricultural possibilities, and more capital to help in the handling and development of our natural resources and the creation of needed industries. The principal agricultural and other products for 1902 were as follows:

Corn, bushels, 12,220, \$ 6,125
Sweet potatoes, bushels, 24,050, \$12,275
Live stock on hand in 1902:
Horses, number, 793, \$31,352
Mules, number, 40, \$2,655
Stock cattle, number, 8,826, \$57,377
Sheep, number, 3,002, \$4,335
Hogs, number, 3,329, \$5,050

[SOURCE: Florida: A Pamphlet Descriptive of Its History, Topography, Climate, Soil. By Florida Department of Agriculture, 1901. Transcribed by Mary Kay Krogman.]