

Source

State Library of Florida, WPA - Historical Records Survey, County Histories

Description

Brief history of Volusia County, Florida collected by the Works Progress Administration's Historical Records Survey.

VOLUSIA COUNTY

From 1821 until December 29, 1824, the section embraced in the present limits of Volusia County was a part of St. Johns County. On this latter date Mosquito County was created with its northern boundary just below Mantanzas Inlet and its southern at Jupiter Inlet. Its southern half was approximately 20 miles wide, increasing to about 60 miles in its northern half.

This name was changed to Orange on January 30, 1845, and finally, on December 29, 1854, a part of Orange became Volusia County. On January 29, 1835, New Smyrna was made the County seat but it was not until 1843 that the Clerk of the Court of St. Johns, under orders from the Territorial Council, turned the records over to the officers at New Smyrna.

This was possibly mostly due to the Seven Years' Indian War which ravaged the country. On February 24, 1843, the County seat was moved from New Smyrna to Enterprise, and on July 16, 1845, it was again changed to Mellonville approximating the present location of Sanford. Fire destroyed the records at Mellonville about 1849.

When Volusia County was created out of Orange, Enterprise became the County seat. The population was then given as 140. In 1888 the County seat was removed to DeLand where it has since remained.

The area embraced in the present limits of the County has been the setting of numerous epochs in the drama of the development of the most southern State of the Union. Its first mention of geographical interest by Ponce de Leon was in his narrative of his repulse of Indians in 1513 at "Rio de la Cruz."

Later Hernando Manrique de Rojas touched at Rio de la Cruz, in 29° North latitude. He sailed from Havana in May, 1564, his mission being to meet and destroy Ribault's fleet. This latitude approximates the mouth of Ponce de Leon (Mosquito) Inlet, and the three waterways, Halifax, Hillsborough rivers and the Inlet and Spruce Creek, make the cross (la Cruz), which might signify the name and fix the place quite definitely.

On September 12, 1565, three of Ribault's ships were wrecked at a point recorded as between 20 and 25 leagues south of St. Augustine, which, according to the measurements then in vogue fixes it as between the present towns of Ormond Beach and Daytona Beach.

During the 17th century, the Franciscan Friars, fostered by the Spanish Government, began their missions which developed into a chain extending from Georgia into what is now Volusia County. Those built in this County were in Indian pueblos. One, a short distance north of the Tomoka river, known as Tissimi is believed to be San Antonio de Anacape, built about 1655. Another, at the pueblo Atocuimi, now New Smyrna, was known as the Mission of Atocuimi de Jororo. Probably the last in the chain of forty-four erected by the Friars, Atocuimi dates from 1696. The third, San Salvador de Mayaca, and said to be a parent mission, is believed to have

been located at Astor on the St. Johns river, at a point where the large shell mound is situated. This mission in one instance is said to have been begun about 1600 and in another to have been built in 1680, however the location is vague and indeterminate. Historians themselves do not agree as to the location. The ruins of Jororo and Anacape still remain as testimonials, but no vestige of Mayaca is to be found.

The largest single attempt at colonization in the New World by [sic] Dr. Andrew Turnbull, who first obtained a grant of 20,000 acres at New Smyrna, during the British occupation. This later was extended to 101,400 acres by grants to Duncan and Granville, his associates, and himself. He imported 1,400 Greek, Sicilian, and Minorcan immigrants, whom he settled at New Smyrna. He introduced the first scientific method of land drainage and irrigation on the Western Hemisphere.

Turnbull's work at New Smyrna still bears witness to his practical ideas. Dissensions within the colony and financial reverses caused the dissolution of this enterprise on November ninth, 1777, a little more than nine years after its founding.

When it resumed occupancy of the territory, Spain fostered a broad plan of agricultural development, encouraging it by land grants, most of which were confirmed by the United States when it came into possession. One of the first so confirmed was that of Samuel Williams, comprising 3,200 acres, on which Daytona Beach is partly built.

The development of the country now advanced rapidly and extensive plantations of sugar cane and cotton came into being. The ruins of the missions were rehabilitated as far as possible and used for sugar cane mills, while substantial quarters were built of coquina. New Smyrna became active as a port of entry for the Halifax country. Enterprise, on Lake Monroe was connected with Jacksonville, by steamers plying the St. Johns river.

When the Indians went on the warpath in 1835, plantations were raided, buildings destroyed and negro slaves were taken into the Indian tribes; settlers were driven northward, many of them being killed before they could make their escape.

On January 18, 1836, after an earlier engagement between settlers and Indians, government forces under Major B. A. Putnam clashed with Indians at Dun-Lawton, near the site of what is now Port Orange.

The whites, outnumbered by the Indians, were defeated and fled to Bulowville, at the head of the Halifax. Ruins of a sugar mill, with remnants of machinery mark the site of the battle, at Port Orange, and in Flagler County, to the north, are the ruins of Bulow's plantation buildings, which contain a finely carved panel over a door lintel, on which is inscribed: "BULOW VILLA," January 26, 1831.

John James Audubon, the naturalist, who had been on a visit to John Bulow, at this place, on the Tomoka, rode overland to visit the plantation of Col Rees, at Spring Garden, in 1831, and he wrote telling of his ride across the country, accompanied by a guide, and that when they sighted the Rees buildings toward sunset, how pleased they were, which pleasure was even communicated to the animals they were riding, which "pricked up their ears and quickened their steps."

Volusia is said to be an Anglicized version of the name of a French or Belgium trapper, Veluche. Other sources say the name originated from that of a Swiss, Voluz, one of the English colony at Rollestown, which disbanded at the close of the British occupation. Voluz, who had explored considerably, induced some of these settlers to settle with him in the vicinity of Volusia, or what afterward became so named.

The first paper to be recorded in Volusia County was a transfer of fifty-two slaves from Vance to Ravenal.

The Civil War with its attendant blockade of southern ports stimulated activities in Volusia County. Exporting cotton, the blockade runners using New Smyrna as a base, returned with much needed munitions, medical supplies, and other necessities secured in Nassau. A salt works of considerable capacity sprang up south of New Smyrna.

Two of the most successful blockade runners were the "Kate" and the "Cecile." Two Federal gunboats came to Mosquito with orders to put a stop to the gun-running. An expedition came in from both ships, under the leadership of both commanders. They moved past New Smyrna and destroyed the salt works. Returning the forty-three men attempted a landing near the blockade runners' stores, which were in a palmetto hut at New Smyrna. The Second Company, Third Florida Infantry, under Captain G. B. Bird, repulsed the attack with no casualties.

Another engagement within the confines of this County was a skirmish between Captain C. H. Dickison, Second Florida Cavalry, and a wagon train under Colonel Wilcoxon, of the 17th Connecticut Regiment. This occurred at Braddock's farm, in the northwest part of the County. The Federal forces were defeated after a spectacular cavalry duel was fought while both sides looked on, between the two commanders, resulting in the death of Col. Wilcoxon. In 1866 the steamer Darlington, with Captain Charlie Brock, who was one of the popular steamboat captains of that time, was making regular trips on the St. Johns from Jacksonville to Enterprise and Mellonville. Frederick [de Bary], who bought a sugar and grist mill at Enterprise from Oliver C. Arnett, during 1868, some years later operated a line of steamers on the St. Johns river. In 1871 Daytona, on the Halifax, was established.

A group of mechanics from New Britain, Conn., settled on the Halifax in 1874. They named their colony New Britain, and in 1880 it was incorporated as Ormond. The construction of a large hotel at Ormond, and the initial link of the East Coast railroad, established the reputation of the section as a winter resort.

Ormond also points to her antiquities in the form of the blockhouse on the nearby Addison grant. This near-perfect relic is linked with one Captain Antonio de Prado, 1569, who is said to have written his King concerning the erection of such a fortification on the "Nocoroco," [or] Tomoka river.

The establishment of Stetson University at DeLand followed the settlement of that place. Then immediately came a period of railroad construction.

On August 28, 1878, the Blue Springs, Orange City & Atlantic Railroad Company started building a road to New Smyrna, finishing the 28 miles in 1886. A year later it was absorbed by the Atlantic & Western Railway Company, and became a part of the F. E. C. Railway, on April 4, 1896.

In the early part of 1880 the Orange Ridge, DeLand & Atlantic Railroad built from DeLand to DeLand Landing, on the east side of the St. Johns river.

The Atlantic Coast, St. Johns and Indian River Railway Company, in 1883-4, built from Enterprise to Titusville. The F. E. C. System now owns and operates this line. The Kissimmee Valley extension of the F. E. C. branching off from New Smyrna, was finished Nov. 16, 1916.

In 1884-6, the Palatka & Indian River Railway built seventy miles from Palatka to Sanford. On April 4, 1887, a consolidation was effected with the J. T. & K. W. Railway, which had a terminal in Jacksonville.

The Florida East Coast Canal and adequate highways, assisted expansion. The fame of Volusia County spread. Its beaches provided a natural speedway for more than twenty-three miles. Upon these many [world] records have been made. Its climate, the cultural advantages of its communities, brought a steady influx of winter visitors. Many who came as tourists settled permanently.

It was found that the early potato crop was a good investment. Through the work of an humble Chinese youth, Lou Gim Gong, a new impetus was given the citrus industry. The philanthropy of a northern family enabled Gong to settle at DeLand, where he began his study and experimentation of horticulture. His outstanding development of citrus culture earned [him] cognomen of "The Chinese Burbank."

With lavish expenditure of "boom" money, beginning in 1924, and the unpopularity of the prohibition law, Mosquito Inlet assumed new life. The fabulous prices offered for imported liquors encouraged hardy individuals who wished to share in prosperity, to risk the danger of a modern Federal blockade.

Because of McCoy's delivery of high class goods only, the "Real McCoy" originated here. His now abandoned boat-yard may still be seen at Holly Hill, near Ormond.

In spite of continued adversity for ten years, the collapse of the "boom," and the depression, Volusia County has shown improvement of a healthy nature.

Figures by the United States and Florida Agricultural Departments show that Volusia County has 2,983 farms, covering 76,796 acres, valued at \$14,226,424.00; with annual crop values of about [\$2,250.00], with an average annual shipment of approximately 1,500,000 boxes of citrus fruits; with fourteen incorporated municipalities, and public school property valued at \$4,000,000.

The County contains 718,720 acres, with a population of 50,500 (1935 Census), and is served by 229 miles of railway; 250 miles of fine automobile highways, and 125 miles of graded roads.

New Smyrna, Florida
November 23, 1936

Mr. Leon J. Canova,
District Supervisor,
HR and SA Surveys,
St. Augustine, Florida.

Dear Mr. Canova:

After having gone over the historical sketch you have prepared on Volusia County, I think it is accurate in that it conforms with the facts as accepted by a number of authorities and is in keeping with local traditions and beliefs, as far as I know.

Very sincerely,
(Signed) Zelia Sweett
(Mrs. Zelia Sweett)