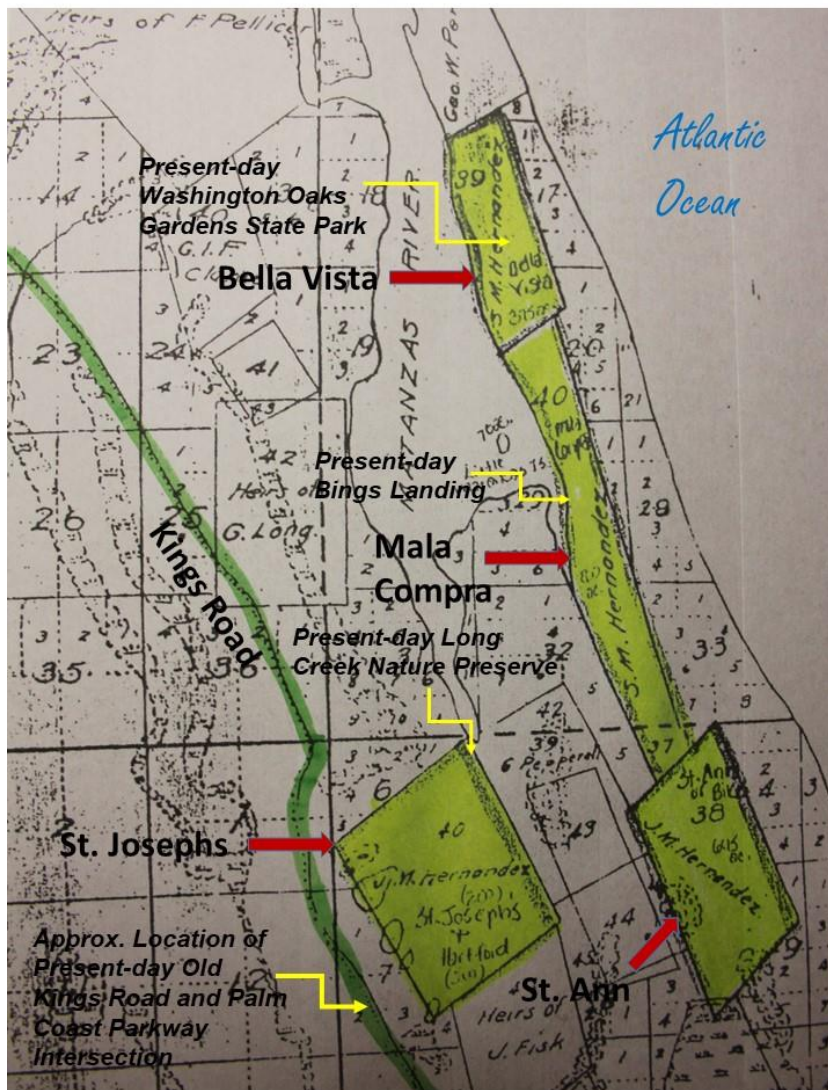


Joseph Marion Hernandez's St. Joseph's Plantation

by Randy Jaye

In the early 1800s, the area now known as Flagler County was home to a network of large plantations that created a thriving and growing economy. Human slaves from African origin not only constructed these plantations but also worked, maintained and managed their vast and intricate operations. In fact, black slaves outnumbered whites and Native Americans in this area during that time. One of the more prosperous, and reportedly the most cutting-edge, of these plantations was a sugar plantation called St. Joseph's which consisted of 807.5 acres. St. Joseph's Plantation was located near the present-day intersection of Palm Coast Parkway and Old Kings Road in Palm Coast, Florida. It is now nearly, but will never be completely, forgotten to history. Ruins of some of the buildings, roads and canals of this once impressive plantation complex were visible above ground until the early 1970s, but when the community of Palm Coast was being

developed, they were unscrupulously bulldozed and destroyed as if they possessed no historical value. A main Flagler County street named St. Joe Grade once ran through the plantation area and provided access to an early 1900s era turpentine operation called St. Joe Still, but this street's name was changed during the initial development of Palm Coast. Today, not even a sign exists to acknowledge that this large and important plantation once existed.



Circa 1850 map of Bella Vista, Mala Compra, St. Joseph's and St. Ann Plantations. The author created the captions and arrow pointers. Source: Flagler County Historical Society.

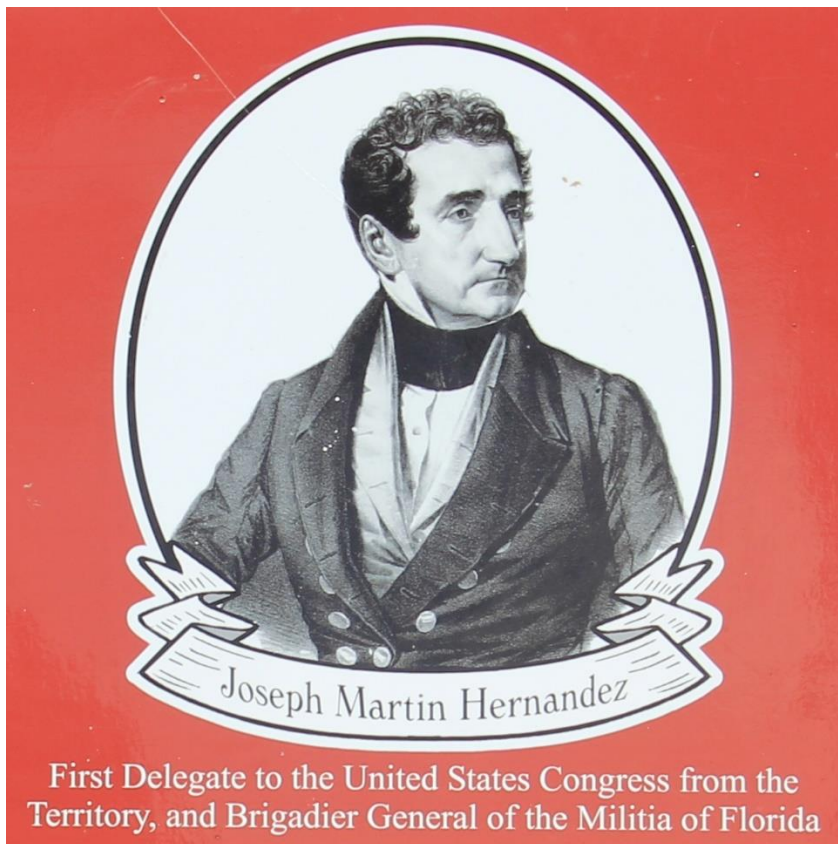
The owner of the St. Joseph's Plantation, Jose Mariano [Joseph Marion] Hernandez, played a prominent role in several important events in U.S. history. He was instrumental in the transition of Spanish Florida to a United States territory, and an owner and operator of several major plantations in northeast Florida. Hernandez believed that certain people (elite master class) had the right to hold and own human slaves.

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In the 1814 Spanish census, he was listed as owning 72 slaves. It is not known how many human slaves he actually owned during the peak of his business operations, but from the size of his land holdings, and their obvious requirement for a large work force, it is quite possible that the number could have exceeded 150.

Joseph Marion Hernandez (1788-1857)

Hernandez's parents were Minorcans¹ who, in 1767, moved to the British East Florida colony of New Smyrna as indentured servants² under contract to Andrew Turnbull³. New Smyrna was organized by Turnbull as one of the largest attempts at British colonization in British Florida. The British briefly owned Florida for about twenty years (1763-1783). Hernandez's parents, and other colonists, were granted sanctuary in St. Augustine in 1777 by Governor Patrick Tonyn⁴ after they abandoned the New Smyrna colony due to what they claimed was neglect and mistreatment by Turnbull's administrators.



First Delegate to the United States Congress from the Territory, and Brigadier General of the Militia of Florida

Joseph Hernandez's portrait on a sign at the Mala Compra Plantation Archaeological Site in Palm Coast. Photographed by the author (November 12, 2017).

Shortly after his marriage, he acquired three additional plantations. In 1816, he obtained a Spanish land grant and established the St. Joseph's Plantation (807.5 acres). In 1818, he purchased the Bella Vista Plantation (394.75 acres) and Mala Compra Plantation (Bad Bargain) (724 acres) from Francis Ferreyra. These plantations were former Spanish land grants as well. Hernandez's plantation holdings in present-day Flagler County grew to include the St. Ann Plantation (645 acres) which he purchased after the Second Seminole War (1835-1842).

Joseph Marion Hernandez was born on May 26, 1788 in St. Augustine, Florida. He attended school in Savannah, Georgia to the age of fifteen. He then moved to Havana, Cuba to study law and returned to St. Augustine in 1811 where he began to practice law.

In 1814, he married Anna Marie Hill, the wealthy widow of Samuel Williams, who owned the Orange Grove Plantation⁵. This plantation, a land grant, was later sold to Matthias Day (1824-1904) and became the beginnings of present-day Daytona Beach.

Joseph Marion Hernandez's St. Joseph's Plantation

In 1821, when Florida became a territory of the United States Hernandez not only transferred his allegiance he changed his name from José Mariano to Joseph Marion. He then became the first delegate from the Florida Territory, and the first Hispanic-American to serve in the United States Congress. He was a member of the Whig Party⁶ and served from September 1822 to March 1823.

During the Second Seminole War he entered the United States military and served from 1835 to 1838. In July 1837, he was appointed Brigadier General of the Mounted Volunteers of the Florida Militia.

The U.S. Army for use as a hospital, field headquarters, and supply depot requisitioned his Mala Compra Plantation. The property was abused by soldiers and was practically destroyed, and his plantations, including Mala Compra and St. Joseph's, were burned down and destroyed by the Seminole Indians in 1836. In October 1837, he organized a meeting between U.S. military representatives and prominent Seminole leaders including Osceola (1804-1838) under a flag of truce. General Thomas Sidney Jesup (1788-1860) ordered Hernandez to capture Osceola and 79 Seminole Indians. His association with this unethical military conduct forever tarnished his reputation and political career. In January 1838, he requested to be relieved of duty due to the war's toll on his personal life and loss of property and business interests.

He filed a claim against the United States government for approximately \$100,000 for damages sustained on his properties. In March 1839, the United States Congress approved the first of the monetary awards for his war claims. Between 1839 and 1842 he received payments totaling \$39,521. In 1844, he requested Congress to pay the balance of \$64,494 but they declined. His ruined plantations and property in present-day Flagler County were eventually abandoned due to the damage they sustained during the Second Seminole War. The war claim payments he received were not enough to restore the once prosperous enterprises to profitability.

In 1845, he became a candidate of the Whig Party for a seat in the United States Senate, but was defeated in the election. His attempts at holding a national office were over, but he remained active in local politics and he served as mayor of St. Augustine in 1848.

He returned to Cuba around 1850 and became a planter in the District of Colisco, near Matanzas. He resided in Cuba for the remainder of his life. Joseph Marion Hernandez died on June 8, 1857 in the District of Coliseo, Matanzas Province, Cuba.

Hernandez is certainly on the astonishingly long list of important people in U.S. history that very few people recognize and arguably the most significant historical figure who ever lived in the area that is present-day Flagler County.

Historical Descriptions of the Operating St. Joseph's Plantation

After Hernandez purchased the St. Joseph's Plantation in 1816 he developed the land into a large sugar plantation. According to House Report 58, 28th Congress, 1st Session, January 19, 1844, the St. Josephs Plantation was located in Graham Swamp at the head of the Matanzas River. A description of this plantation states it was quite a large and sophisticated operation with a least 80 human slaves. Its crops included 200 acres of ratoon and planted cane, 200 acres of corn intermixed

Joseph Marion Hernandez's St. Joseph's Plantation

with cane, 80 acres of hammock land, 80 acres of peas and 20 acres of potatoes. It included immense ditching with several large canals from four, five and seven feet wide, of the same depth, and from a half to one and a half mile in length, two hundred acres of which were cross-ditched, two feet wide and two feet deep, at a distance of thirty-five feet from each other, for the purposes of draining, and consisting of about two million cubic feet of ditching. It had expensive causeways, roads and bridges throughout the plantation. Buildings included a large, spacious, and well-finished stone boiling house connected with a curing house measuring 67 feet long by 31 feet wide with division walls for molasses cisterns and mill house (sugar manufacturing), a large frame building with a steam engine with iron rollers (sugar cane grinding), a large frame two-stories high corn house, a pumpkin house, two large cattle sheds, a large fodder (animal feed) house and a number of small buildings used as a blacksmith shop, kitchen and slave houses. There were also oxen, horses, stock cattle, several carts and a variety of tools and miscellaneous plantation-related machinery.

A July 1835 article in the Farmers' Register titled, 'On the Soils and Agricultural Advantages of Florida' describe St. Joseph's Plantation from a visiting planter's assessment as:

"...the most valuable plantation soil wise, in Florida...Hernandez had with great perseverance and success overcome the laborious difficulties of clearing and draining new land, and has under culture upwards of 200 acres of these swamp lands. The judgment of this observer was that the swamp-lands of East Florida and especially those lying on the branches of the Matanzas and Halifax Rivers are superior in strength and character for the production of sugar to the most valued lands of the West India Islands."

Military Occupation during the Second Seminole War

During the Second Seminole War the Florida Militia occupied St. Joseph's plantation and renamed it Camp Brisbane. They converted the large two story house into a hospital on the second floor and a storehouse on the first floor. They also tore down the log blacksmith shop and two log slave houses and used the logs to build fortifications around the hospital building. St. Joseph's/Camp Brisbane became the second brigade of the second regiment of the Florida Militia's main supply depot for its operations south of St. Augustine. Interestingly, Brigadier General Joseph M. Hernandez commanded this unit of the Florida Brigade.

Ravage Resulting from the Second Seminole War

After the Florida Militia's defeat at the Battle of Dunlawton⁷ on January 18, 1836, Gen. Hernandez ordered the battered and wounded forces led by Major Benjamin Putnam⁸ to retreat to Bulowville⁹ and wait for reinforcements. On January 23, 1836, Hernandez realized that reinforcements were not coming so he ordered Maj. Putnam to abandon Bulowville and relocate his troops to St. Joseph's/Camp Brisbane. It was apparent that the hospital at St. Joseph's/Camp Brisbane could not accommodate all the wounded as many required more skilled medical attention. On January 28, 1839, Maj. Putnam abandoned St. Joseph's/Camp Brisbane and relocated all of his troops to St. Augustine.

Joseph Marion Hernandez's St. Joseph's Plantation

Since Bulowville and St. Joseph's/Camp Brisbane were left unguarded by troops and deserted by white owners and black slaves the Seminole Indians and their allies, burnt most of their buildings (**Figure 1**) and looted the remaining property (which was what happened to most of the other plantations in the Tomoka region of northeastern Florida during the Second Seminole War). In addition to the intensive damage rendered by the Seminoles, the U.S. Army plundered a large quantity of crops for food and feed for their horses and mules and killed livestock for food and hides during their occupation. As a result, the large plantation economy south of St. Augustine was virtually destroyed. It never recovered to its thriving times prior to the Second Seminole War. Ruins scattered around the area still stand as testaments to the once prosperous plantation industry.



Figure 1 – Some of the ruins of the once impressive sugar mill complex at Bulowville. Fire scars from its destruction in 1836 are still visible on many of the coquina building stones. Photograph by author (November 26, 2016).

St. Joseph's Plantation Closes and Erodes

Hernandez was able to recover a percentage of his wartime losses from the U.S. government, which enabled him to partially rebuild the St. Joseph's plantation after the Second Seminole War. He managed to yield a considerable crop of sugar and syrup, but was not able to produce enough profit to maintain the plantation. In 1850, Hernandez left the United States and moved to Cuba. The portions of what remained of the St. Joseph's Plantation were abandoned and eroded away over the following decades.

Amateur Boy Scout Excavations in the 1960s

Plantation buildings and canal ruins were visible above ground (**Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5**) during the 1960s when a Boy Scout excavation project led by Reece Moore was conducted. The parts of the

Joseph Marion Hernandez's St. Joseph's Plantation

plantation complex that were visible appeared to be built in a series of levels and extended for approximately two hundred and fifty feet. Obviously, it is not known what portions of the plantation ruins remained under ground during the 1960s as these boy scouts did not have the knowledge, time or resources to conduct detailed professional-level excavations.

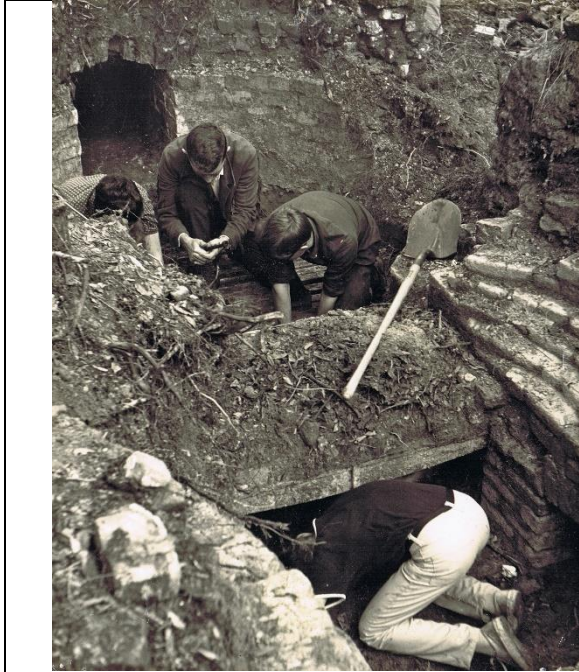


Figure 2 - Canal excavations by a Boy Scout Troop led by Reese Moore (circa 1960s). Source: Flagler Beach Historical Museum.



Figure 3 - Excavation preparation by a Boy Scout Troop led by Reese Moore (circa 1960s). Source: Flagler Beach Historical Museum.

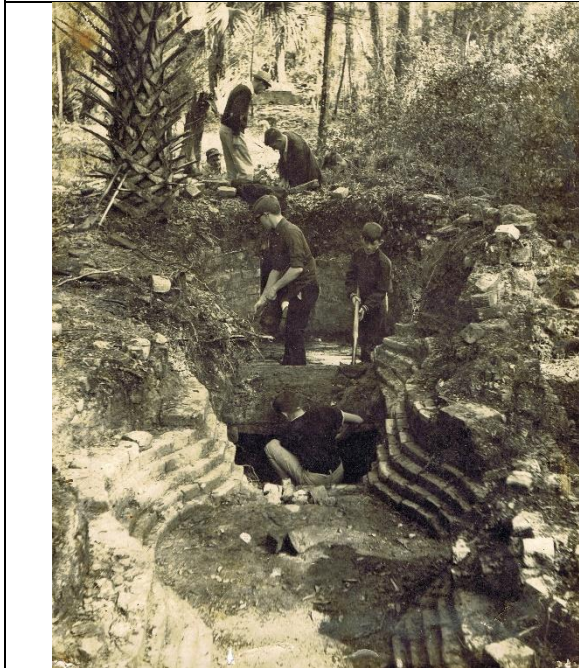


Figure 4 - Clearing dirt from a canal by a Boy Scout Troop led by Reese Moore (circa 1960s). Source: Flagler Beach Historical Museum.



Figure 5 - Laying out an excavation grid by a Boy Scout Troop led by Reese Moore (circa 1960s). Source: Flagler Beach Historical Museum.

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Creal family photographs from the 1960s (**Figures 6, 7 and 8**) also reveal that many ruins of the St. Joseph's Plantation existed above ground.

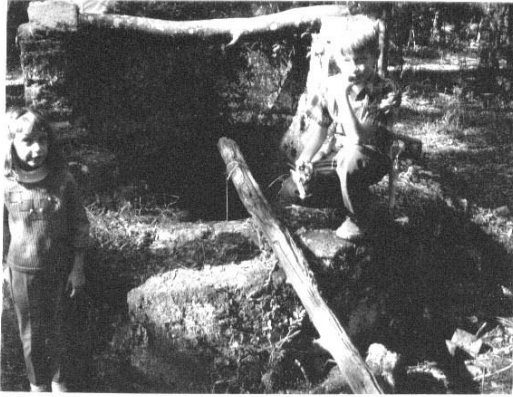


Figure 6 - Creal family picture at the St Joseph's Plantation ruins - portions of building walls were standing (circa 1966) – Source: Rob Creal.



Figure 7 - Creal family picture at the St Joseph's Plantation ruins - portions of building walls (some more than 4 feet high) were standing (circa 1966) – Source: Rob Creal.



Figure 8 - Creal family picture at the St Joseph's Plantation ruins – wide curving canals were still extant (circa 1966) – Source: Rob Creal.

Palm Coast's Development and Decimation of the St. Joseph's Plantation Ruins

Obviously, from photographic evidence and eyewitness accounts ruins of the St. Joseph's Plantation existed into the 1970s during the initial development of Palm Coast. For various reasons, some speculative, the ITT-Levitt developers destroyed what was remaining of the St. Joseph's Plantation, at least the portions that were visible above ground. It is not known what

Joseph Marion Hernandez's St. Joseph's Plantation

remnants of the vast complex could still be buried underneath homes, streets, commercial buildings or parking lots. Today, the Island Walk at Palm Coast shopping center (**Figures 9 & 10**) and the surrounding housing community and streets sit on top of the site where the once impressive St. Joseph's Plantation operated and thrived.



Figure 9 - Island Walk at Palm Coast - Entrance Sign at Old Kings Road. Photograph by Author (May 28, 2019).



Figure 10 - Island Walk at Palm Coast - Parking Lot and Commercial Buildings. Photograph by Author (May 28, 2019).

Interestingly, property that contained some of the Mala Compra plantation ruins was purchased by Flagler County in 1989 and is now preserved as an archaeological site within Flagler County's Bings Landing park. The Mala Compra Plantation Archaeological Site (**Figure 11**) was added to the National Register of Historic Places on March 5, 2004.



Figure 11 - Ruins of the kitchen and fireplace of the plantation residence of Joseph Hernandez – at the Mala Compra Plantation Archaeological Site in Palm Coast, FL. Photograph by author (February 24, 2017).

End Notes

¹ **Minorcans** are people who originated from **Minorca** or **Menorca** which is an island that belongs to Spain and is one of the Balearic Islands located in the Mediterranean Sea.

² **Indentured servants** (also referred to as indentured laborers) are employees who are bound by a signed or forced contract that requires them to work for a particular employer for a fixed period of time. This contract was legally binding in British America (the 13 Colonies) and indentured servants were threatened with imprisonment or violent treatment if they did not complete the terms of their contract. Between one-half and two-thirds of white immigrants coming to the 13 British Colonies between the 1630s and the 1770s were indentured servants. The adoption of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution on December 18, 1865 made indentured servitude illegal in the United States.

³ **Dr. Andrew Turnbull** (1718-1792) was a Scottish physician who, in 1767, organized the largest attempt at British colonization in British Florida. He started a 101,400 acre colony with 1,400 colonists (mostly all indentured servants from the island of Menorca) called New Smyrna (now New Smyrna Beach, Florida). It was almost three times larger than the Jamestown colony. In 1783, when Florida was returned to Spain he left the New Smyrna colony and retired in Charleston, South Carolina.

⁴ British East Florida Governor **Patrick Tonyn** (1725–1804) was a British General and served from 1774 to 1783 as the last British governor of East Florida. Through good negotiations, he was able to keep peace with the Seminole Indians during his tenure as British East Florida's governor.

⁵ **Orange Grove Plantation** was developed from a 3200 acre land grant that Samuel Williams received in 1803. Originally, there was a plantation house, sugar mill, warehouse and other plantation related buildings. In 1830, the plantation was turned over to William H. Williams (the son of Joseph Marion Hernandez's wife Anna). The plantation was burnt down in 1836 during the Second Seminole War. In 1870, Matthias Day purchased the Samuel Williams land grant and began selling it off as land lots to start a settlement. The area where this plantation once thrived is now part of the city of Daytona Beach, Florida.

⁶ The **Whig Party** was a political party in the United States that existed from 1834 to 1854. It was a leading opponent of the policies of President Andrew Jackson and his Democratic Party. The Whigs supported the power of the Congress over the office of the President. In its brief existence four U.S. Presidents were elected as Whigs: William Henry Harrison (in office: 1841), John Tyler (in office: 1841-1845), Zachary Taylor (in office: 1849-1850) and Millard Fillmore (in office: 1850-1853).

⁷ The **Battle of Dunlawton** occurred on January 18, 1836 around the temporary fortification of Camp Dunlawton, which the Florida Militia built at the Anderson or Dunlawton Plantation (which is located in present-day Port Orange, FL). Major Benjamin Putnam led a detachment of troops (St. Augustine Guards and Captain Douglas Dummett's Company) on a mission to remove corn supplies from the camp and plantation before they fell into the hands of the Seminole Indians. When the militia arrived, plantation buildings were already on fire. They waited until the next morning to confront the Seminoles and then the "Battle of Dunlawton" broke out. The militia was

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outnumbered, underestimated the forces of the Seminoles, and were handily defeated. Putnam ordered a retreat and the detachment made it back to the Bulowville but three were dead, thirteen wounded and two were stranded on Pelican Island (one of which was never heard from again). Camp Dunlawton was left abandoned by the militia and was subsequently burnt down by the Seminoles. The militia's eventual retreat to St. Augustine after their defeat at the Battle of Dunlawton resulted in the abandonment of military defenses on the east coast of Florida south of St. Augustine. Most of the plantations were subsequently destroyed by the Seminoles, which resulted in the devastation of the area's economy.

⁸ **Benjamin Putnam** (1801-1869) was born in Savannah, Georgia on the Putnam Plantation. He attended Harvard University and studied and practiced law in St. Augustine, FL. During the Second Seminole War (1835-1842), he served as Major, Colonel and Adjutant General. Politically, he served in both houses of the Florida legislature and was the Speaker of the House in 1848. U.S. President Zachary Taylor appointed him Surveyor-General of Florida, a position he held from May 1848 to 1854. He was also was the President of the Florida Historical Society from 1853 to 1856. Florida's Putnam County is named for him.

⁹ **Bulowville** was a plantation that was developed in 1821 by Major Wilhelm Bulow which was located next to a tidal creek (present-day Bulow Creek) and located in present-day Flagler Beach, FL. The total land consisted of 4,675 acres, of which 2,200 acres were cleared and cultivated by human slaves of African origin. Sugar cane, rice, cotton and indigo were grown on the plantation. In 1821, John Joachim Bulow inherited the plantation after his father's death. The famous artist and naturalist, John James Audubon, stayed at Bulowville and explored the area from Christmas of 1831 into January of 1832. A large sugar mill complex, reportedly the largest that ever existed in Florida, operated on this plantation until the end of January 1836 when the Seminole Indians and their allies burnt and destroyed it and all the other plantation buildings during the Second Seminole War. The property and ruins were acquired by the State of Florida in 1945. In 1957, the property was dedicated as a State Historic Park. On September 29, 1970, the **Bulow Plantation Ruins Historic State Park** was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Joseph Marion Hernandez's St. Joseph's Plantation

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