



The History of Wekiwa Springs

By Don Philpott and the Wekiva Wilderness Trust

Wekiwa History

Introduction

A lot has been written about the history of Wekiwa Springs over the years and it is fair to say that much of it has been based on hearsay rather than fact.

The purpose of this book was to try to clarify the facts based on historical data gleaned from old maps, photographs, and official records. By piecing together this information, especially over the past 200 or so years, we believe we now have a more accurate overview of the history of the Wekiwa Springs area – and what a fascinating history it is.

In the beginning...

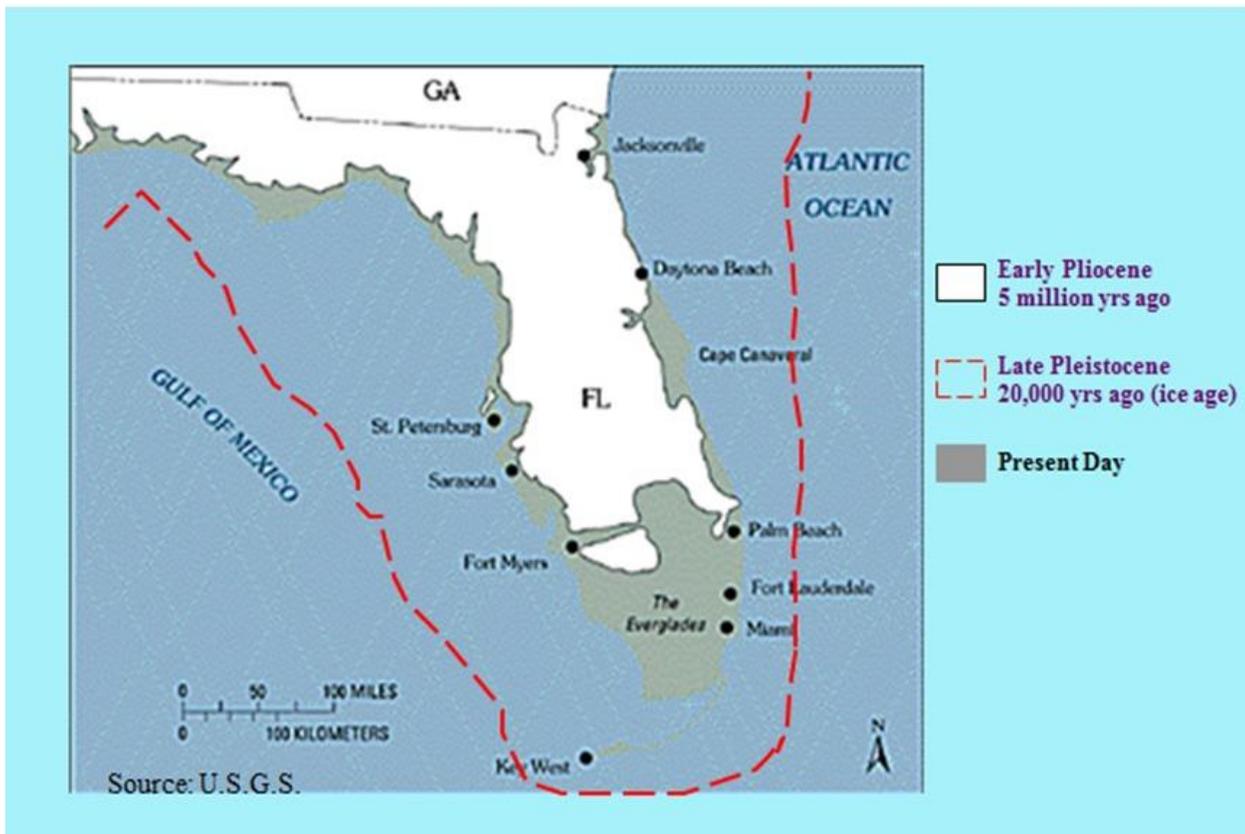
Florida was originally on the western coast of a giant continent called Gondwana. About 300 million years ago, Gondwana collided with another supercontinent called Laurasia, trapping Florida in between them. This collision resulted in an even larger supercontinent called Pangea.

Eventually, Pangea broke apart with Gondwana splitting up to form most of the land south of the equator, while Laurasia eventually formed the lands north of the equator, including North America.

Although Florida was part of Gondwana it seems to have attached itself to Laurasia during the collision and was dragged away with it. This is borne out by the fact that volcanic and sedimentary rocks found up to 3 miles below the surface of Florida are similar in composition and age to rocks found in Senegal, Africa, and are unlike those in the rest of the southeastern U.S.

When the North American landmass finally settled in its current location, Florida was still submerged. Global temperatures were much warmer then and sea levels much higher. For about 130 million years, limestone deposits accumulated on submerged Florida.

About 30 million years ago, the climate cooled significantly. As ice sheets formed, sea levels dropped significantly. So much water was trapped in the glaciers that the levels of the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico were much lower – as much as 350 feet lower than today – and the peninsula was twice the width of modern-day Florida.



This cooling (glacial) and warming (interglacial) cycle continued for millions of years with peninsula Florida repeatedly emerging from the sea and then being submerged under it. This accounts for the layering of aquatic fossils topped by terrestrial fossils, topped by aquatic fossils, and so on.

While dinosaurs roamed the rest of North America, the peninsula of Florida was still submerged several hundred feet below the sea. Instead of massive land animals, the warm waters above what was to become Florida were home to giant sharks - more than 55 feet long - whales and giant dugong, related to today's endangered manatee.

When Florida finally emerged for the last time, there were few flowing rivers and wetlands, and the weather was much cooler. At this time mammoths, mastodons, saber-tooth tigers, camels, rhinoceroses, giant ground sloths, giant beavers, wolves, and glyptodonts (a 1,000 lb. ancestors of the armadillo) roamed the countryside. All had been driven south by advancing Ice Age glaciers.

When the Ice Age ended and the oceans stabilized, seawater was trapped by dunes and ridges creating lagoons and rainwater gathered in limestone hollows. Natural acids dissolved the limestone (karstification) to form caves, sinkholes, and complex underground drainage systems which we now call the Floridan Aquifer, one of the largest aquifers in the world.

In places, the water would bubble up out of the ground as springs and the first settlers in Florida, the Paleo-Indians, chose these rain-filled hollows and springs as their campsites.

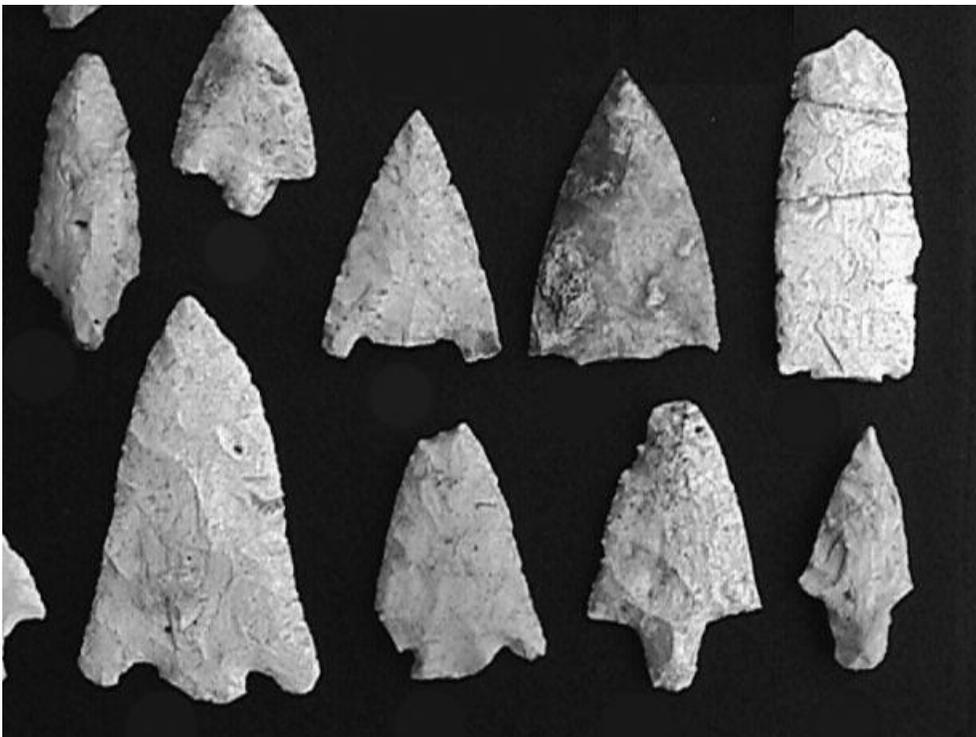
Paleo Indians

Around 12000-11000 BC, Paleo-Indians arrived in Florida. Their ancestors had entered North America from eastern Asia across a huge land bridge exposed by the lower sea levels. They were wandering hunters and gatherers although they rarely hunted big game. Their diet consisted mainly of small animals, plants, nuts, and shellfish. Because there were few rivers, their settlements were built close to springs, sinkholes, and water holes where animals also had to come to drink.

Spear points and pottery shards can still be found in the riverbed and springs, and at least a dozen campsites have been documented along the Wekiva River and its tributary, Rock Springs Run. The oldest items found in Wekiwa Springs are pieces of fossilized ivory dating back to around 10,000 years ago although artifacts dating to 12,000 BC have been found near Lake Apopka.

The northern glaciers started retreating about 8,500 BC and Florida's climate became warmer and wetter as the sea level rose.

This encouraged more people to migrate south and establish settlements in other areas. It was around this time that the Paleo-Indian culture evolved into the Early Archaic culture that saw the first permanent settlements. The Indians were skilled weavers and twine makers using fibers from Sabal palm, saw palmetto, and other plants. The twine was used to weave cloth, make fishnets, and rope. Tools and weapons were made from bone.



Source. WSSP

Early fishing spearheads

The Early Archaic culture evolved into the Middle Archaic culture around 5,000 BC. People established villages along wetlands and near rivers and their locations were so favorable that they flourished generation after generation.

Middens and Shell Mounds

A midden is effectively a settlement's garbage tip that over the years grows until it becomes a mound. Once the settlement is abandoned the midden gets covered with vegetation. This flora is unique due to the high Ph of the calcium shells. A professional exploration can reveal enormous information about the lives of the people. Midden deposits can contain animal bone, shells, botanical material, pottery fragments, and other artifacts that can tell how people lived and what they ate. Middens with damp conditions can even preserve organic remains that can yield information about climate and seasonal use. There are many middens and shell mounds in the parks although most are of undetermined age and many have been vandalized and damaged. Between 1940 and 1970, several squatter cabins were built on top of island middens along the Wekiva. Both their construction and their removal in the 1980s caused further damage.

Around 3,000BC, Florida's climate was much the same as it is today, and the Late Archaic period began. This was the time when the largest shell middens accumulated as shellfish and fish were a major food source. The people lived in large villages and learned how to fire pottery, tempering it with Spanish moss and palmetto fibers. By about 500 BC the Archaic culture, dominant throughout Florida, began to fragment into regional cultures. Each developed its distinctive pottery which has helped archaeologists identify and study-specific cultures. One of these cultures was St. Johns – named after the river along which they lived.

It was long thought that the Timucua were the main tribe in the area, but historical documentation suggests that the Mayaca, Jororo, or Rinconada tribes were the likeliest to have settled the area.

These Native Americans were farmers and fishermen and their settlements have been found throughout the region. Spearheads and pottery shards have been found in the springs and Wekiva riverbed and at least six early campsites have been documented along the Wekiva River and Rock Springs Run. Spearheads are often mistaken for arrowheads but bows and arrows had not been introduced then. Most spearheads and knives were made from chert, not flint. Chert is formed by the precipitation of silica to form nodules and is the most common material used in Florida for points. Indian pottery shards dating back to 2,500 BC have been found. Of more recent origin are finds of flints and ivory used for spearheads although these are at least 1,500 years old as Indians did not start using bows and arrows until about 500 A.D. Native Americans lived around Wekiwa Springs, Rock Springs, and the Wekiva River throughout the Pre-Columbian period, beginning with the Paleo Indians and continuing through the Archaic, Mount Taylor, Orange, Transitional and St. Johns Periods.

Amerindian Timeline

Paleo-Indian period — 12,000 B.C.

Archaic period — 6,000 B.C. – 1,000 B.C.

Mount Taylor period — 4,000 B.C. – 2,000 B.C.,

St. Johns period — 500 B.C.-A.D.1565

The tribes lived in villages of 25 to 30 houses. Each home was round and about 25 feet in diameter. In the winter, the roof was made of thatched palms and in the hot summer, reeds were used that allowed the air to circulate. Primarily hunters and gatherers, they did plant crops such as maize, beans, and squash, including pumpkins. They made tools and artifacts from bone, stone, and shells. They used fiber from the cabbage palm to make ropes and fishing nets and for weaving cloth. They used dugout canoes, made from pine or cypress. The shallow, narrow canoes were up to 20 feet long and had a platform at each end for poling the boat or fishing. When on long trips, they would often sink their canoes and cover them in mud so that they were protected until they returned for them. Many of their shell middens are located along the banks of the Wekiva River, Rock Springs Run, and Wekiwa Springs. The largest midden was at what is now Katie's landing and the largest island midden was Shell Island (see below).

There are 78 archaeological sites recorded in the Wekiva River Basin State Parks including one prehistoric village site, four Indian mounds, seven lithic scatter sites, and thirty shell middens identified from the Early Archaic, Orange, St. Johns I, St. Johns II, and modern periods. Also, twenty-five cultural sites date from the early 19th century and are discussed in more detail later.

Did you know that the Wekiva Basin State Parks also boasts two historic shipwreck sites? One of them is the Wekiva ferry which served the township of Markham. It brought supplies and the mail to Markham and outlying settlements like Zellwood and Winter Park. Constructed in the late 19th century, it was discovered by divers after a search in 1991.



Source. WSSP

The French

In February 1562, a French expedition, organized by Protestant Admiral Gaspard de Coligny and led by the French Explorer Jean Ribault, landed at a site on the May River (now St. Johns) and established a small colony. After a year, the few colonists had not received any new supplies and they abandoned the fort.

On June 22, 1564, René Goulaine de Laudonnière, who had been Ribault's second in command, landed at the site with about 200 French protestant settlers and established Fort Caroline, named after King

Charles IX of France. The colony, whose exact location has never been determined, was intended to be a haven for Huguenots, who were being persecuted in France because they were Protestant, rather than Catholic.

The French colonists relied heavily on the Indians for both food and trade and were welcomed by the Timucua. On July 20, 1565, English adventurer John Hawkins arrived at the fort with his fleet looking for freshwater; there he exchanged his smallest ship for four cannons and a supply of powder and shot.

As Laudonnière writes: "I may say that we received as many courtesies of the General, as it was possible to receive of any man living. Wherein doubtless he hath won the reputation of a good and charitable man, deserving to be esteemed as much of us all as if he had saved all our lives."

The French introduced Hawkins to tobacco, which they all were using, and he introduced it to England when he returned.

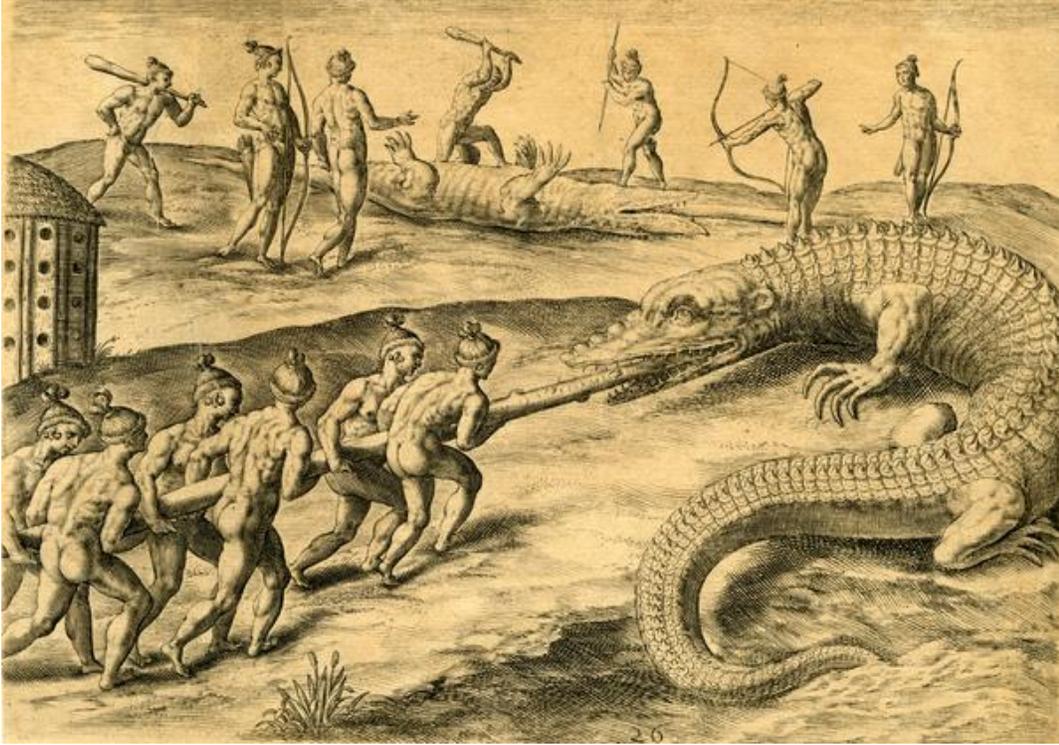
In late August, Ribault returned to Fort Caroline with a large fleet and hundreds of soldiers and settlers, taking command of the colony. Within days, the Spanish Governor of Florida, Don Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, arrived and there were skirmishes between the two fleets. The Spanish retreated 35 miles south and established the settlement of St. Augustine.

On September 20, Spanish troops who had marched north during a violent storm attacked Fort Caroline. Apart from about 50 women and children who were taken prisoner, almost everyone else in the garrison was massacred. Laudonnière and a handful of others were able to escape.

Ribault's fleet had been caught in the storm and all his ships sank or ran aground. Ribault and several hundred sailors managed to make it ashore, but they were captured by Menéndez on September 29 and put to death as heretics.

The Spanish destroyed Fort Caroline and built their fort on the same site. In April 1568, Dominique de Gourgues led a French force that attacked, captured, and burned the fort. He then slaughtered the Spanish prisoners in revenge for the 1565 massacre. The Spanish rebuilt but permanently abandoned the fort the following year.

French artist Jacques le Moyne had been living at Fort Caroline but ventured out to spend time with the Timucua capturing their way of life in drawings. When the colony was destroyed, le Moyne managed to escape, but all his drawings were lost. However, he was able to recreate many of his drawings from memory and Theodore De Bry created engravings of them which were published in a book in 1591. Some of his drawings are shown below.



Crocodile Hunting (Source. Florida Memory)



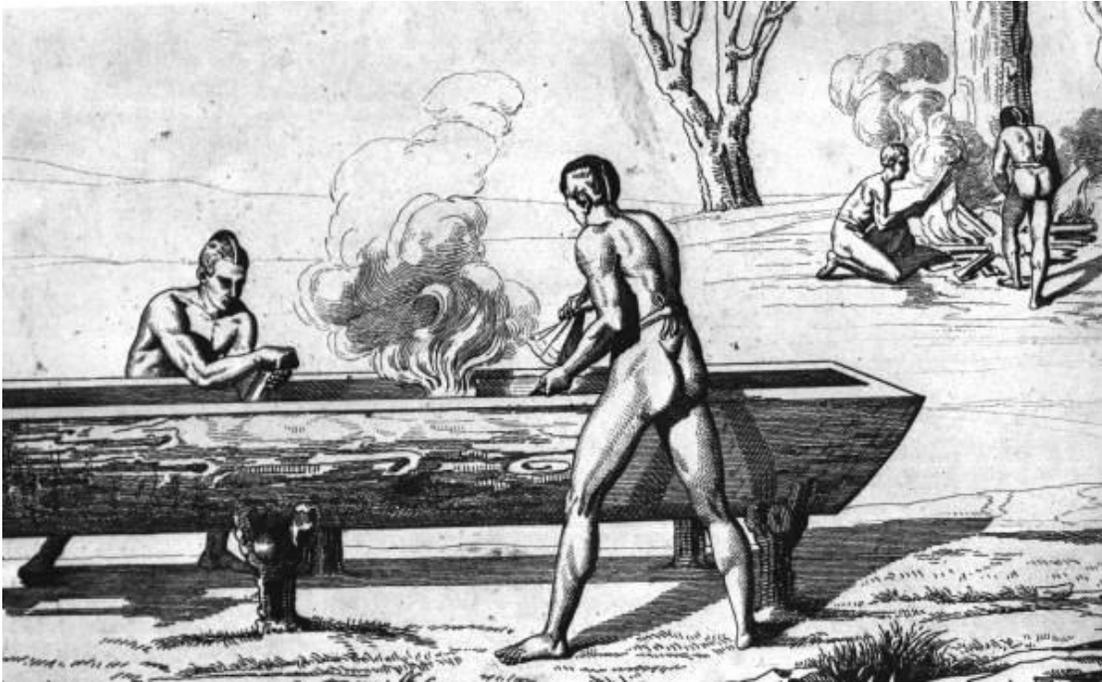
Drying fish and game (Source. Florida Memory)



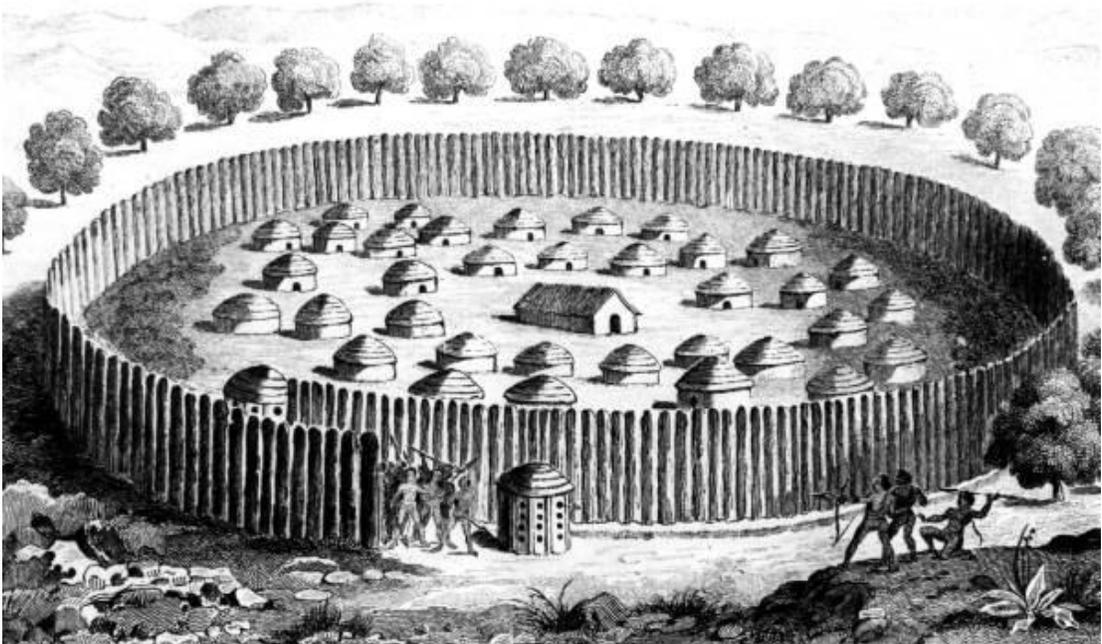
Hunting deer (Source. Florida Memory)



Preparing a feast (Source. Florida Memory)



Canoe building using fire (Source. Florida Memory)



Fortified village (Source. Florida Memory)

The Spanish

In the 1500s the first Spanish explorers arrived. Apart from horses and oranges, they brought with them European diseases that killed most of the Indians. In 1513 there were six or seven main groups of Indians throughout Florida with about 40,000 Timucua in Central Florida. In the 1700s, Seminole Indians, descendants of the Creek Indians, moved into central Florida from Alabama and Georgia,

taking over the areas formerly inhabited by the Timucua. The origin of the word Seminole is not certain. Some say it is derived from a Creek word meaning “runaway” – someone who has left the main camp and settled elsewhere – while others argue it “comes from ‘cimarron’, a colloquial Spanish word for “wild”.

The English

In 1763 Britain briefly gained control of Florida from the Spanish by exchanging it for Havana, Cuba, which they had captured during the Seven Years War. The British tried to populate the area by offering land and in July 1768 Scottish doctor Andrew Turnbull arrived with 1,400 indentured workers and settled at New Smyrna creating the biggest settlement in Central Florida. Although there were explorations inland, the settlement did not flourish, and it collapsed after a few years and the people moved north to St. Augustine. British rule ended in 1784 as part of the Treaty of Paris that concluded the American Revolution. Florida was returned to Spain.

Exploration

In 1765 William Bartram, the first botanist to explore southeastern North America made camp near the Wekiva River. With his botanist father John, he spent more than a year recording the plants and animals of the area. The Seminoles helped them explore and named William Puc Puggy or “flower lover”.

Settlement and Seminole Wars

In the late 18th and early 19th century, settlers began colonizing Central Florida and by the mid-1800s, the area was primarily used for farming and milling.

After the end of the War of 1812 (1812-1814), Florida was under Spanish control and many black slaves who had fled the war were living with the Seminoles. General Andrew Jackson ordered his troops to recapture the runaway slaves. They attacked the Seminole villages and destroyed many of them, leading to the First Seminole War (1817-1818). The English captured Spanish-held Pensacola and in 1819, the Spanish agreed to cede its Florida territory to the U.S. under the terms of the Transcontinental Treaty.

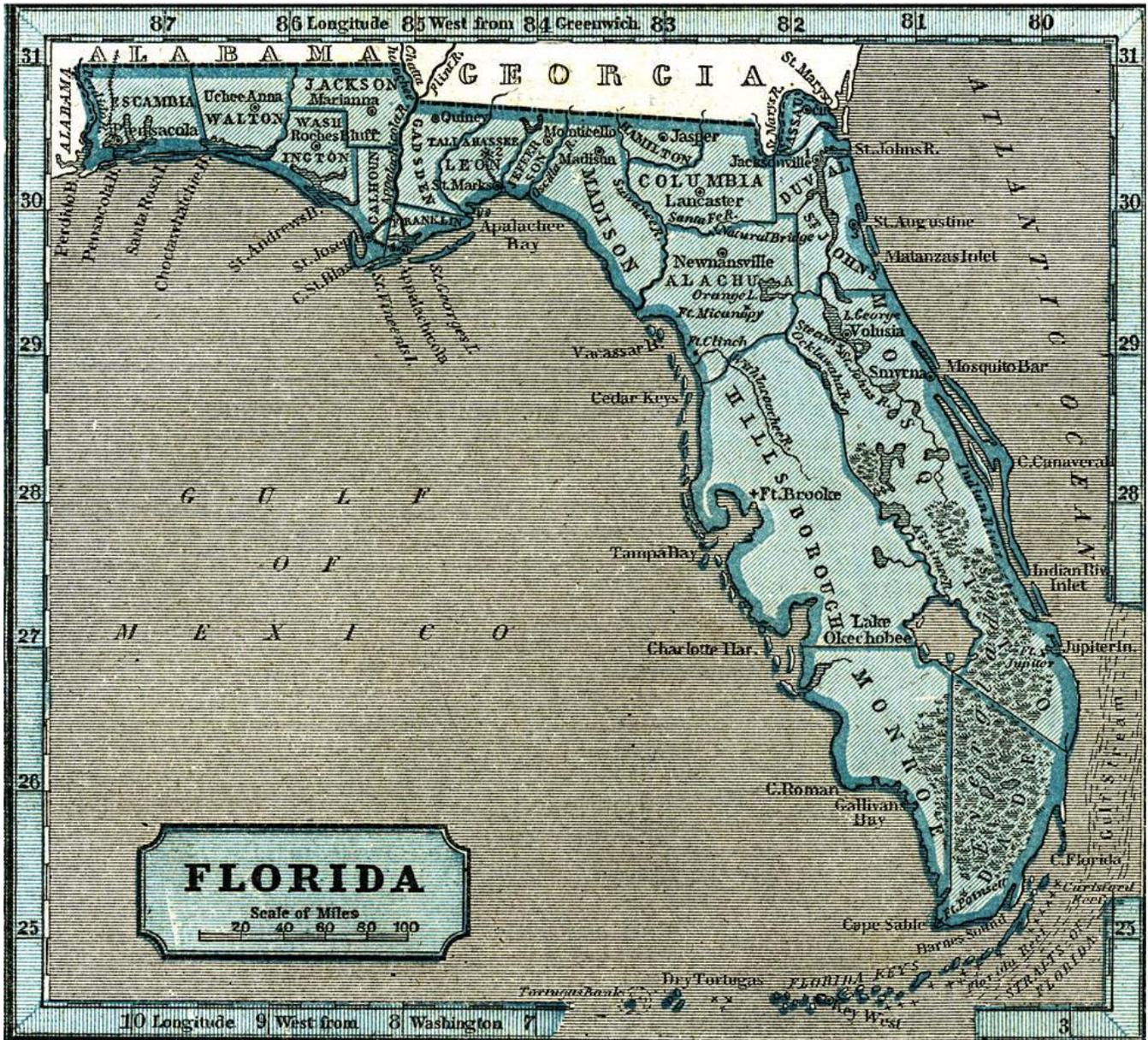
In July 1821, the United States formally took control of Florida and encouraged more settlement. The pressure grew on the U.S. government to remove the Seminoles. This led to the Second Seminole War (1835-1842). The only battle of the Seminole Wars in Orange County was fought in the swamps of Wekiva on July 29, 1840. The enemy killed Private Isaac Childs of the Second Regiment of Dragoons on that day. During the wars, the Seminoles used Wekiwa and its swamps to hide from the U.S. Army. In 1840 Major James A. Ashby used a Seminole prisoner, to find Seminole chief Coacoochee’s camp near Rock Springs Run. Coacoochee escaped from captivity and with many of his Seminoles, made his way to Mexico.

The Armed Occupation Act of 1842 brought more white settlers to the area. They received 160 acres if they agreed to farm them. As more settlers moved into Florida there was increasing conflict as they took over Seminole lands.

The Third Seminole War (1855-1858) was fought mostly in South Florida, which was a series of raids and skirmishes. With their food supplies cut off, the Seminoles agreed to relocate to Oklahoma with the promise of safe passage. About 500 Seminole refused to leave and retreated into the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp.

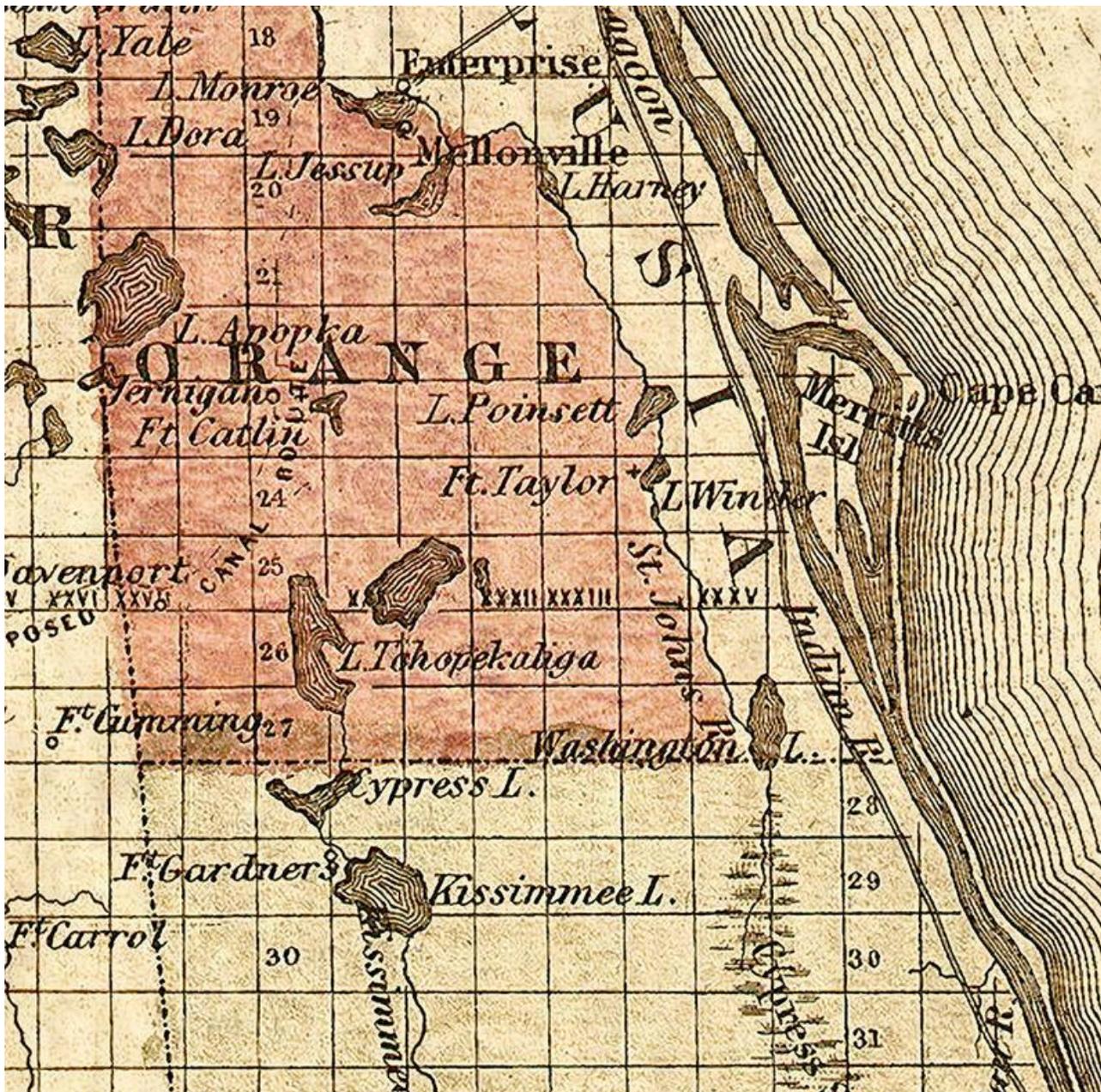
Statehood

On March 3, 1845, Florida became the 27th state of the United States of America. In the same year, Mosquito changed its name to become Orange County. Almost half its population was made up of enslaved African Americans working on cotton and sugar plantations. Peter Buchan with his family and slaves established the first plantation close to the springs in the 1840s.

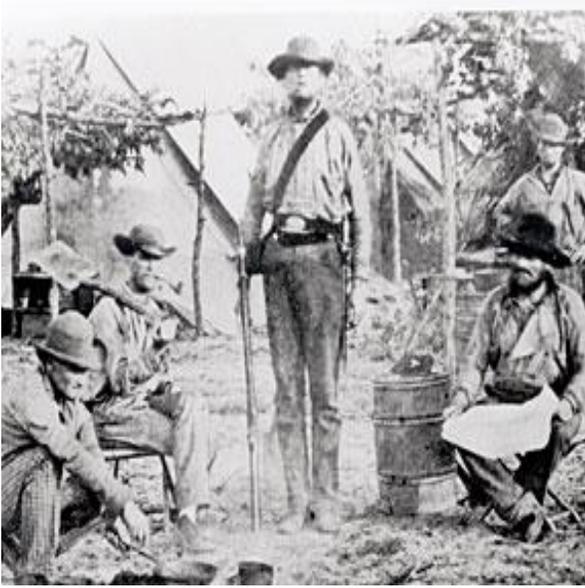


1845 map of Florida (Source. Florida Memory)

In 1860 Florida's population was only 140,424 and almost half were slaves. Most of the population was in the northern part of the state. Central Florida was largely uninhabited. An 1863 map of Florida (below) for the U.S. Government shows Orange County as devoid of settlements other than a handful of forts. There is no mention of the Wekiva River.



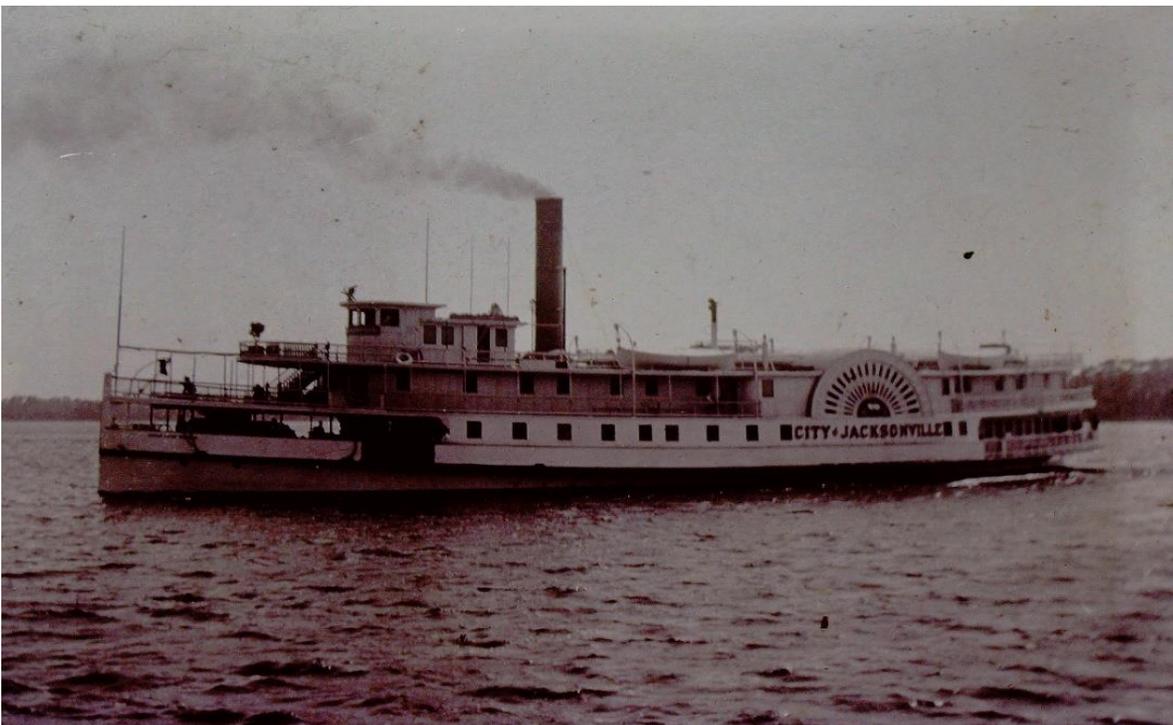
Orange County 1863 (Source. Florida Memory)



A scouting party during the Civil War (Source. Florida Memory)

Early Tourism

At the end of the Civil War in 1865, Florida started to become a tourist destination. Jacob Brock built Enterprise, a winter resort on the northside of Lake Monroe. He operated a steamboat service from Jacksonville to his resort to bring in his guests and he also operated smaller vessels that would take his guests on local river excursions, including the Wekiva River.



Early steamboat – the City of Jacksonville (Source. Florida Memory)

At the same time, many of the people who had moved out of the area because of the war returned. Among these were the Buchans, who were among the earliest settlers to the area. When they returned to Apopka, they came by way of the St. Johns River to Sanford and the Wekiwa River to Wekiwa Springs, then known as Clay Springs. They constructed a barge on the St. Johns River, on which they loaded all their belongings, including several barrels of salt that had been evaporated from seawater. The barge was floated down the St. Johns and paddled up the Wekiwa, and the salt was sold to their neighbors at a handsome profit.

A boat dock was built at Wekiwa and flat-bottom steamers were able to navigate the shallow waters of the Wekiwa River. The steamers brought tourists in and carried timber and citrus out.



Jacob Brock (Source. Florida Memory)

Tourists came to enjoy the year-round good weather and the warm waters of the springs.

Wekiwa Springs was then known as Clay Springs after farmer L. H. Clay, who homesteaded land nearby in the mid-1840s. An 1847 U.S. survey of the area refers to “Clay’s improvements” and shows the location of Wekiwa Springs, according to the late University of Central Florida historian Jerrell H. Shofner in his 1982 book “History of Apopka and Northwest Orange County, Florida.”

L.H. Clay was still on the land in 1850, according to U.S. census records, but his name does not appear in later county tax records, Shofner wrote.

Wekiwa was a popular destination, not only for Orlando and area residents but also for people from up and down the St. Johns River. Clay Springs was also the name of the community that had sprung up along the Wekiwa River. It had about 100 residents and was important as it served as a port and shipping point for the Apopka-Zellwood area. The community was scattered on the higher ground south of the springs and probably straddled what is now the Wekiwa Springs Road.

Barges brought in food and supplies to the warehouse and wharf at Clay Springs and would then take oranges and lumber to the St. Johns River, where steamboats carried it to Jacksonville. The township had a sawmill, printing shop, and factory where oranges were pressed into wine. Joel D. Smith was the town postmaster - appointed by President Grover Cleveland – and mail was brought upriver from Mellonville, the original name for Sanford.



Laden river steamer bringing in supplies in the late 1800s. (Source. Florida Memory)

By 1870, the settlement sought to challenge Apopka for the political leadership of northwest Orange County. That year, Orange (which then included present-day Seminole County) built a road that connected the wharf at Clay Springs to routes that reached Orlando, Apopka, and the St. Johns River. Clay Springs was designated by County Commissioners as the polling station for the area but in 1874, it moved back to Apopka.

In the early 1870s, developer and later citrus baron Henry Sanford opened a Clay Springs store that was a branch of his business in the city that bore his name. His goal was to trade with cotton farmers and citrus growers in the Clay Springs and Apopka areas.

After the Civil War, several freed slaves also moved into the area. One of these was Anthony Frazier, an African American soldier who fought for the Union during the Civil War and later farmed land near the Wekiva River. His headstone was discovered on the park's Neighborhood Lakes property during the construction of the Wekiva Parkway. The gravestone is thought to be in the vicinity of the actual grave, but further investigation utilizing ground penetrating radar or other modern equipment would be necessary before moving the gravestone from its current location underneath a stand of trees where it is protected from the elements.

When the gravestone was found, it was lying on the ground beneath an old tree. After some time, the tree toppled over, and the root ball rose out the ground eerily raising the gravestone to a vertical position as seen in the photographs below.



Source. WSSP



Source. WSSP

River Transport

The first steamboat operating on the Wekiva River was built by Capt. T. W. Lund and his father and went into service in December 1874. The shallow draft vessel operated from Clay Springs to the mouth of the Wekiva connecting with steamers from Jacksonville. The service ceased in 1876.

Sometime in the mid to late-19th century a ferry boat that transported people across the Wekiva River sank. It is now a shipwreck site close to the old township of Markham, within the boundaries of Wekiwa Springs State Park.

Although popular as a bathing spot, an article in the Atlanta Constitution in 1875 said that the spring “reeked of a villainous odor of sulfur”. The writer went on to say that while water laced with sulfur might be healthy, he preferred Atlanta well water to “a liquid that smells like the extract of ten thousand polecats”.

Around the same time, Clay Springs storeowners William Mills and Matthew A. Stewart launched the Wekiva Steamboat Co. They had been hauling in supplies by wagon over a sandy road from Melonville.

Not only did they recognize that the Wekiva could make getting supplies to their store a lot easier, Shofner said they envisioned draining and selling swamplands. Through their partnership, the Wekiva Steamboat Co. signed a deal with the state - which was encouraging entrepreneurs to drain swamps - to keep two-thirds of all the state lands they could drain within a year.

They dredged the river and cleared overhanging branches to allow the steamer Mayflower to ply between Sanford and Clay Springs. The Mayflower was a 70-foot double-ended vessel with a 14-foot

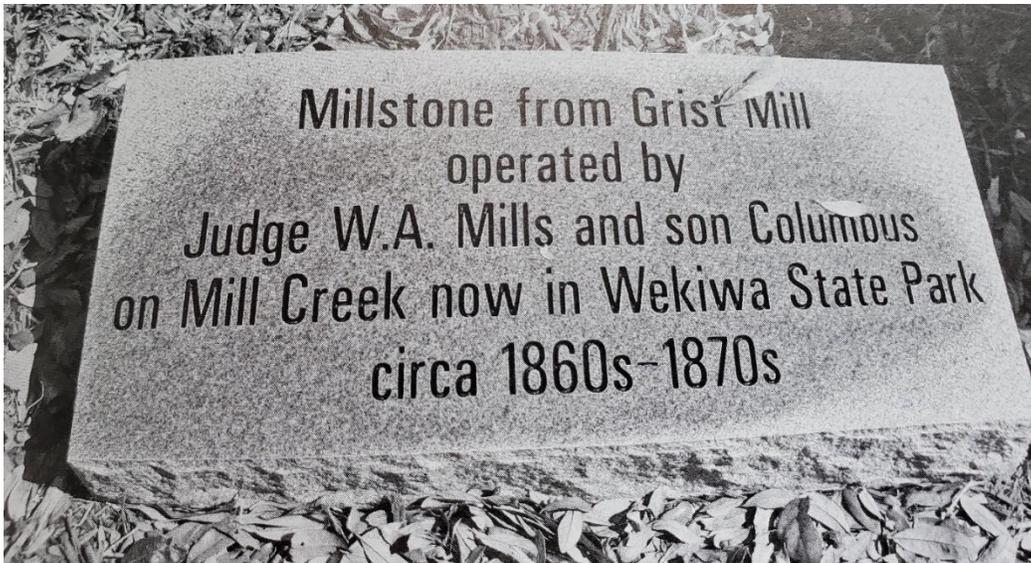
beam, a sidewheel, and a draft of only 14 inches, captained by Capt. E. R. Laws. In 1877 he announced that the Mayflower would make two trips a week between Sanford and Clay Springs. An advertisement in the Tallahassee Floridian said the captain promised "fast day accommodations with saloon below and an awning above with seats for comfort."

Laws later became a minor partner with Mills and Stewart in their steamboat company. Stewart is buried in Apopka Church Cemetery and has a fine headstone.

Wills, who later became a judge, and his son Columbus, also operated a grist mill in the 1860s and 1870s. The mill was located on Mill Creek, which is about a mile from Sand Lake, in the center of what is now Wekiwa Springs State Park. The millstone is now on display at the entrance to the Apopka Historical Society's Museum of Apopkans.



Source. Don Philpott



Source. Don Philpott

Newspapers reported that Wekiwa barges hauled cargo well into the 1880s when railroad competition heated up and eventually overtook the steamers. Even after railroads replaced steamboat commerce, Clay Springs remained a popular bathing and picnic spot and the township had about 50 residents.

Picnic day trips including river cruises, fishing, and bathing with “good eats” were popular. Passengers would pay \$1.50 for a round-trip excursion that included two meals “and an attractive program”.



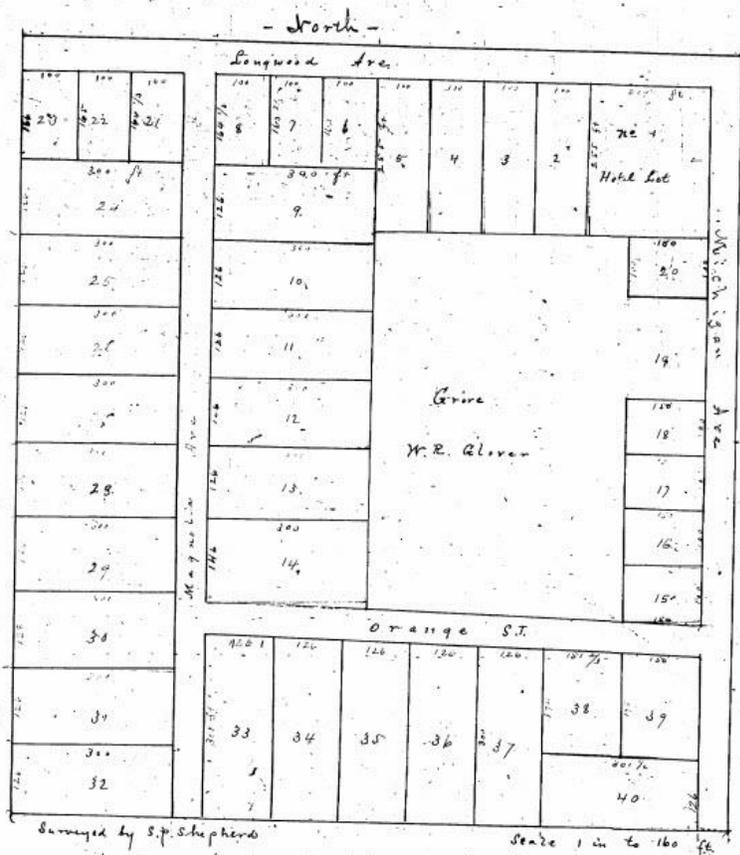
Source. ASCL

Land sales were brisk enough for four real estate companies. Henry Sanford, who had opened a branch of his Sanford general store in Clay Springs, was selling tracts of land bordering Lake Monroe and elsewhere. Some of Sanford's buyers included President Ulysses S. Grant and Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman. The land around Sanford was soon bought up and prospective settlers looked to the interior, including land along the Wekiva.

A newspaper article in 1877 said that the spring was "once a great resort for invalids" and added that the surrounding land would make "a very attractive place for resort".

An article in the Florida Times-Union of May 7, 1884, said, "Clay Springs is a series of immense boiling springs of sulphur water, perfectly pure and transparent in appearance. The springs are in a group, within a radius of about one hundred feet, and give forth a volume of water sufficient to form a navigable river."

Clay Springs was a popular venue for large picnic gatherings and groups would travel in from the growing cities of Orlando, Winter Park, and Maitland. They would spend the day at the springs and then enjoy a moonlit ride back home.



Surveyed by S.P. Stephens

Scale 1 in to 160 ft

- Map of the -
 South West Quarter
 of the Marsh East Quarter
 of
 Section Thirty Six
 Township Twenty South - Range Twenty Eight East
 Clay Springs
 Orange County Fla.

STREET NAME CHANGE: LONGWOOD AVE. IS NOW TO BE KNOWN AS WEKIWA SPRINGS ROAD IN PLAT A PG. 78. APPROVED IN COMM. MINUTE BK. 80 PG. 8, 90-91. SEE PLAT B, B PG 29. A REPLAT OF A PART OF LOTS 19, 34, 35, 36, 37 AND 40 AND A PART OF ORANGE STREET OF CLAY SPRINGS.

SEE RESOLUTION COUNTY COMM. RECORDED 12/16/87 IN O.R. 3946 PAGE 1878 VACATING A PORTION OF PLAT. SEE O.R. FOR DETAILS.

SEE RESOLUTION COUNTY COMM. RECORDED 1/11/89 IN O.R. 4102 PAGE 8106 VACATING A PORTION OF PLAT

SEE RESOLUTION COUNTY COMM. RECORDED 12/15/89 IN O.R. 4144 PAGE 1886 VACATING A PORTION OF PLAT

1885 plat of Clay Springs showing street names and indicating that the name of Longwood Avenue had changed to Wekiwa Springs Road. According to the plat, the hotel lot is seen top right. Source. OCRHC.



The Clay Springs Bathing Club, c.1880s. (Source. OCRHC)

In January 1887, Jacksonville's Florida Times-Union, suggested tongue in cheek that "the United States Government should purchase the springs for a sanitarium to which statesmen whose systems are charged with Washington City malaria could be sent and cured."

An article in June 1894 reported, "A party of about a dozen young ladies has arranged to go to Clay Springs, accompanied by chaperones, and spend all of next week in camping and game playing. They will set one day of the week as gentlemen's day when they will entertain their gentlemen friends."

Sulphur Springs

On August 1, 1885, the Weekly Times-Democrat reported that a hotel "is set to be built at Clay Springs before fall. On September 15, it announced that the new hotel would have fifty rooms.

In late 1885, the Orange County Reporter published a large article about Clay Springs that mentioned the construction of the hotel (the exact date of the article is not visible).

"Work is already progressing upon a hotel which is being erected by T. Stephenson, formerly of Kansas City...The plan of the hotel embraces one hundred rooms. One portion, containing thirty-three rooms, is being pushed as rapidly as possible, and will be completed and ready for guests in January. The building is to be three stories high and will be specifically fitted for the accommodation of visitors and tourists. It is called Ton-ya-wa-tha or Healing Water." (Editor's note: Because of the hotel's strange name, it has appeared in print with multiple variations of the spelling – Ton-ya-tha, Ton-ya-watha, and Tow-ya-wa-tha.)

Miss Rewella McGee was a guest at the hotel on January 1, 1989. She talked about her stay with Mrs. Clairborne Armstrong, her niece, who recounted the conversation in an article in the Orlando Sentinel of January 2, 1969.

“The hotel was built of native heart pine, dark stained in the manner of a Swiss chalet, had a veranda all around the whole building, on at least the first and second floors. It stood among the tall virgin pines.

“There was a carriage driveway from the hotel, up on the hill, down to the famous spring with boathouse, bathing pavilion, and docks. Alongside the carriage driveway was a boardwalk for pedestrians. The avenue was lined with oleanders and hibiscus – not poinsettias, which were imports of a much later date.”

The sheets were Irish linen and had to be changed every day because they wrinkled so badly because of the humidity. The bedspreads were imported from France and were “Marseilles spreads”. There were cuspidors and bracket lamps, and each bedroom has its own set of “bedroom crockery” which suggests that the hotel at that time did not have running water or sewage connections in the guest rooms.

She is quoted as saying “a pitcher of hot water and a pitcher of water, cool from the springs, was available forthwith upon the guest’s order. There was no ice.”

This absence of running water magnified service problems, she said. She recalled that the one-story servant’s quarters extended far back into the woods. In addition to bedroom service, 60 or more lamps and lanterns had to be trimmed and filled. The big fireplaces in the lobby, dining room, and guest rooms, burned many cords of wood cut from the surrounding woods.

The staff she said were largely ex-slaves. “The cooks were negroes and imported from New Orleans.”

Lack of ice meant that food had to be served quickly. A lot of fish was served and “often right out of the water and still squirming into the frying pan”. As was the custom at the time diners ate together at long tables. There were five long tables and 50 chairs.

Many of the guests had medical issues and were there to take the waters. Miss McGee remembered that among the guests were many suffering from tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases. “They were evidently wealthy and had been told by their doctors to come to this mild climate where they could spend much time outside.”

Miss McGee, whose family lived in Apopka, added that when the group decided to go to the hotel for dinner, they made a day of it. They left early in a wagon and deep sand made the going rough for the narrow tires of carriages that were available. However, the going was very good through stretches of open pine forests where the needles were deep on the ground.”

She added that she thought the hotel was destroyed by fire in the late 1890s.

The hotel's ownership is a little vague. It is known that an Iowa newspaperman named J.D. Smith bought land less than a mile from Clay Springs and had plans for a new township. He renamed the springs Sulphur Springs and probably had the hotel built but there is no record of him ever owning it or the land.

In October 1885 there is a record of J.D. and Alice Smith selling the lot to Thomas and Mary A. Stephenson. The deed includes how there was a previous agreement to build a hotel. At some point, the Stephenson's took out a mortgage on the property and it is later sold at auction to J.D. Fudge in February 1889, who turns around and sells it to Pierce & Toney Investment Company in March 1889. The property is purchased at auction by Charles George Perceval, the Earl of Egmont in 1892, who later sells the property to Charles L. Randall in 1894. The Earl of Egmont also had a hunting lodge in the area in the 1890s but its location is unknown.

A travel guide from 1894-95 lists Dr. C.L. Randall as the proprietor of the Ton-y-a-Watha hotel and lists rates as well - \$1.50-\$3 a day, \$6-\$10 per week.

However, the new name of the springs never sat well with the locals, and the area continued to be called Clay Springs into the early years of the 20th century.

In 1886, H. D. Miner, S. McClintock, J. D. Knapp, F. S. Guild, H. M. Williams, and W. A. Wilson, all from Ohio, built a timber mill and bought five lots from Smith on which they built five two-story homes. That same year, Ernest Leibling leased the hotel and the springs and started to convert them into a tourist attraction.

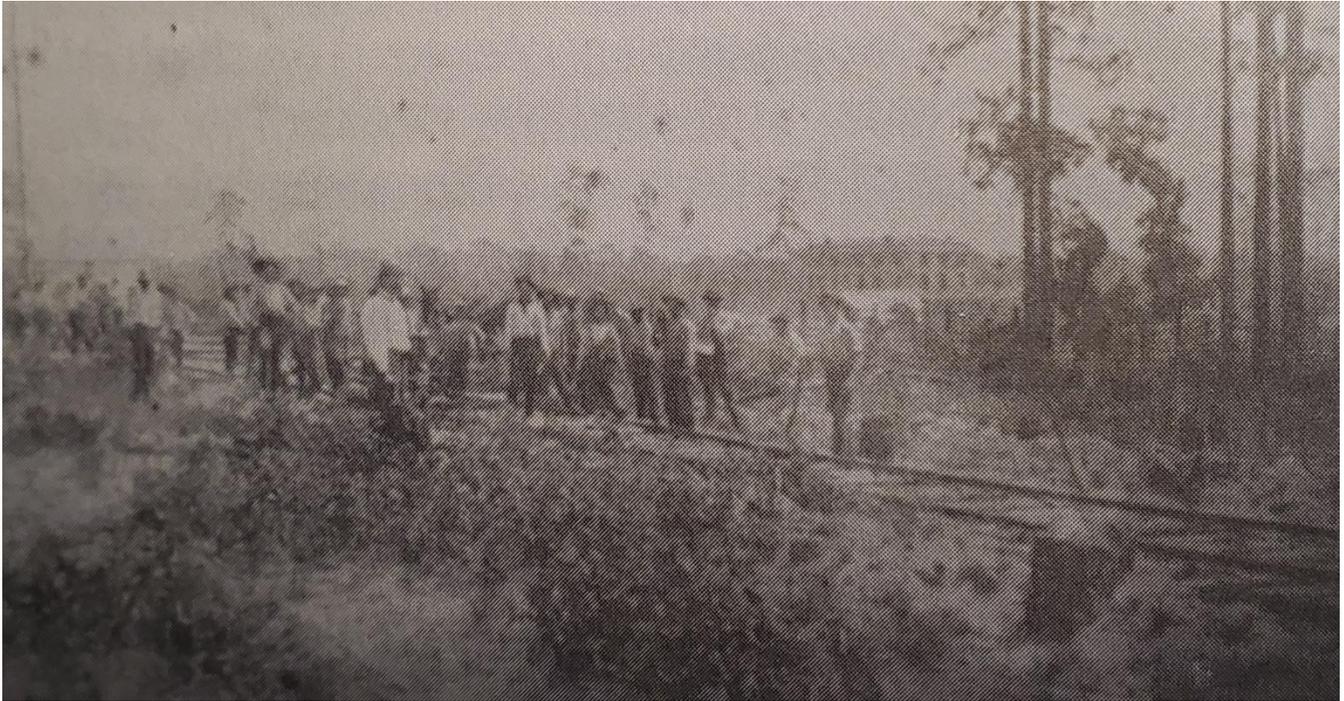
The springs also continued to be a popular site for picnics and day trips for Central Floridians who dipped into its refreshing waters.

On November 2, 1887, the Florida Times-Union of Jacksonville, reported on "a party of some twenty of the young people of Sylvan Lake and vicinity visited the springs Saturday on a picnic. After a day spent in the park surrounding the ever-healing springs, and at the rink, all adjourned to the Hotel Ton-Ya-Wa-Tha and spent the evening in dancing. They left for home by the light of the moon about 11 pm, declaring Clay Springs the best place yet for a picnic."

Despite this, in 1888 a travel writer described Wekiva River as a "narrow, tortuous and shallow stream." The steamboat and riverboat era ended soon after the arrival of the railroad.

In August 1878 a meeting was held in Apopka to raise the funding needed for the proposed Clay Springs and Apopka Railroad. Originally it was going to be an eight-mile tramway from Lovell's landing on Lake Apopka through the town of Apopka to Clay Springs. Twenty-nine people agreed to buy stock in the railroad and by the following year, the right of way had been obtained and William Mills had

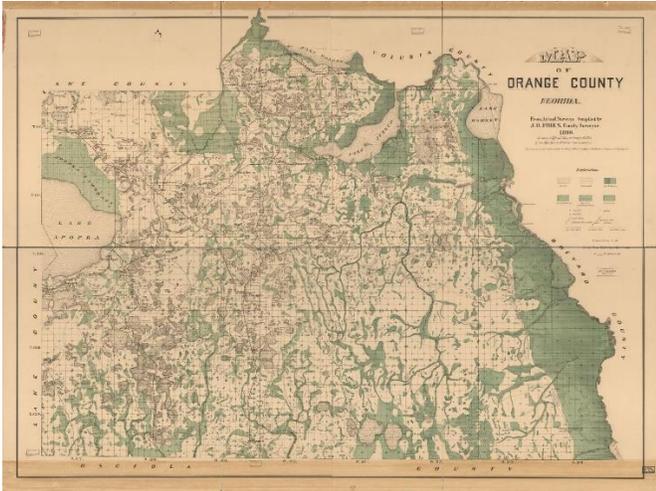
agreed to provide the wooden stringers at a cost of \$8 per thousand feet. However, it took ten years from that first meeting for work to start. By March 1889, grading was “progressing very satisfactorily” and in April, the Apopka Advertiser reported the arrival of “five carloads of rails and one load of spikes.”



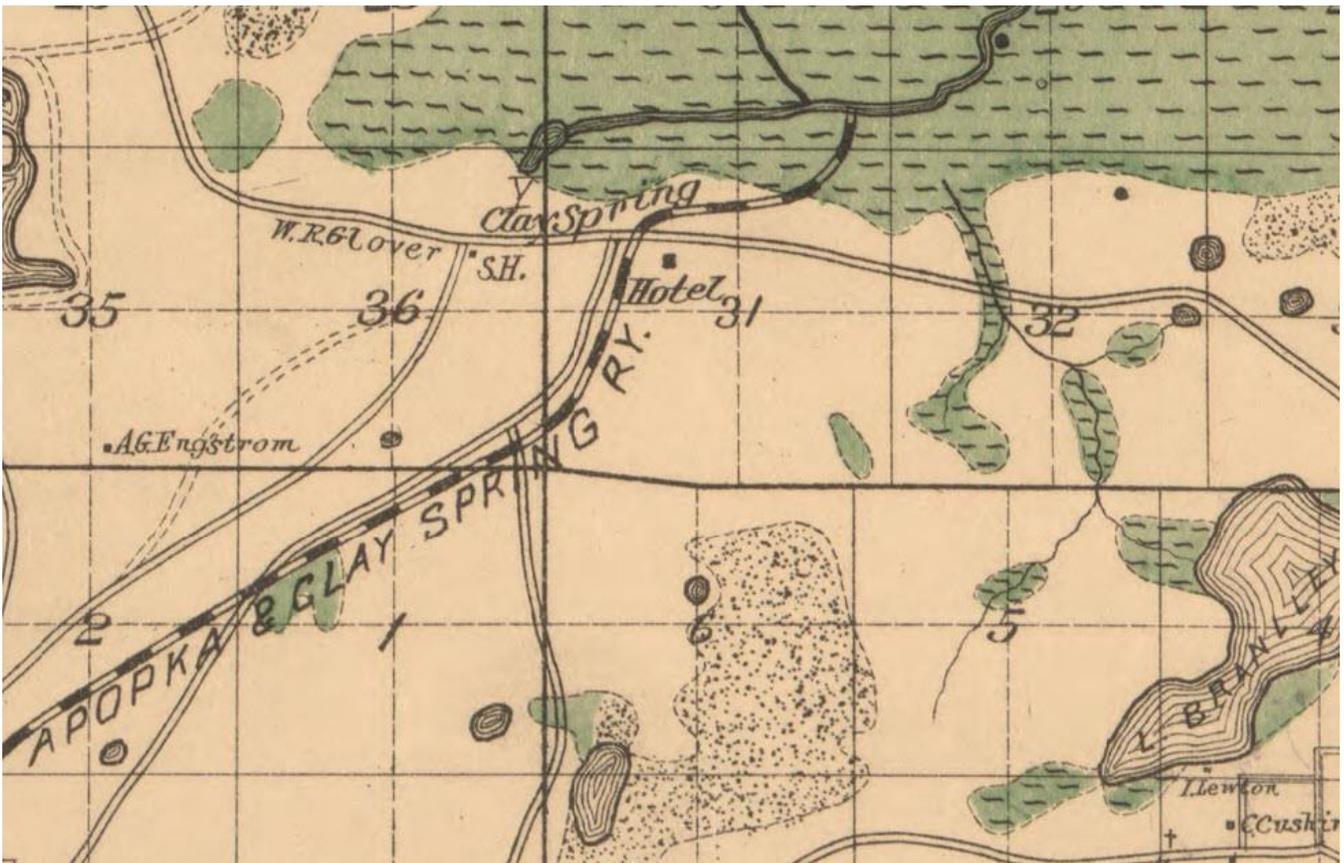
This faded photograph shows construction crews working on the Apopka and Clay Springs Railroad in 1889. It is an important image because it is the only one that we know of that shows the hotel at Clay Springs in the background – and it looks like a three-story structure. (Source. Florida Memory)

In July 1890, the railroad was offering “Excursions to Clay Springs. Fare reduced. Leaves Apopka every Wednesday and Saturday”.

The fare from Apopka was 25 cents and 15 cents from East Apopka. The railroad only ran for six miles – from Clay Springs to Apopka but it never made it to Lovell’s Landing. The railroad company paid no taxes after 1890 and in 1896, when the Orange County Tax Collector tried to recoup back taxes, he found that all the rails had been removed and there was nothing left to collect on.



1890 map of Orange County with Clay Spring area enlarged below showing location of the hotel in Section 31 of Township 20, Range 29. (Source. OCRHC)



(Source. OCRHC)

Major John Steinmetz

Major John B. Steinmetz, from Norristown, Pennsylvania, moved to Florida in 1882 due to poor health. He was 25 years old and planned to spend his time hunting, fishing, and living in the outdoors. (He quickly recovered his health and lived to be 92, dying in 1949, after having lived at the springs for 67 years). He owned orange groves and a packing house which he converted to a skating rink after the 1894-5 freeze. The skating rink also served as the community's church on Sundays.

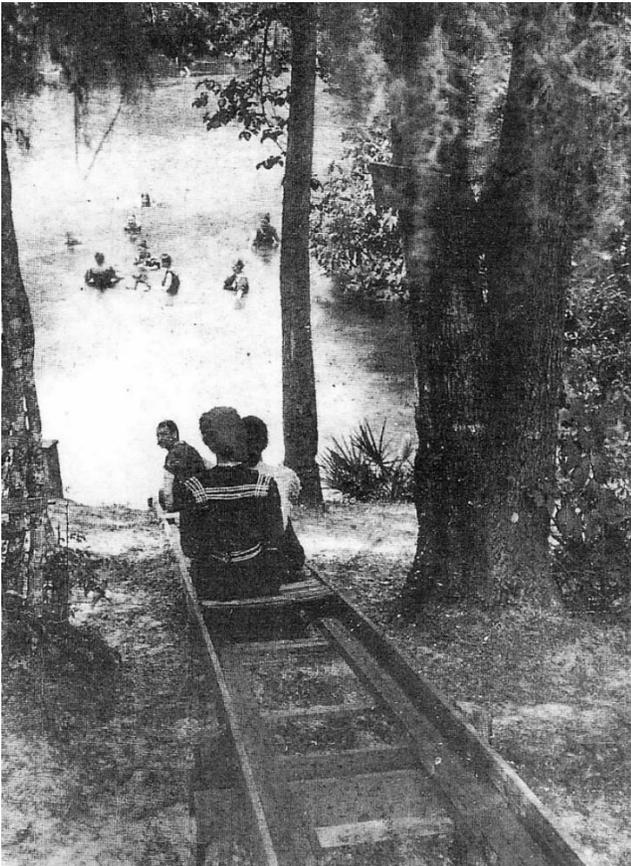
In 1898, he took over the hotel lease and opened a small amusement park, bathhouse dance pavilion, and picnic pavilion. There was a boat dock with several boathouses and a rail toboggan ride down the slope into the springs "that was a thrill of a lifetime". At that time Clay Springs had a population of around 50.



Church group, 1895 (Source: ASCL)



The toboggan ride (Source. OCRHC)



(Source. WSSP, AHS)



View of springs and toboggan ride rails entering the water (Source. WSSP)

The skating rink was installed in 1886 following a severe winter freeze that killed his orange groves. With no prospect of fruit for several years, he converted the citrus packing house into a skating rink, and on Sundays, it doubled up as the local church. The severe frosts and freezes of 1884-85 – the Great Freeze - destroyed almost all the orange groves in central Florida. The damage was caused by a bitter frost on December 29, 1894, when temperatures dropped to 24 degrees, which killed the fruit followed by a warm January during which tree produced new growth and sap started to flow, followed by a bitter freeze on February 7, 1895, when temperatures plummeted to 17 degrees, which killed the trees. Land prices crashed, seven of the eight local banks crashed, and many local towns that relied almost entirely on citrus such as Glen Ethel, along what is now Markham Woods Road, and the original Altamonte were abandoned.

With a hotel and bathhouse complex established at the spring in the 1890s, Wekiwa Springs is thought to be the first tourist attraction in central Florida, more than 70 years before the opening of Walt Disney World in Florida, if not the state.

The largest and most prominent structure was the bathhouse, where swimmers would change into their bathing costumes. To draw Northerners to the area and promote tourism, the springs were touted as medicinal waters that would cure an assortment of ailments.



Bathhouse 1895 (Source for top and bottom. WSSP)



Looking upstream (Source. WSSP, Florida Memory)



Looking down at the old bathhouse and the springs (Source. WSSP, Florida Memory)



View of springs and bath house (Source. Florida Memory)



The Scott family at Clay Springs, May 7, 1900 (Source. Florida Memory)



Views of bath house (Source of both/ WSSP)



The new bathhouse c. 1990 (Source. Florida Memory)



Picnic pavilion and bath house in the background (Source. WSSP, Florida Memory)



(Source. WSSP)



Wekiwa-Clay-Springs, Florida

A colored postcard of the bathhouse (Source. WSSP)



(Source. WSSP)



A view looking southwest (Source. Florida Memory)



A view looking southeast (Source. Florida Memory)



View of the springs from the south with bath house to left and boat house to the right (Source. WSSP)



View of the slope behind the springs (Source. WSSP, Florida Memory)



(Source. Florida memory)



(Source. WSSP)



Scene in Wekiwa-Clay-Springs, Florida

Views of the bath house (Source. WSSP)



mouth Fla Mar 7th 1907 Mineral (Clay) Springs, Florida Dear Mrs De
I am among Oranges and blossoms of all kind It
mbure I am with it a few miles of Clay Springs I stopped a
ngstine it is very pretty down the St Johns river I have one

Springs and river views (Source for both. Florida Memory)



Bath house with picnic pavilion up the slope (Source. Florida Memory)

The hotel at the springs attracted tourists who traveled in and out by wagon or took the river steamers for the 28-mile trip from the Port of Sanford on the shore of Lake Monroe. Sanford was also the terminus of the South Florida Railroad and in 1880 the Sanford to Orlando rail extension was opened. In 1888 President Grover Cleveland and his wife visited Sanford to support tourism in the state.

Steinmetz was a leading entrepreneur in the area and in 1900 was a founder member of the Florida Audubon Society. It was founded by Louis F. Dommerich, a New York businessman who had a winter estate among his Maitland orange groves. Its prestigious officers and supporters included President Theodore Roosevelt, railroad baron Henry Flagler, the presidents of Rollins and Stetson Colleges, and the editors of several leading newspapers.

The aim of the society was to stop the killing of birds for their plumes for ladies' hats. The society's campaigning led to state preserves and sanctuaries to protect the birds, legislative protection, and the creation of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.



1. Head of the Wekiwa Springs.
 2. Dunn's Bluff, at the mouth of the Wekiwa River.
 3. Orange Avenue.
 4. View on the Wekiwa, from Sandeman's Hammock.
 5. Junction of the Wekiwa and Withlacoochee Rivers.
 6. Looking up the Wekiwa.

VIEWS IN FLORIDA.

A full-page photo article of Wekiwa which appeared in the Illustrated London News on Sept 21, 1887

The captions for the images were:

1. Head of Wekiwa Springs
2. Dunn's Bluff at the mouth of the Wekiwa
3. Orange Avenue
4. View of the Wekiwa from Sandeman's Hammock
5. Junction of Wekiwa and Withlacoochee Rivers
6. Looking up the Wekiwa



The Picnic Pavilion at Wekiwa (Source. WSSP)



Picnic pavilion (Source. Florida Memory)

In 1901, Steinmetz partnered with Henry Witherington to build the first rural telephone line to serve the Apopka-Clay Springs area.

Clay Springs also boasted a newspaper, the Southern Progress, later the Clay Springs Progress. The newspaper was purchased by Robbins and Smith in 1888 and moved from Orlando to Clay Springs. On February 21, 1888, the Florida Times-Union described it as “a very neat four column quarto paper”. Dr. D. P. Robbins, formerly of Crawford County, was the editor. Clay Springs also had five two-story homes. It is said that when families picnicked at the springs, the men always brought along their Winchester .44 rifles because wild pigs were such a problem in the nearby woods.

Many locals also built boathouses along the river, close to the springs.



Boathouses c. 1906 (Source. Florida Memory)



Boaters on the Wekiva River (Source. Florida Memory)

Henry Sanford's store in Sanford also opened a branch in Clay Springs and did considerable business with local farmers. He supplied merchandise on credit to those who consigned their cotton crops to him.

In 1887, Amos Schultz from Norristown, Pennsylvania, a winter resident of Clay Springs, opened the Clay Springs Wine Company making wine from oranges and the native muscadine grapes. He had 15 employees and planned on making 2,000 barrels of wine a year. While he never reached his target, the company did make wine until the mid-1890s.

There were at least two other wineries in the area. One of them was run by August "Gust" Jackson and Olaf Larssen and his sons, Jonas and Lars, in Piedmont. This small, almost exclusively Swedish colony was built around what is now the junction of SR 436 and Piedmont-Wekiva Road in Apopka. The first settlers arrived around 1877. They dammed a stream and built a wood enclosed pond around which most of their community events were held. Among the earliest settlers were the Andersons, Thollanders, Jacksons, Olsons, and Larssons. Railroad tracks were extended through the settlement in 1885, and the Piedmont railroad depot was constructed in 1890 by the Florida Central and Peninsula Railroad.



Piedmont Winery 1880s (Source. AHS)



Piedmont school and church house (Source. Florida Memory)



Piedmont railroad depot c. 1890 (Source. Florida Memory)



George and Charles Anderson's sawmill in Piedmont. (Source. Florida Memory)

A small store and a schoolhouse, the center of the community, served as a social center and church. Residents cultivated citrus groves and vineyards establishing several wineries. Residents also farmed raising livestock, produce, and poultry. In the late 1890s, a sawmill was built that continued into the 1920s.

The Piedmont post office, established to serve 75 residents in 17 homes in 1903, was discontinued in 1922. In the 1920s, electric service became available. The Piedmont Chamber of Commerce was formed in 1929.

Most of the settlers brought wine-making traditions with them but the Piedmont winery shipped wines as far as Nebraska. In 1889, they made a total of 3,360 gallons of wine, from oranges and the local muscadine grapes, which sold for \$8,572. One of their orange wines won an award at the 1895 Atlanta Exposition. In 1897 they were selling a gallon of orange wine for \$1.

The area was annexed into the City of Apopka in 1986. On January 21, 2009, a Florida Heritage Site marker commemorating the colony was dedicated. The marker stands on land donated by Wal-Mart on U.S. Highway 441.



(Source. Orlando Sentinel)

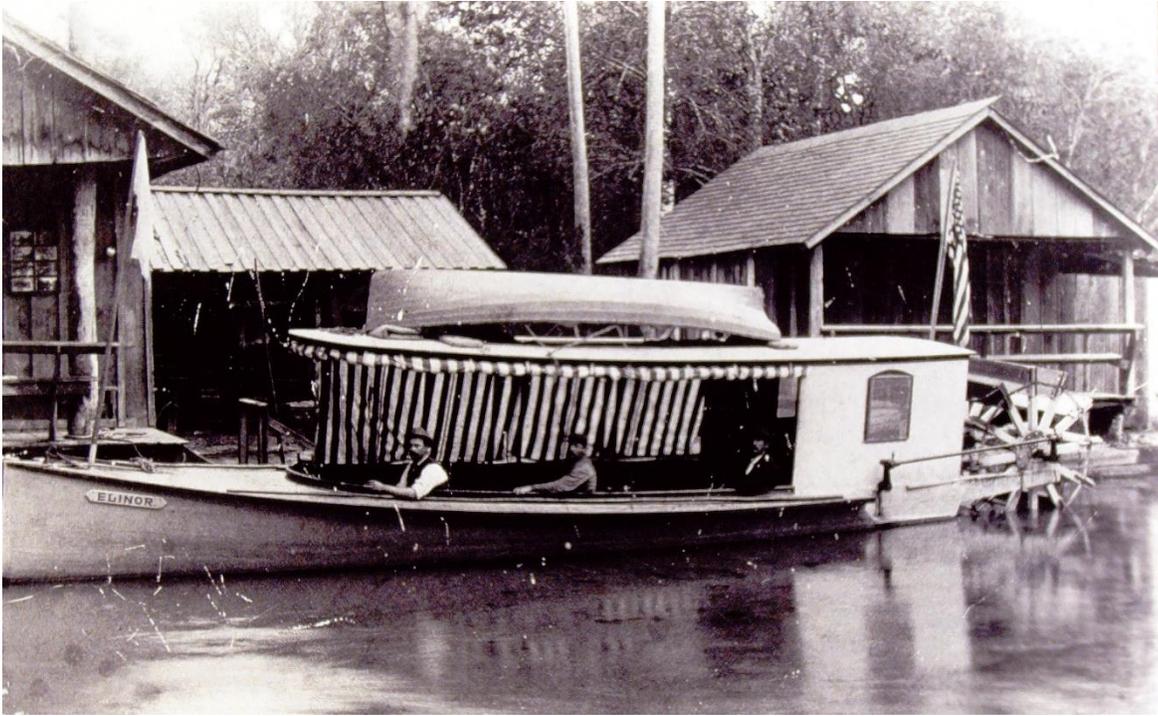
On November 9, 1887, a newspaper reported that a railroad inspector had been to Clay Springs, and said, "Everything is now ready for iron, which will be laid as soon as the grading reaches Eustis."

The same year, Edward Henck, who founded neighboring Longwood, issued a brochure to promote a new hotel in the city. "This new house is furnished with all the improvements of a first-class hotel, having electric bells, and bathrooms are nicely furnished, and can offer to tourists and invalids, all the comforts of a winter home. It is situated at the junction of two railroads, forty-one hours from New York, by through Pullman cars. Longwood is an incorporated town, eight miles from Sanford, in the midst of young and bearing orange groves. It has five churches and two schools, a post office, depot, and telegraph office, within three minutes' walk of the hotel. A large store filled with an excellent stock of goods. The sportsman will find the best of hunting and fishing in the vicinity."



(Source. ASCL)

In the 1890s, Steinmetz also offered rowing boats and a large naphtha launch, the Elinor, which was used for sightseeing trips down the river or could be chartered by families for day trips. At 4 pm every day, a large flock of wild turkeys would swoop down onto the bluff west of the spring where a generous supply of corn was laid out for them.

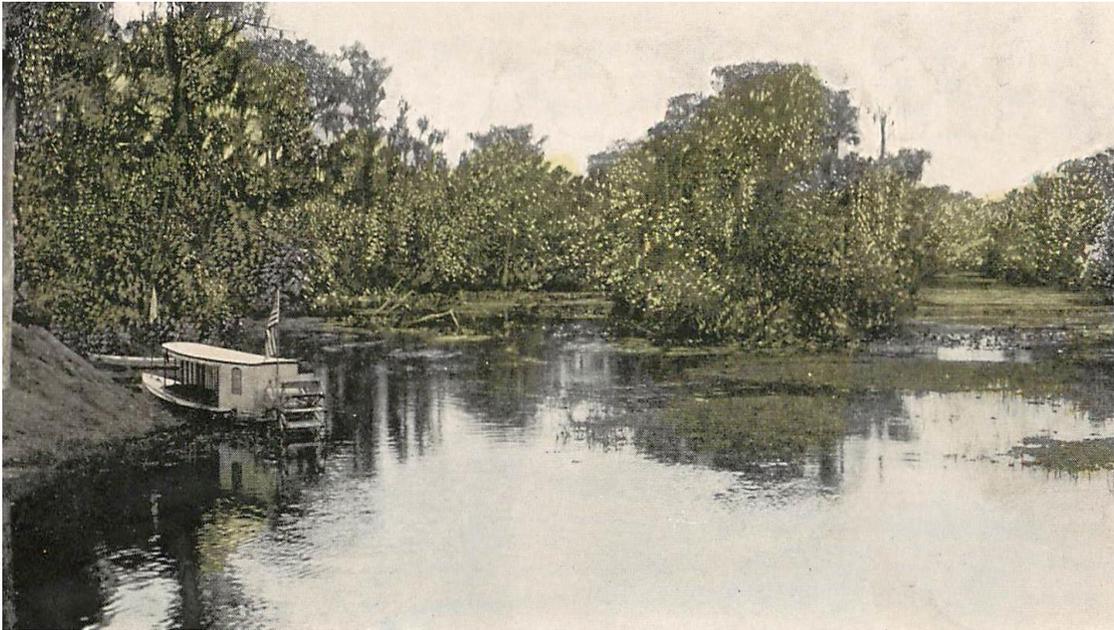


The Elinor (Source. Florida Memory)

The Clay Springs and Apopka Railroad ran from the Florida Central and Peninsular Railroad's Orlando Division southeast of Apopka, north, and northeast across the Florida Midland Railroad at East Apopka, to Clay Springs (now Wekiwa Springs), Florida, United States. It was operational from around 1890 to sometime after 1919. During the 1890s locomotives would haul two flatcars packed with passengers the eight miles from Apopka to Clay Springs for day trips. The railroad also contributed to the area's prosperity as iced railcars could now be used to ship fresh citrus up the east coast.



The Elinor could be hired by the day for family boat trips (Source. OCRHC)



The Elinor in the lagoon (Source. Florida Memory)

The town's prosperity was built on the surrounding fruit growing areas but was dealt a mortal blow by the great freeze of 1894-95. With no fruit to ship, most of the people moved away, and the township soon disappeared although the springs continued to attract tourists.

Picnicking at the springs entailed a very long day for most people. It was a slow four-hour ride over sandy, rutted roads from Orlando to the springs. Groups would leave at first light and arrive at the springs mid-morning. They would leave late in the afternoon and not get back home until well after dark.



The Great Freeze of December 29, 1894 (Source. ASCL)

Early 20th Century

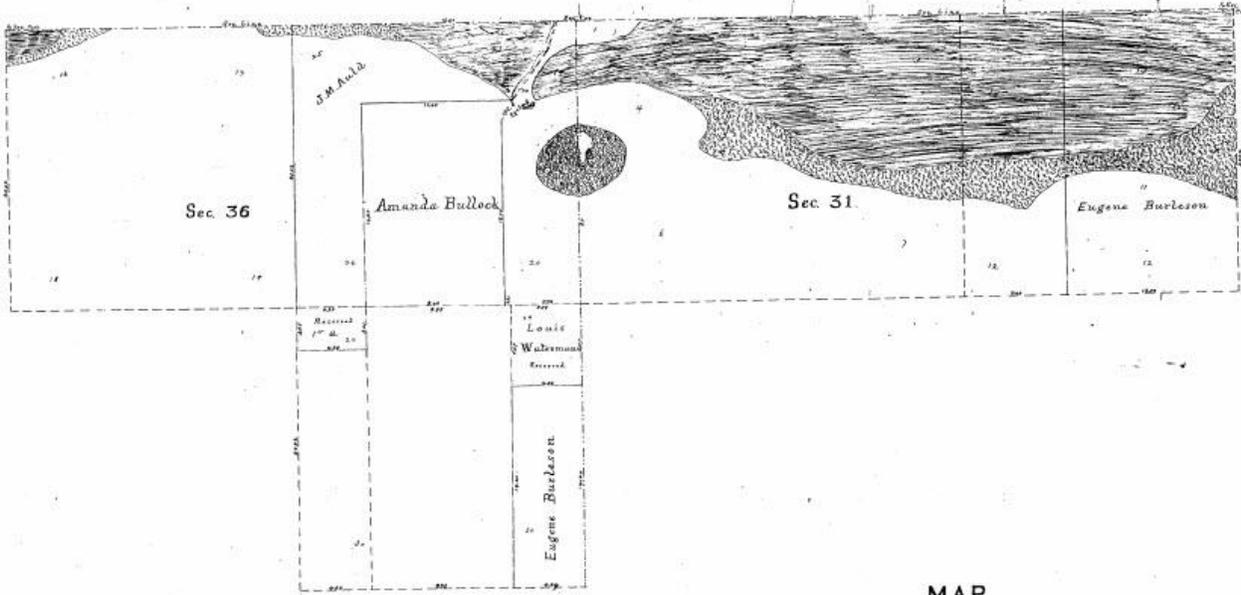
In 1905, the Bullock family inherited what was known as the 'Clay Springs Property' after the death of Robert and Amanda Bullock.

The name of the community's post office remained Clay Springs until 1906 when it was renamed, Wekiwa Springs. The post office closed in 1910.

On May 30, 1906, the State of Florida Agricultural Department sent a letter to Judge W. S. Bullock, of Ocala, with the results of an analysis of the spring water at Wekiwa Springs that he had requested. The letter was signed by R. E. Rose, the state agricultural chemist. In it, he wrote, "Total solids per 100,000 parts, 1.48 parts composed of calcium carbonate, magnesium carbonate, and sodium chloride. No sulphates, nor organic impurities. A very pure water".

Later that year, Bullock built a new hotel on the property and called it the Wekiwa Hotel. It could accommodate 30 guests. Its exact location, according to the deed, was:

Clay Springs Property, situated in Orange County, Florida, and more particularly described as being, the north half of the northwest quarter of Section thirty-one (31), Township twenty (20) South Range twenty-nine (29) East; the northwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section thirty-six, Township twenty (20) South Range twenty-eight (28) East; southeast quarter of northeast quarter of Section thirty-six (36), Township twenty (20) South Range twenty-eight (28) East the northeast quarter of the northeast quarter of Section thirty-six (36) Township twenty (20) South Range twenty-eight (28) East.



MAP
OF THE
CCRY SPRING PROPERTY

Orange & N $\frac{1}{2}$ of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 31, T20S, R29E, Florida,
and
(N $\frac{1}{2}$ & SE $\frac{1}{4}$) of NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 36, T20S, R28E.

By Order From The Circuit Court For The Sixth Judicial
Circuit of Florida

Surveyed Sept 1887 by J.O. Price County Surveyor

Showing the PARTITION of this land

made by

The appointed Commissioners

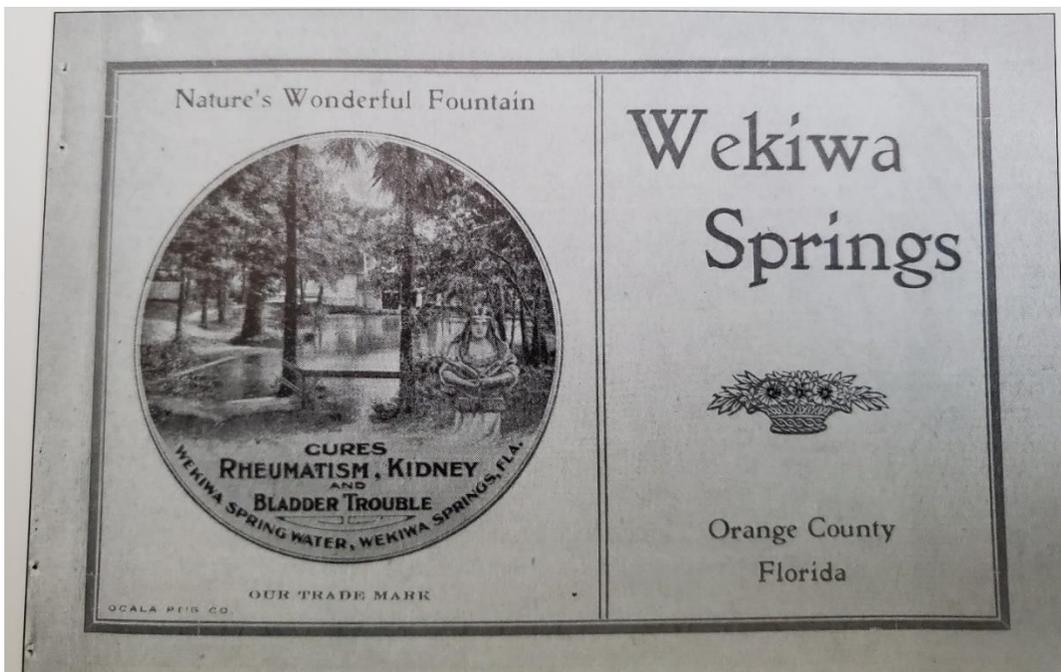
One Otto Fries J.D. Smith & E.C. Morgan

Drawn by C.H. Adams



The Wekiwa Hotel (Source. WSSP)

Judge William S. Bullock was the principal stockholder in the Wekiwa Springs Company. The property, managed by E. C. Harrington, stayed in the Bullock family until 1921 when it and 200 acres, was sold to local entrepreneur A. C. Starbird who sold it to the M. E. Miller Corporation in 1925.



(Source. WSSP)

In 1907, the hotel's advertising claimed that Wekiwa was "the finest mineral springs in Florida". According to a 24-page brochure, Wekiwa Spring Water was "Nature's Wonderful Fountain".

"The water is so pure, its healing powers so great, making so many wonderful cures of rheumatism, kidney and bladder trouble, that the Seminole Indians very properly called it 'Mystery', for indeed, it is one of Nature's great fountains of health, a mystery."

The brochure contained many endorsements about the water's health-giving qualities and the water was bottled and sold as far away as New York.

The brochure also described the hotel and its amenities.

"A New small Hotel, twelve-foot ceilings, ten-foot veranda, well ventilated, all openings screened, lighted with acetylene gas, new iron beds with best springs, canopies, etc. Two furnished cottages near. Installing porcelain bath tubs and toilets of most modern make with hot and cold water tank, supplied with spring water. Pool room, dancing pavilion in the palm grove near the spring, boats, toboggan slide, bath suits, and everything for health, pleasure, and comfort.

"Five miles from Apopka on the S. A. L. R. R. (Seaboard Air Line Rail Road) in Orange County, Florida. Good livery teams await you in Apopka. Rates \$2 a day: special to parties and by the week. Wekiwa Springs Company".

The hotel also boasted telephone and telegraph communications and daily mail deliveries.

The brochure pictured the bathhouse (seen below) with the following description.

"The view on your left shows the front of a very large commodious bath house, with the bathers in the spring and their friends looking on. A peculiar feature of the bath is that after a plunge and then a good rubbing, brisk and hard, produces an exhilarating effect, and no one ever experiences that feeling of lassitude and weariness that is usually felt after a bath. For any eczema, nettle rash, or skin diseases, or old wounds, it is a specific.

"See on the left the large shady sweet gum on the south of the spring, shading it and giving you a bath in the open air, and at the same time, in the shade. You can jump in the boil, or come down the first steps about waist deep, or down the second steps about knee-deep, or turn a somersault from the springboard.

"See the little tots in the white sand; a child one year old; a feeble person; or one who cannot swim, is perfectly safe, and enjoy a bath here; indeed, an ideal place; its equal cannot be found."

kiwa Springs Company.

"Recently the editor of the News visited this spring for the first time. It is located about four miles from Apopka, the nearest railroad point. Apopka is on the branch of the S. A. L. road leading from Wildwood to Orlando, distant from the latter place about twelve miles. The spring gushes from a high bluff at the rate of thousands of gallons every minute. It forms a large area of various depths, suitable for bathing of persons of all ages. So great is the flow, and so strong the gush that the spring and the stream are clear as a crystal. The location is certainly ideal for one who wants to rest. It is beyond doubt unsurpassed in beauty by any spring. In fact, Wekiwa is easily at the head of all the health resorts in Florida. Situated in the hill country of West Orange, this spring comes out of high ground. The whole background to the south, west and east is pine woods. From these come the prevailing breezes, laden with resinous, health-giving qualities. Immediately surrounding the spring are the oak, hickory and other hardwood trees. Shade while bathing or resting is found at Wekiwa. The trees are full of birds and squirrels, and even the wild turkeys are tame and show no signs of being afraid.

"The spring is the pride of Hon. W. S. Bullock, of Ocala, the popular judge of the fifth judicial circuit. He has had the water analyzed by the state chemist, and also at Washington, D. C. He has built a small, new hotel, well equipped with water and light, in which he daily provides appetizing dishes for his guests.

"The judge has built bath houses, toboggan slides, swings, pavilions, boats and boat houses. He put in sewerage and is not sparing pains or cost to make Wekiwa Springs the most popular health resort in Florida.

A review in the Ocala Evening Star, Tuesday, September 29, 1908



(Source. WSSP)

The name Clay Springs was changed in 1906 to Wekiwa Springs, and ever since there has been confusion between Wekiwa and Wekiva.

Canoeing on the Wekiva was very fashionable in the early 1900s as the picture below shows. The photograph below shows members of the prominent Fuller family from Altamonte Springs enjoying a day's boating and fishing.

Shown in the canoes are Arthur Herbert Fuller, Herbert Ehrhardt Fuller, Mary Ann Fuller, Irene Fuller, and one other. They owned orange groves and managed others that were owned by winter residents. They also owned a store near the Altamonte Springs railroad depot. Arthur Fuller succeeded his father, Rosewell S. Fuller, as postmaster and storekeeper. Herbert Fuller would become one of the original 28 residents who voted to incorporate Altamonte Springs on November 11, 1920.

He became the town marshal and later an Alderman while running the family store.



The Fuller family fishing (Source. ASCL)



The Fuller family going ashore for a picnic c. 1900 (Source. ASCL)



Family picnic, March 30, 1901 (Source. ASCL)



A local family arriving for a picnic via ox cart. (Source. Florida Memory)



Picnic group, 1902. (Source. ASCL)



Swimming in the lagoon just beyond Clay Springs, early 1900s. (Source. WSSP)



School picnic. 1901. (Source. ASCL)



Sunday School picnic. (Source. ASCL)

On April 30, 1912, the Orlando Sentinel reported that Mr. Osborne, formerly of The Altamonte, Altamonte Springs, had leased Wekiwa Springs and the hotel and planned to open the hotel on Sundays.

There are references and advertisements in local newspapers about the Wekiva Hotel up to the 1930s. One advertisement in the Orlando Sentinel on Sunday, November 15, 1925, boasted of “excellent drinking water, bathing, boating, fishing, and hunting. A good place to stop.” People were encouraged to call the hotel for reservations – the Apopka telephone number was 70-G.

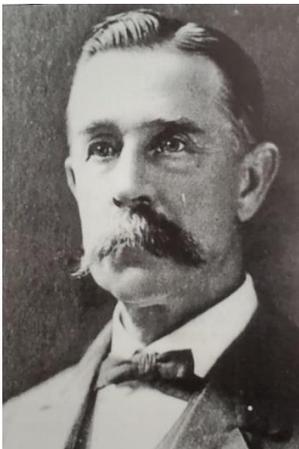
And, on November 8, 1927, the Orlando Sentinel, reported that “notwithstanding the various and sundry beasts, birds and fishes that inhabit and infest the lands, the air and waters around and about the Wekiwa Springs Hotel, Arthur ‘Art’ O’Neal, jolly manager of that popular hostelry of eats and recreation, has secured at great expense a pair of genuine black muzzled Florida fox squirrels and has them caged on the lawn for the edification of dinner guests. We guarantee the proper atmosphere at all times, said Art.”

Rufus Rose

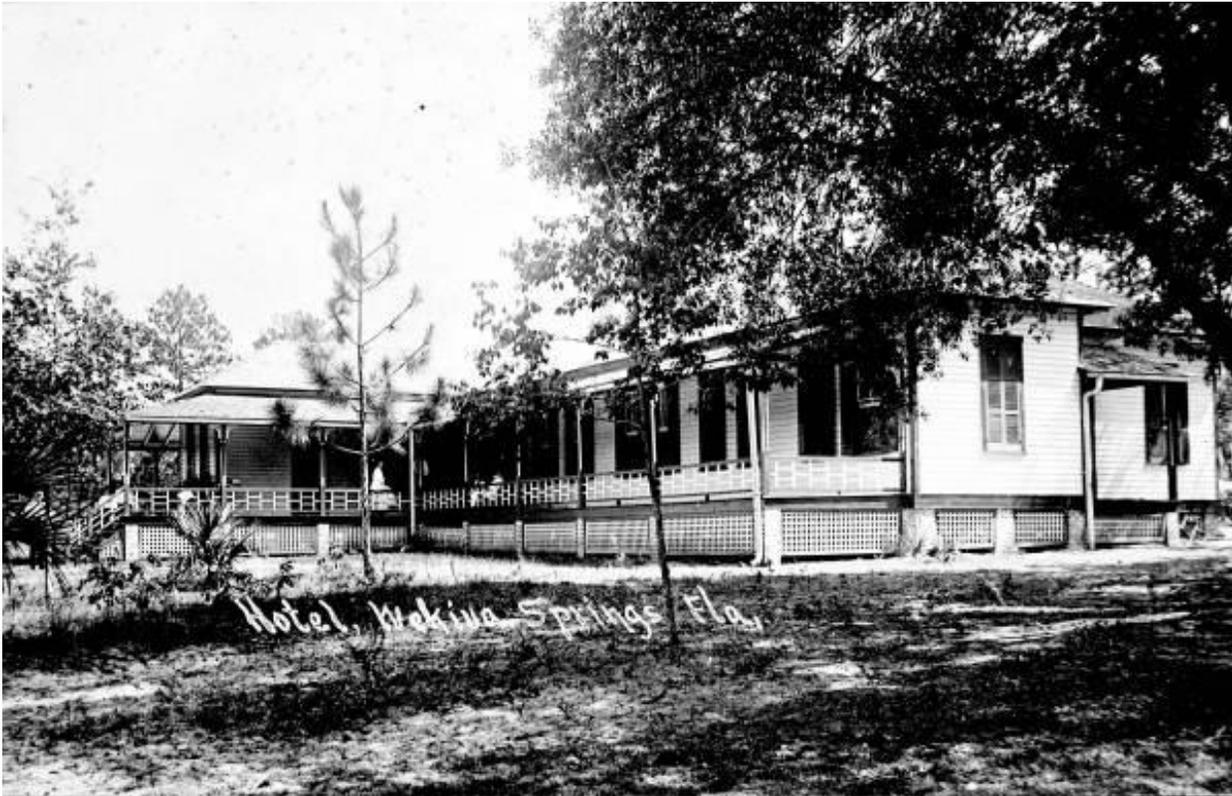
Rufus E. Rose, a former Mississippi riverboat captain, came to Florida at the request of Hamilton Disston, an industrialist and real-estate developer, who in 1881 bought four million acres of land throughout the state. He paid 25 cents an acre and the deal was signed on June 1. It is still believed to be the world record for the largest single land purchase by an individual and it made him the largest landowner in the United States. His industrialist father Henry, who owned steel mills and one of the world’s largest saw manufacturing companies, had died in 1878 leaving his fortune to Hamilton and his brothers Horace, William, and Jacob.

Hamilton Disston was intent on draining Florida’s swamps to create land for both agriculture and residential and commercial development and was largely responsible for the development of Kissimmee, St. Cloud, Gulfport, and Tarpon Springs. He was also a major producer of rice and sugar cane on a 20,000-acre estate, out of which came the city of St. Cloud.

Rose was largely responsible for draining millions of acres of land in the Kissimmee River valley and he laid out many of the first streets. He also became Kissimmee’s first mayor when the city held its first election to incorporate in 1883. He later became the state’s agricultural chemist, a post he held until his death in 1931.



R. E. Rose



Wekiwa Hotel c. 1915. (Source. WSSP)



The boardwalk beside the springs c. the mid-1920s. (Source. Florida Memory)

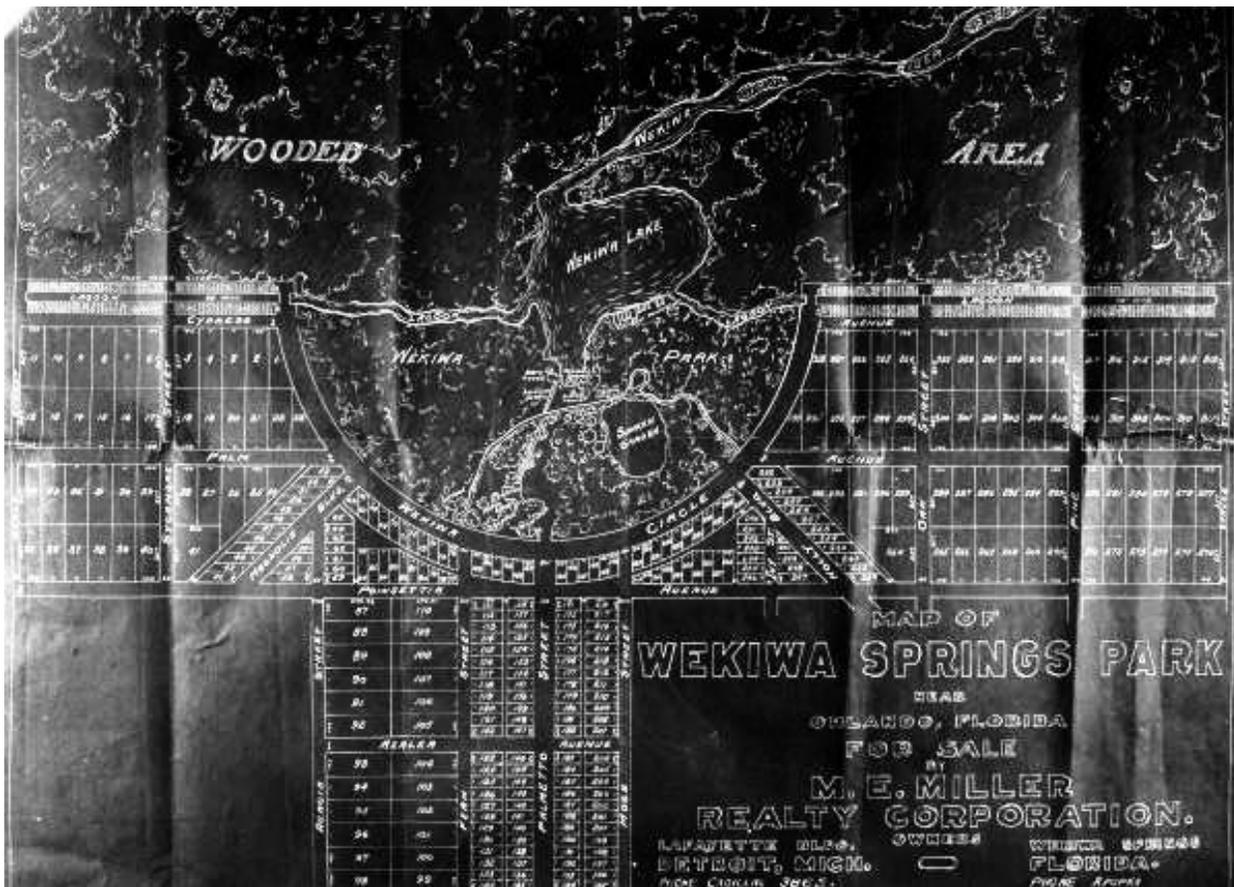
In the early 1920s, a tour boat sailed between Wekiwa Springs and the St. Johns River, and the river was still used to bring in supplies and mail to areas such as Zellwood and Winter Park.

From 1916-1923 Wekiwa Springs was managed by E. C. Harrington. The owner Austin Starbird then sold it to a Detroit entrepreneur M. E. Miller. He opened real estate offices in several Florida cities and Detroit and started to promote Wekiwa as “The Wonder Spot of Florida”.

He reopened the hotel with a new dance pavilion, cut three streets for his new city, and marked out lots, His plat (below) showed the city of Wekiwa Springs Park spreading out to the south, east, and west of the springs around a main thoroughfare Wekiwa Circle. He also bought Shell Island from the Wilson Cypress Company and cleared the four miles of Wekiva River between it and the springs so that it was navigable by light draft boats. The hotel was managed for him by A. T. O’Neal until 1928.

In 1924, H. L. Nelson of Jacksonville who had signed a 20-year franchise to bottle and market Wekiwa Spring water sold his interest to Richard Lamb who had moved from London to Orlando.

As part of his construction plans, Miller started the Wekiwa Sand and Construction Company. Managed by J. J. Rogers, the aim was to ship ten carloads of “high class and” daily to a new siding of the Apopka and Clay Springs Railroad. In January 1925, Miller sold his first lot.



Miller’s plans for the town of Wekiwa Springs Park

His color brochure showed a photograph of people bathing in the springs during the winter months and urged northerners to "Winter here yearly in your own home."

The brochure extolled the health-giving qualities of the spring waters and quoted from a United States Geological Survey to back this up.

"Wekiwa Springs water is good for diseases of the stomach, kidneys, and liver. The United States Department of the Interior has kept this water bottled for fine months and found no change in analysis. It contains a very small amount of organic matter. Spectroscopic tests of the residue from two liters of water show a trace of Lithium. Its degree of mineralization is about that of Great Bear water and somewhat higher than that of Poland Water.

"The Atlantic Coast Line and Seaboard Air Line have daily trains through Apopka, which is four miles distant from the Springs. This is the most healthy district in Florida, being located in the highlands of North Orange and Seminole Counties."

The brochure went on to describe the development of Wekiwa Springs Park.

"Within the Park, a moderate sized inn is located and a commodious tearoom which specializes in chicken and fish dinners. Special parties arranged for by appointment. Here Wekiwa water is served with all meals.

"Also within the Park will be located various forms of amusement such as a pool for swimming, tennis courts, shuffle board, bowling greens, horseshoe courts. Dancing pavilion."

"Wekiwa Springs is a community complete within itself with its bathing, boating, fishing, hunting, golf, and other recreations.

"The restrictions and improvements necessary for its proper development are included.

"Wekiwa Springs Park is being developed as a home community so special attention is given to the home builder.

"Complete information regarding the natural advantages of Wekiwa Springs for a home and the aid given those building may be had by mailing a card to the developers."

With a climate that permits Palm Beach suits, white dresses, Panama hats, and white shoes all through the winter season, motoring in the days of sunshine and nights of moonlight, and enjoyment of public parks at all times, it is little wonder that the wealth of the world flocks to Florida."

In 1925 he reopened the Wekiwa Springs Hotel but in the two years since 1923, he had sold only one lot. The land boom in Florida collapsed the following year and by the end of the 1920s, with only two lots sold, Miller gave up and nature reclaimed the streets and marked out lots. It is not known if houses were ever built on the two sold lots but broken concrete from the original streets, now hidden by overgrowth and trees, is the only remaining trace of his vision.

The hotel struggled on until the Great Depression. After standing derelict for years, it was destroyed by fire in the early 1940s.

During the 1920s, Wekiwa Springs remained a popular destination for local day-trippers but most now arrived by automobiles rather than river steamboats. The railroad saw less and less travel and in the early 1920s, the railbed became the western stretch of Wekiwa Springs Road.

The land boom collapse in 1926 was largely due to unscrupulous agents selling Northerners land that was unsuitable for anything. Complaints filed by the gullible purchasers led to fraud investigations which caused land prices to crash and investors to run. The situation was not helped by the Great Miami hurricane which hit on September 18, 1926, claiming 373 lives. At that time because of the land boom, Miami was the fastest growing city in the U. S. Scenes of devastation were front-page news in newspapers across the nation which acted as a further deterrent for people thinking about moving to Florida. This was further compounded on September 17, 1928, by the Okeechobee Hurricane. Much of southern Florida was flooded for weeks and the death toll was over 2,500. The following year, the stock market crashed, and the Great Depression began.

In 1935 the Wilson Cypress Co. built a narrow-gauge railway into the swamp to haul out the centuries-old cypress trees. The Florida Park Service was created the same year.

The town of Markham, located south of Lake Markham, operated from around 1880 to 1945. Pinnie Ridge Cemetery, also known as Pinnie Grove Cemetery, is thought to contain between 24 and 75 burial sites, but no headstones or cemetery markers remain.

Shell Island

Rollins College has owned Shell Island for 65 years and made an extended campus of it for most of its history since 1885. In the late 1920s and 1930s, it was a regular practice for a group of eight Rollins students and their chaperones to spend a weekend on the river, men one week and women the next, sleeping in a large log cabin with a dirt floor, built in 1923 by the Wilson Cypress Company and then abandoned. Over the years and thanks to an agreement with the Wilson Cypress Company who owned the land, as many as thirteen hundred students got a sense of the river community as a part of their Florida education. Because the college was having trouble keeping the cabin and island clean between weekend visits, in 1938 they arranged to buy the island for \$10 and other considerations through Wilson's President, Russ McPherson, who had two daughters pursuing degrees at the college at the time.

At present, the island is an inholding of the Wekiwa Springs State Park and still belongs to Rollins. The Trustees of the College do not wish to give up the property because the island is connected to its historical character as a frontier and pragmatic liberal arts college. Officials of the college, however, have entered into an informal agreement whereby the park governs and polices the island while providing access to Rollins upon notification. The reason for such an agreement is quite practical: the island has a long history of attracting squatters who usually leave more than footprints. The question

of how best to preserve the site is left unresolved, but as the following story reveals, the place has considerable educational value.

Shell Island is a shell midden mound created sometime between 5,000 and 7,000 years ago. It is the largest Archaic habitation area in the Wekiva basin (Weisman 1993:20). Excavations by Rollins College in the 1970s and 1980s demonstrated the rich cultural heritage of the inhabitants. The presence of marine shells represents exchange connections with the Atlantic coast, a variety in pottery decoration could illustrate changes in style over time, and tools made in both stone and bone display their technical skill sets. Despite the significance of the site, its preservation is lacking. In a 2005 conditional assessment of Shell Island, preservation was deemed “poor” due to looting and vandalism (State of Florida Department of Environmental Protection 2005:44). The current management scheme for the island is convoluted and there is a lack of effort on the part of Rollins and the Wekiva community to conserve the island due to several factors that I explore here. Using the recommendations of Shell Island’s various stakeholders and case studies of archaeological sites with similar issues to Shell Island, this thesis project will formulate a management plan for the site and explore the benefits of conservation for the College, its students, the wider Central Florida community, and the broader study of Florida archaeology.



Rollins College students and faculty leaving Shell Island after a weekend sleeping in the log cabin seen among the trees. The picture was taken in 1939, the year Rollins College purchased the island from the Wilson Cypress Company for \$10. (Source. RC)



Male students arriving at Shell Island for a weekend retreat (Source. RC)



Students attending outdoor class at Shell Island (Source. RC)

William Fremont Blackman, Rollins College President from 1902-15, also had close ties to the Wekiwa River. Born in North Pitcher, New York, he earned a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Yale and his Ph. D. from Cornell. He also studied in Berlin and Paris. He was pastor of several churches before joining Yale as Professor of Christian Ethics in 1893 and was appointed as president of Rollins College in 1902. Ill health forced his resignation in 1915 and he bought the 4,000-acre Wekiwa Ranch nestling between the confluence of the Wekiwa and St. Johns Rivers. Although retired he farmed his land and at one stage “had a thousand head of cattle and 1,000 head of sheep and grew 40 tons of sugar cane to the acre, as well as crops of sorghum, kudzu, soybeans, Para grass, and other forage crops”.

He also played a significant role in the growth of Winter Park. In 1921, he became President of the Florida Audubon Society, because of his interest in birds and conservation, and set aside much of his ranch as a bird reserve. Blackman also wrote a history of Orange County which was published in 1927.

His wife, Lucy Worthington Blackman, wrote a history of the Florida Audubon Society.



William Blackman and his wife (the couple on the right) riding with friends on his ranch in 1915.
(Source RC)



Wekiva Lagoon, 1940 (Source. WSSP)

African American Links

Plantation House and Mitchell Farmhouse is an African American historic site consisting of the remains of some agricultural buildings and a refuse pile close to the old township of Markham.

Another historic African American site south of Lake Markham is where the Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church stood. It was built in the mid-1880s and is reported to have burned down in 1928.

Ethel is a historic cemetery and was the community cemetery for the railroad stop town of Ethel, formerly called Moody. There were several sawmills in the area and there was a spur line from Ethel to the mills. Located east of County Road 433 (which is the road running through Rock Springs, it is currently the oldest known cemetery in Lake County. Four grave markers remain intact.

Ethel was first established in the 1860s by people who obtained their land through homestead acts, also known as patents or grants. The source of its name is and may never be known but believed to be from the Sanford-Lake Eustis Railway built in 1886 - 1887 for passenger and freight service. Because of the railroad, there was also a railroad platform stop that was in this small community. The railway eventually became part of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad System and was used through the 1960s. The tracks were taken out in 1980, and the raised railbed is all that remains along the North side of Ethel Drive.

The community grew up around a commissary, or general store, that had belonged to a timber company and burned down before 1916.

The houses located in Ethel were scattered with a distance between them. There was also a post office and a schoolhouse where church services were held every other Sunday by a minister who crossed the Wekiva River by ferry.



Finley B. Click outside his cabin, Ethel, the late-1800s. (Source. Florida Memory)



Finley B. Click and wife Maggie, outside his second cabin, Ethel, 1912 (Source. Florida Memory)



Ethel School, 1917 (Source. Florida Memory)



Ethel Store, date unknown (Source. Florida Memory)

Ethel was a rural community and not a developed town as we would think of one today. Most of Ethel's people were farmers, but census records show carpenters, machinists, wood craftsman, a photographer, ferry operators, and schoolteachers made up the people in this community.

The major freeze in 1895 destroyed the citrus trees and caused most of the residents to abandon their furnished homes and livestock, taking with them just their clothing and a few personal items. Those who remained gathered the abandoned livestock and became farmers.

By the 1920 Census of Ethel, there were only ten homes with families listed, and that included the residents of the little adjacent town of Wekiva, now the site of the Wekiva Falls RV Resort.

A few moss-covered bricks and colored bottles are the only evidence of previous habitation. The cemetery, established around 1880, has three headstones remaining.

All that is left of the small community of Ethel is the Ethel Cemetery which was established around 1880. What also remains of the town of Ethel is the Lewis House and remnants of Mrs. Rowena Lewis's birthplace. Ethel Cemetery is a one-acre site containing only four tombstones, but research has identified a total of twenty-nine burials so far. Years ago, the headstones of other interred were removed and thrown into the woods and a nearby lake.

There is a lot we do not know about the small town of Ethel that once stood within the borders of today's Rock Springs Run State Reserve.



The entrance of Ethel Cemetery at Rock Springs Run State Reserve. (Source. WSSP)



Grave marker for Luke H. Moore, who died in 1914. He was a member of the Woodsmen of the World, a fraternal and insurance society. His marker is known as a 'treestone' and would have been provided by the fraternal society. (Source. WSSP)



Ethel resident William D. Fillmon and family in front of their home at Ethel - circa the 1920s. (Source. Florida Memory)

Logging

In the 1840s Navy Master Edward C. Anderson explored the Wekiva River looking for timber that could be harvested. He wrote about “three small rivers bearing the name Wekiva...the upper one empties into the St. Johns and its water as you approach the head is clear and limpid. Taking the cutter, we follow its winding until it lost itself in a narrow brook, clear as crystal.” He also described the massive cypress trees overhanging the banks “few of which measure less than twelve feet in circumference and many of them thirty feet at the base.”

Logging and collecting turpentine were important industries in the area until the 1940s. The Wilson Cypress Company logged the land for hardwoods, cypress, and pine and even built a narrow-gauge railway to haul the timber out. Basswood trees were cut to make cigar boxes in the 1920s and 1930s.

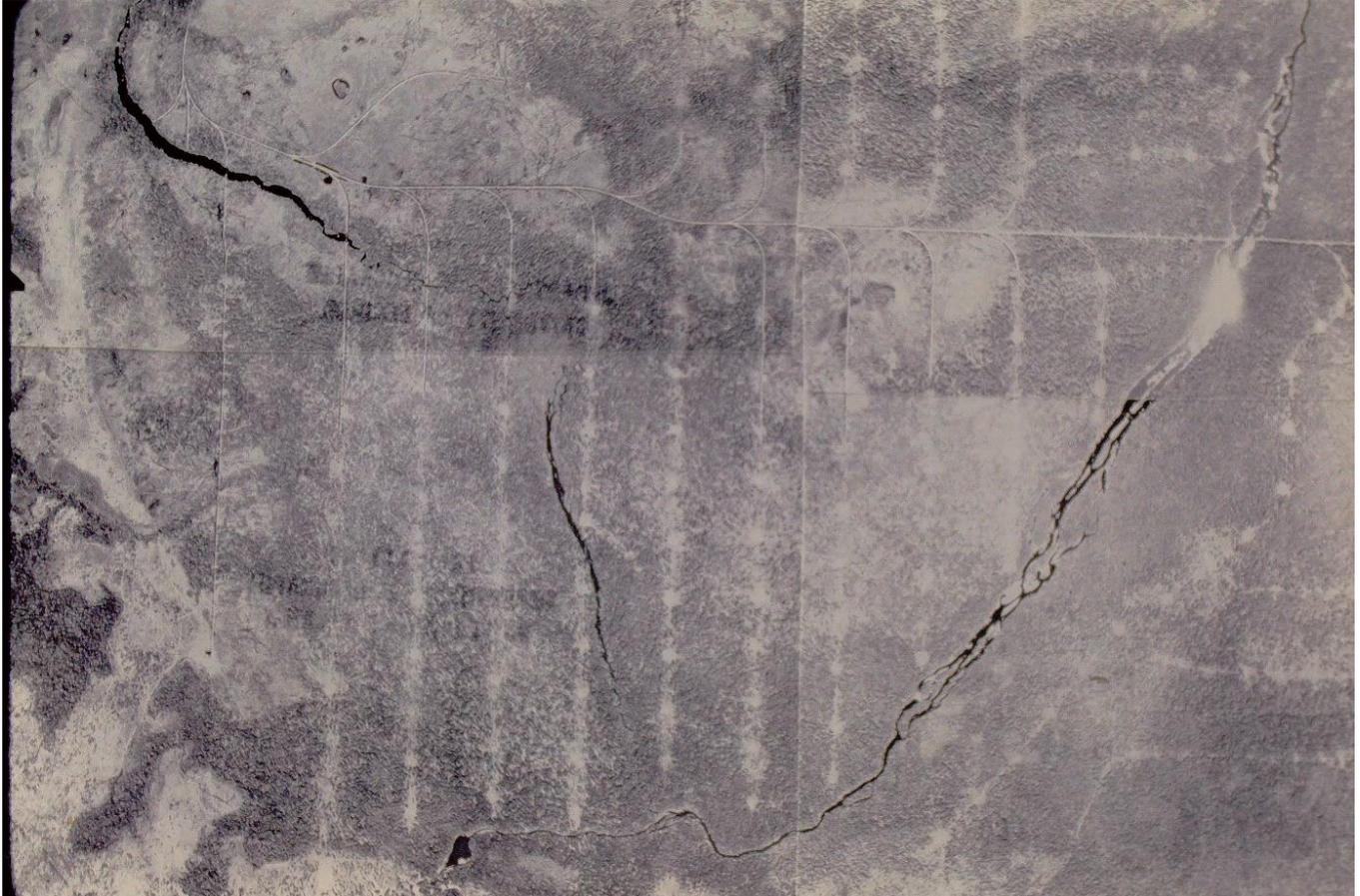
The Wilson Cypress Company was founded in 1889 when brothers Henry S. Wilson and A. E. Wilson, from Saginaw, Michigan, visited and then bought the Tilghman Cypress Company mill in Apopka, and then two years later purchased the Tilghman Cypress Company from Noah J. Tilghman and Sons. The Wilson Cypress Company started operations in 1893 and in 1898 built a new mill in Palatka on the St. Johns River. By the end of the century, the company was running the second-largest cypress mill in the world, and in the early 1920s, they moved into the Wekiva area. By 1926 they had over 600 employees. The remains of a windmill can be found in the center of the preserve. It is one of several that used to operate in the area.

The loggers would carve out trails, tramroads, and canals deep into the forest from the river. As the Wekiwa River generally runs northwards, the trails, tramroads, and canals would run east to west on either side of it. The logs could then be hauled to the water and floated downriver to the sawmills. Often, the tramroads had to be built on top of earth embankments because the area would frequently flood. Some of these earthen roads are over 10 feet high and twenty feet wide and can still be walked. Each year, the river was dredged to keep it open for the loggers. One log could provide enough boards to build two three-bedroom houses.



Measuring the circumference of a massive Cypress. (Source. Florida Memory)

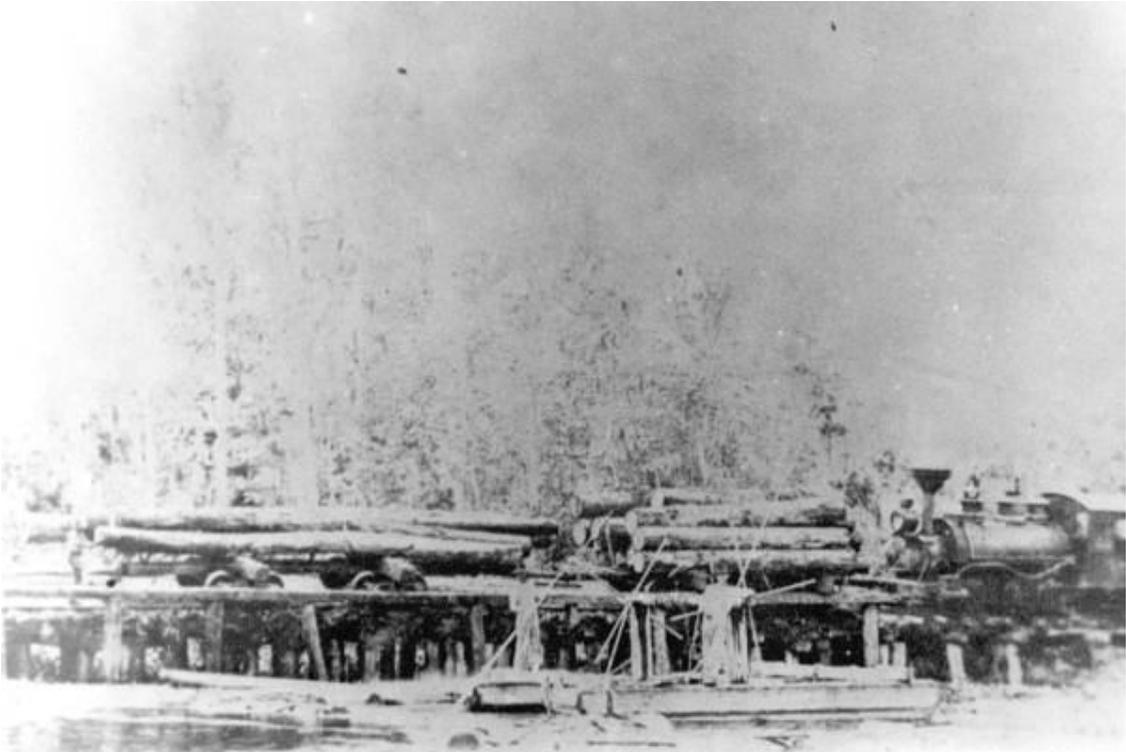
There are many logging trails throughout the basin parks. One of them, the Logging Trail, was built in the early 1940s in the St. Johns River flood plain cypress swamp. A segment can be followed across Banana River and out to Bush Island. The site consists of pilings constructed from local woods with some retaining metal spikes.



Aerial view of Wilson Cypress Company's holdings in the Wekiva River Basin. Wekiwa Springs is at the bottom of the picture to the left of the center. Both the Wekiva River and Rock Springs Run are clearly seen. (Source. Florida Memory)



Wilson Cypress Co. steam engine. (Source. Florida Memory)



Wilson Cypress Co. train and flatbed trucks with felled logs. (Source. Florida Memory)



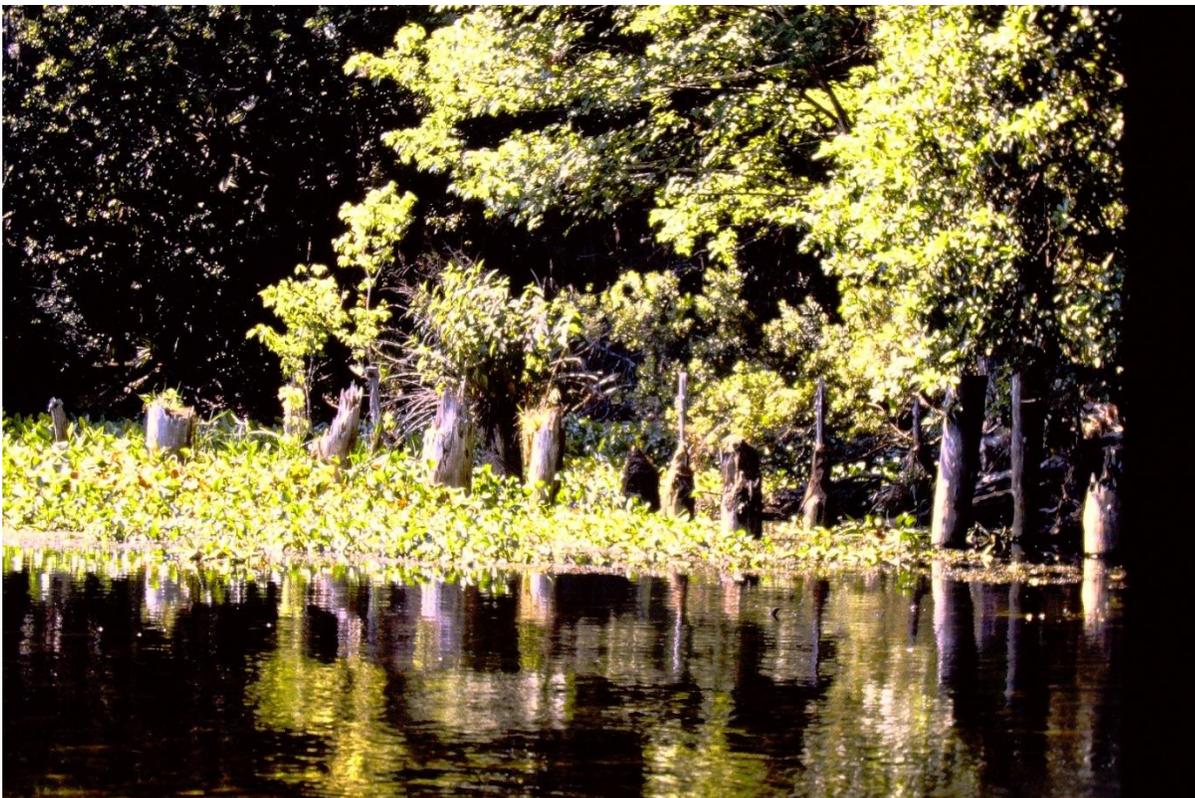
(Source. Florida Memory)



(Source. Florida Memory)



Wilson Cypress Company Bridge on Wekiva River at Palm Springs. (Source. Florida Memory)



Remains of the old trail bed through the swamp. (Source. WSSP)



Loggers moving felled trees down the Wekiva River. (Source. Florida Memory)



Company picnic with people sitting on logs loaded on flatbed trucks. (Source. Florida Memory)



Train with flatbed trucks packed with picnickers. (Source. AHS)



An old tram bed in Wekiwa Springs, now a trail. (Source. WSSP)

In 1941, the Apopka Sportsmen’s Club purchased the property from the Wilson Cypress Company, and it was maintained for recreational use.

Turpentine

The turpentine industry moved into the Wekiva area in a big way in the 1880s and 1890s to provide rosin and oil (or spirit) of turpentine, otherwise known as “naval stores”. The industry started in Georgia and Alabama and steadily moved south as the pine trees in these states were tapped out. The trees were then usually felled for timber and after that, the land was sold and cleared for agriculture or for building on.

Rosin was used to caulk the ship’s timbers to make them watertight. Ship’s ropes were also coated with turpentine to make them last longer and protect them from seawater. A turpentine farmer would typically have about 10,000 trees. He needed workers to “crop” them, quarters for them to live in, and a still to convert the gum.

During the winter, the trees were “boxed” which involved attaching a box or clay pot (known as a ‘herty’ pot), to a tree about 10 inches from its base. A V- shaped deep cut was made above the pot and strips of metal were hammered into the tree beneath the cuts to funnel the sap into the pot. In the spring the sap started to rise and would flow from the cut into the pot.

Every few days, a worker called a ‘turpentine dipper’, would return to make another cut just above the old one to keep the sap running. This continued for eight to nine months. The series of cuts was called a “catface” because it resembled cat whiskers. Every few weeks, the pot of sap would be emptied into buckets which would then be emptied into barrels and taken by cart to the still.



Tree showing catface and pot. (Source. WSSP)

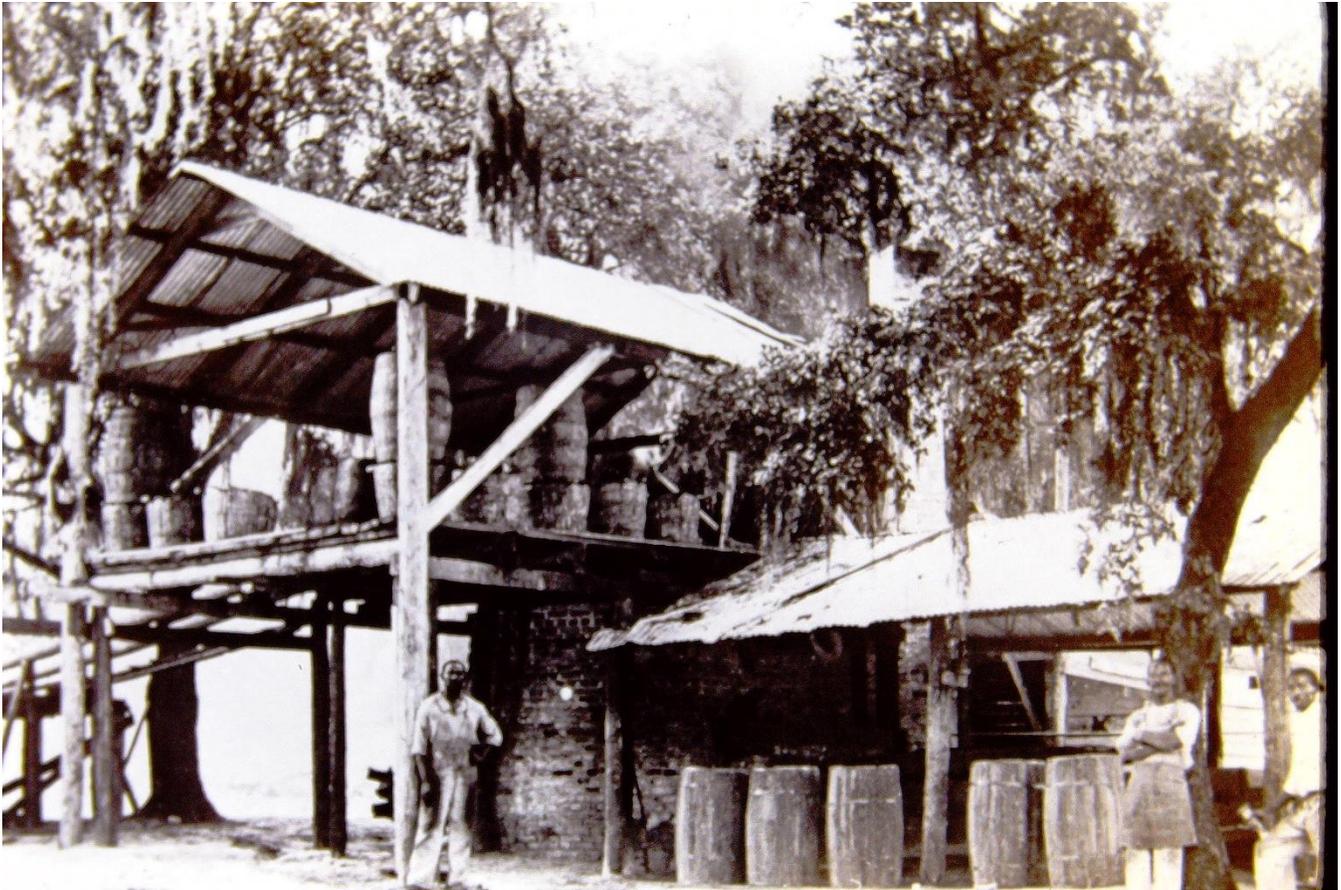
The huge copper stills were heated until the sap boiled. The liquid was passed through a coil and collected in a tank. As it cooled the oil of turpentine rose to the surface and was drained off into barrels. The rosin left in the still was filtered and then packed into barrels or seven-gallon pots where it congealed before being sent to market.



Top. Loading the barrels of sap (Source. WSSP). Bottom. Loading the sap in the mill prior to boiling. (Source. Florida Memory)



Workers tapping the trees. (Source. WSSP)



Turpentine still. (Source. Florida Memory)

The best crop was always in the first year that trees were tapped. The yield dropped off each successive year. A good crop would be about 50 barrels of turpentine and 160 barrels of rosin. Turpentine trees could be tapped for between three and five years and then be allowed to rest for a year or two before the cycle started again on the other side of the tree. They could only be tapped a few times because once faces had been cut around the tree no more sap could be drawn.

On old pines, you may still spot the incisions cut into the bark to extract the turpentine. Conditions in the turpentine camps were often brutal. Local prisoners would be ‘leased out to work’ for no pay and laborers earned about \$1 a day but it was paid in the form of a weekly scrip that could only be redeemed in the company store where prices were usually inflated. As a result, laborers quickly ran into debt and could not leave until they had paid off what they owed. Workers and their families lived in huts that were little more than shanties and they were frequently beaten and worse. They had little access to medical attention. In 1922, after a convict was tortured and murdered at a turpentine camp, the state outlawed the practice of convict leasing was outlawed.

Zora Neale Hurston, the author, anthropologist, and filmmaker, exposed the harsh working conditions in many of the camps while researching musical and oral histories.

Markham

In 1875 William Markham purchased a large tract of pine flat woods on the east side of the Wekiva River for lumber, turpentine, and agriculture. Born in Connecticut, Markham had an interesting life. He was Atlanta's acting mayor in 1853 and when war broke out, he formed a secret club of Yankee spies, known as the Union Circle. Later, it fell to him to surrender Atlanta to Union General William Sherman.

Lumber activities continued in the area for the next 70 years. Companies operating here included the Overstreet Turpentine Company, the Spencer Sawmill, the Zachary Lumber Company, and the Wilson Cypress Company. The Wilson Cypress Company ceased mill operations on December 5, 1944. At its height, it owned more than 100,000 acres in 10 central Florida counties. The company was formally dissolved in 1983.

The planks and timbers used to build the first bridge over the Wekiva River (on what is now SR 46), were milled at Markham. By the 1940s, almost all the longleaf and slash pines had disappeared, and the turpentine industry was all but over.



The Fuller family on the timber Wekiva bridge. (Source. ASCL)

The site of the old town of Markham, where sawmill and lumber companies built simple houses for workers and their families as well as a post office and railroad station, was south of State Road 46 along the Wekiva River. In the 1880s it was a vibrant African American community.



Lovett Thomas family, Markham c.1906. (Source. Florida Memory)

Pinnie Ridge Cemetery and the Oak Grove Missionary Church remains are two notable archaeological features of the area. Pinnie Ridge Cemetery is thought to contain between 24 and 75 burial sites and the Church is thought to have burned down around 1928. Today there is no visible evidence for either of these sites.

In 1991, the wreck of a sunken ferryboat was located "in a backwater slough with one end pointed into the main channel of the river," according to the 1997 Wekiva Ferry Site Survey. The boat was described in old accounts as 18 feet wide and 60 feet long.

The river is about five feet deep at that point and researchers could see through the clear water to a post of its stem or stern. Aquatic weeds blocked the view of the boat's remains. Scuba divers looked over the boat in 1996 and took measurements without taking any artifacts or removing any of the weeds or sediment.

The boat's boxy framing was constructed with cypress lumber six inches thick and 10 to 12 feet long and held in place with iron spikes. It was designed to carry heavy loads. It had a flat floor that turned upward at both ends because the boat needed to land along sloping shorelines.

Nearby, a cable stretched across the Wekiva River between Seminole and Lake counties. Before a narrow bridge spanned the Wekiva just to the south of the present State Road 46 bridge, early settlers used the ferry crossing at Rutland Ford. The pilot could carry passengers and up to two wagons from one riverbank to the other by sliding a grooved pole along a submerged guide cable and pulling his barge along.

The owner of a four-horse team paid \$1 to get himself, his horses, and his wagon across the river. The fare was 25 cents for anyone on foot or a rider and his horse.

The ferryboat landing was near the sawmill and lumber town of Markham that grew up after William Markham purchased the land on the east side of the Wekiva River from Telemaous F. Montgomery.

R.H. Marks operated the first ferry at Markham, beginning in 1877. His scow, a long, flat-bottom boat with square ends, could haul two wagons across the river into Lake County at what then was called the Montgomery crossing. For the most part, travel through the woods was by wagon and ox cart along narrow, sandy trails. The loggers also built their crude roads, canals, and railroad spurs to the river.

Markham in 1878 won the county's permission to build a road 20 to 26 feet wide linking his growing community and his groves to Sanford. "This road led to the Wekiva River and became the ferryboat crossing site on the east side of the river," according to the survey.

It cites a Florida Historical Quarterly article on Florida river crossings. Even when Florida was still a territory, the government granted more than 100 permits for ferries, and many of the ferries were in use long before roads opened.

"After roads had been cleared through the country the need for ferries became urgent," according to the article. It continues, "The boats used were usually rude dugouts in which the passengers were rowed; their horses (and cattle, if they had any) swam or were flatted across."

"Sometimes, where the ferryman was on the opposite shore, the traveler had to spend hours riding back and forth, gesticulating and shouting and even firing off a gun to attract his attention," according to the article.

The ferryboat men made a few extra dollars by providing passengers and their horses with food and a place to rest.

On Dec. 6, 1880, Thomas E. Wilson applied for a five-year permit to operate a ferryboat on the Wekiva River at nearby Rutland's Ford. He paid \$200 to the county in 1885 to renew his license and lowered his prices.

He might have been trying to protect his business. Orange County records in 1892 mention plans for a "stationary wooden bridge" across the Wekiva at Rutlands Ferry. Zachary Lumber Co. built the bridge in partnership with the county where State Road 46 crosses the river today.

The 1997 survey mentions the Wilson's Corner steamboat landing at what today is the Port of Sanford. Mail for the Markham and Paola area was dropped off at the landing.

The Orange Belt Railroad linking lakes Monroe and Apopka stopped two miles east at Paola in 1886. Interest in Markham picked up after the nearly 30-mile Sanford & Lake Eustis Railroad added a stop at the town in mid-1887. The 85 to 100 residents of Markham also got their own post office along Markham's road and near the train station. Citrus grower and steamboat captain George Arthur was named postmaster. The next year, Wilson became the postmaster at Paola.

The railroads hauled citrus, but they also lured tourists to Markham's Plantation Hotel, which was on the south side of what is today, the Longwood-Markham Road. The two-story wooden hotel was built no later than 1888 and featured the luxury of indoor plumbing supplied by a water tank built on top. The Pinnie Ridge Cemetery and the Oak Grove Missionary Baptist Church date to the same time frame. Markham's post office was serving 500 people by 1889.

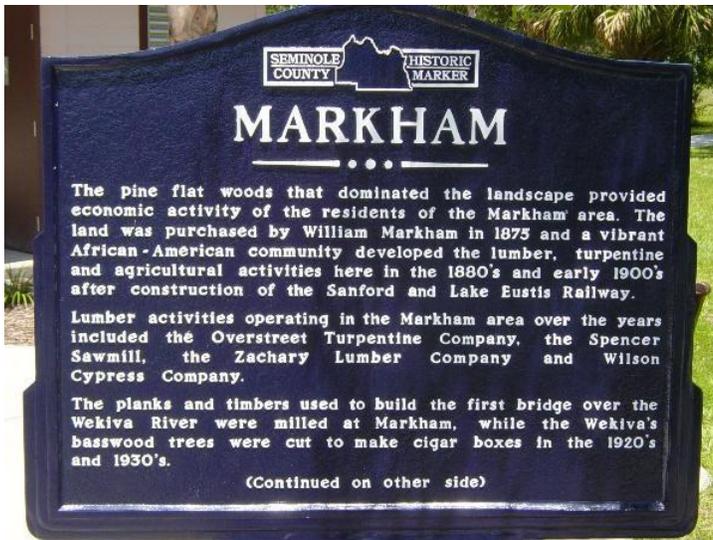
The railroads brought about a decline in the use of and need for steamboats.

"Steamboats were eventually used only for tourism, though ferries and working boats remained in use on the St. Johns for many more years," historian Arthur E. Francke Jr. writes in *Early Days of Seminole County*.

In April 1899, the Markham post office was merged into the Paola post office.

The Overstreet Turpentine Co. in 1907 purchased land in the town of Markham. By the early 1900s, Markham was a company town for two lumber companies, Spence Sawmill and Zachary Lumber. But, by 1920, the town of Markham was fading. As late as 1960, the turpentine still at Markham was standing along S.R. 46.

William Markham died in 1896.



(Source. Don Philpott)

The Silver Screen

In the 1950s, the Wekiwa River became a popular backdrop for several motion pictures, including *Yellowneck* (1955), *The Girl from 5,000AD* (1957), and *Johnny Tiger* (1966). Copies of *Yellowneck* are can still be found on old videotapes and DVDs and the film shows what Wekiwa has looked like for thousands of years. Much of it was shot in the sandhills in the area that now houses the youth camp, and around the springs and Wekiwa River. The film tells the story of a band of Civil War deserters who escape to Cuba through the Everglades. It is interesting because it depicts Florida in a way that many people further north, must have thought about the state as a mosquito, infested swamp full of dangerous creatures. In the film, one deserter gets killed by an enormous, larger than life alligator, another dies instantly after being bitten by a rattlesnake, while a third is swallowed up by quicksand.



Poster for *Yellowneck*, 1955 (Source. Synergy Archives)

The Bridge to Nowhere

While movies were being filmed at Wekiwa in the 1950s, landowners were hatching grandiose plans to develop the area. George Daugherty owned thousands of acres south of SR 46 to the Wekiwa. He had visions of building a road from SR 46, east of Mount Plymouth, to connect the remote east side of Lake County with metro Orlando. For this to happen, a bridge would have to be built over the Wekiwa River. This was long before Disney, Interstate 4, and Orlando International Airport.

He put together a group of investors which included E. Everett Huskey, who would later go on to develop Sweetwater Oaks and Sweetwater Country Club. The group persuaded Lake County to construct County Road 433 and the investors built the bridge over the Wekiwa. Unfortunately, both Orange and Seminole Counties backed out of the project.



(Source. WSSP)

Today County Road 433 runs through the park from the northern entrance of what is now Rock Springs Run State Reserve on SR 46 but ends at a pair of locked gates at the Orange-Lake county line. Beyond, there is a winding, sandy trail where the road should have continued for just over 4.5 miles to connect with the bridge.

The bridge marks the entrance on the river to Wekiwa Springs State Park. People used to climb on top of the bridge to fish, but this is no longer allowed as the bridge is considered structurally unsafe and its future is uncertain.

Hunting Club

The Apopka Sportsmen's Club acquired the land that is now Wekiwa Springs State Park from the Wilson Cypress Company in 1941. The Club had been leasing the uplands between Rock Springs and

Wekiva Springs since the 1930s and by 1934 had leased 7,000 acres. About 3,500 acres were leased from Wilson and the rest was made up of smaller tracts such as the Mill Creek Game Preserve. Clyde Love was employed in 1934 as a patrol rider to stop illegal hunters and poachers, and in 1936 Mallory Welch was appointed warden of the Rock Springs preserve by the board of county commissioners.

The club president was W. Goding and V. W. Haywood was secretary-treasurer. The club consisted of 75 members but in 1938 they voted to limit membership to 50 and these later became the incorporating shareholders when they bought the land. The membership roll was a “who’s who’ of almost all the most powerful people in the area. A founders’ marker listing the members of the club can be seen at the end of the Sand Lake parking lot.

The club maintained the area for recreational use – hunting and fishing – but they also protected the land and helped conserve and preserve it. During the 1920s, overhunting and tick fever had seriously depleted the number of deer in the area so the Club limited the number of does that could be shot and the population quickly recovered.



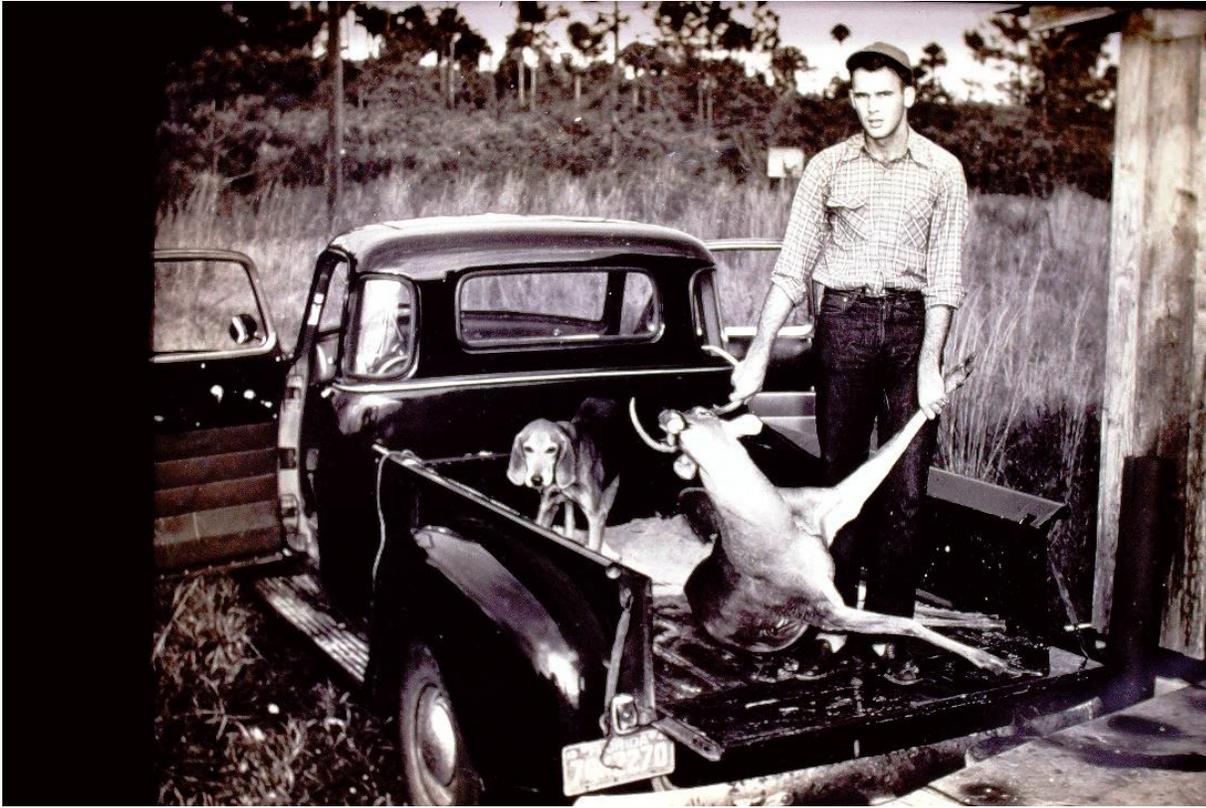
An early hunting camp. (Source. Florida Memory)



License plate nailed to tree to mark out each hunter's territories. (Source. WSSP)



Joe Carroll's Camp, November 1948. (Source. WSSP)



Jack Gilliam Sr. at Joe Carroll's Camp, November 1948. (Source. WSSP)

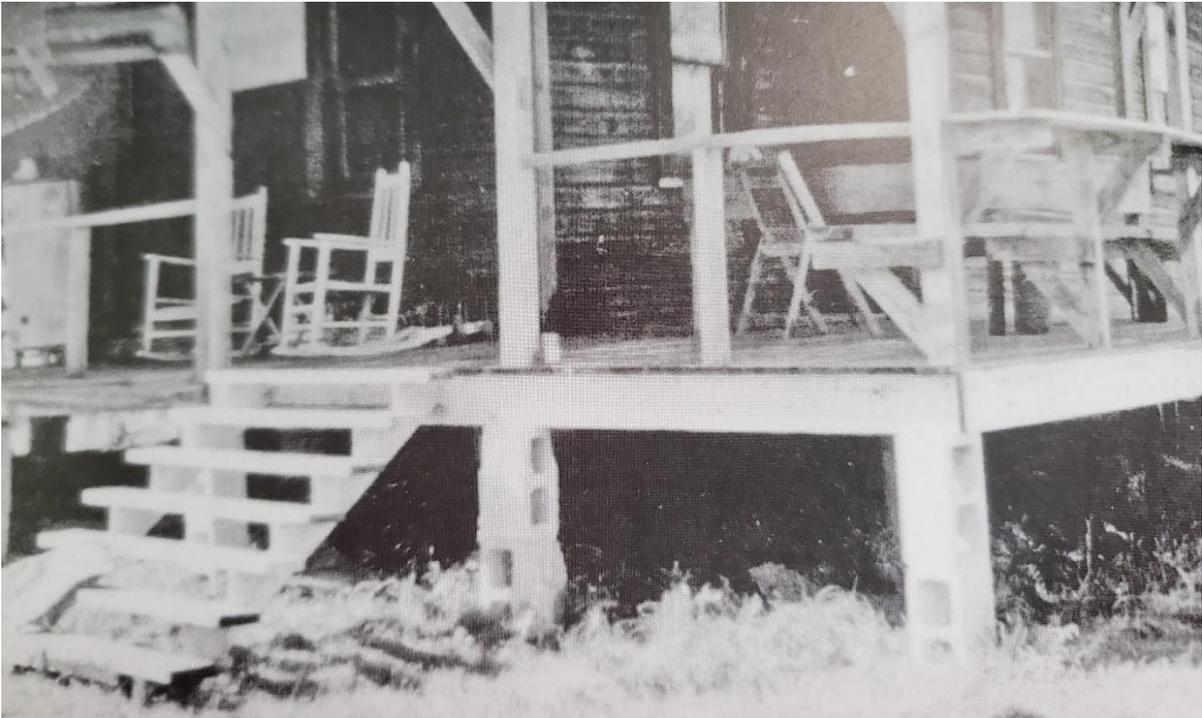
Each fall the Club held a dinner at Camp Cozy which included a lottery for the club's 45 hunting stands on its property. Camp Cozy, on Rock Spring Run, acted as their clubhouse and a dock provided water access. The club built several hunting cabins, many of them on small islands in the river, during the 1940s and 1950s. The cabins were later pulled down but, in some cases, the land was used for primitive camping sites. One cabin remains and serves as a ranger residence.

The club sold the land to the Florida Park Service in 1969 for \$2.1 million, or \$350 an acre. The club members each received \$41,000 which was a lot less than they could have got had they sold the land on the open market, but they had agreed that "we wanted the land to remain the way it was."

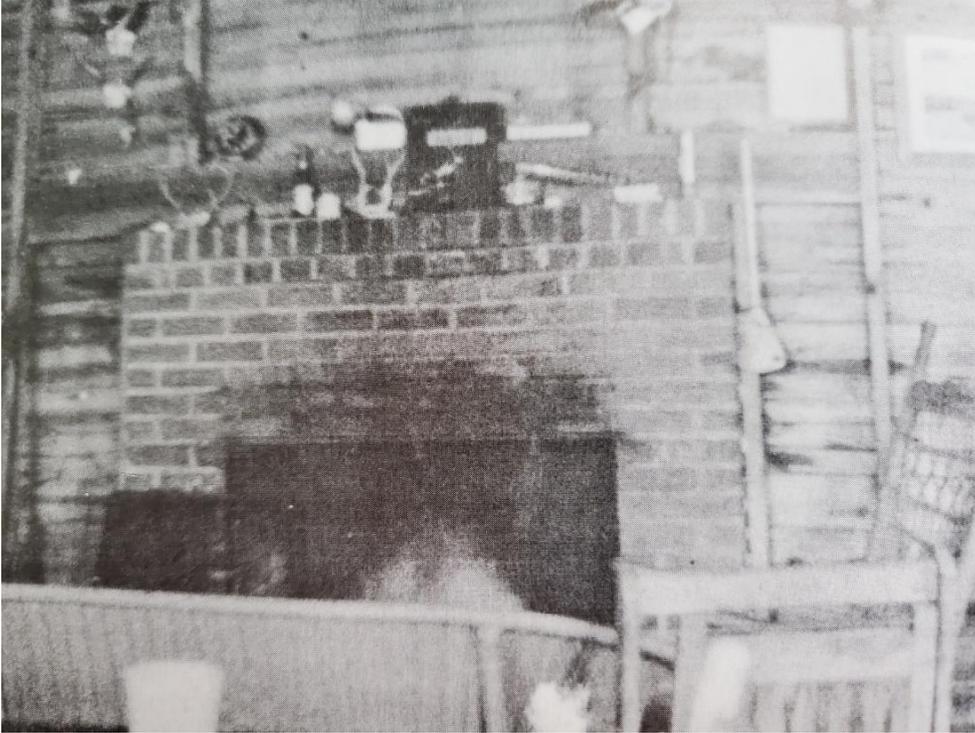
The Orlando Sentinel reported on September 30, 1991, that "When the time came to sell their paradise, they spurned lucrative offers from developers. They sold it all to the state, they say, so others could come to love their woods, too. Those young hunters, most lifetime Apopka residents, may move a little slower now, but their regard for the wood is as strong as it ever was."



Camp Cozy. (Source. WSSP)



Camp Cozy back porch (Source. WSSP)



Interior of Camp Cozy where Club members met to agree to sell their land to the Florida Park Service. (Source. WSSP)



John H. Land and Sydney Bacchus (above) by Mill Creek, August 2, 1991. Land was a member of the Apopka Sportsmen's Club and Mayor of Apopka for 61 years, from 1950-1967 and 1971 until April 2014. He died in November that year aged 94. He was the longest-serving mayor in Florida. (Source. WSSP)



The Apopka Sportsmen's Club Memorial at Sand Lake. (Source. Don Philpott)

While the sale included the springs, the Club did not own that land. Orlando businessman, Conway Kettridge, owned a parcel of 600 acres of land which included the springs. He had plans to build a large house above the springs and he planted over 600 azaleas around the intended site. The plants were stolen, and illegal hunters and partygoers broke down fences surrounding the property to get to the woods and the springs. The situation got so bad that Kettridge employed Frank Smith to keep people from the springs, both day and night.

Smith carried a 38 police revolver which he called "sweet lips" and worked closely with the local sheriffs. In one year, he apprehended over 300 people. When the Club decided to sell, Kettridge offered his land as part of the deal.

Sand Lake

There was massive growth in central Florida in the mid-1960s and huge demand for construction materials. Sand was excavated from a borrow pit in the center of what is now the state park but as they dug deeper, they hit an artesian spring and the pit was flooded becoming Sand Lake. Inflow to the lake is primarily through the artesian spring and surface runoff. Sand Lake drains into the Wekiwa lagoon through an unnamed creek just below the bridge across the springs.

Wekiwa Springs State Park

On April 30, 1969, the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund obtained title to the property that later became Wekiwa Springs State Park. One stipulation of the land sale was that the state had to retain the services of Frank Smith. He became the first ranger at Wekiwa Springs State Park.

The park opened on July 1st, 1970. In its first year, it attracted more than 300,000 visitors. In 1971 the park was so popular that officials imposed a 1,000-person limit at any one time and added a 25c admission charge for 1972.

In 1973, the state approved plans to double visitor capacity at the springs. This would have involved extending roads, adding about 800 parking spaces, and an additional picnic area with its own bathing area. Camping facilities were also to be added for 60 trailers or tents. For whatever reason, most of the plan was never implemented although additional camping was provided.

Rock Springs

Rock Springs is unusual in that the water does not bubble up under pressure out of the ground, but rather flows out from a rock cave. From there it runs into a lagoon and then into Rock Springs Run, which meanders for about nine miles until it joins the Wekiva River.

The first settler at the springs was thought to be William S. Delk. He moved from Liberty County, Georgia to Florida in the late 1840s. In 1854 he bought 3,000 acres of pine and palmetto woodland around Rock Springs. He hauled his supplies from Hawkinsville on the St. Johns river, eighteen miles away. He cleared 400 acres to become the area's largest plantation and grew cotton, rice, sugar, and corn. He worked the land with his son William, two white laborers, and about 20 slaves valued at \$12,700. These included a young slave called Joseph G. Roberts, who later claimed he was Delk's son.



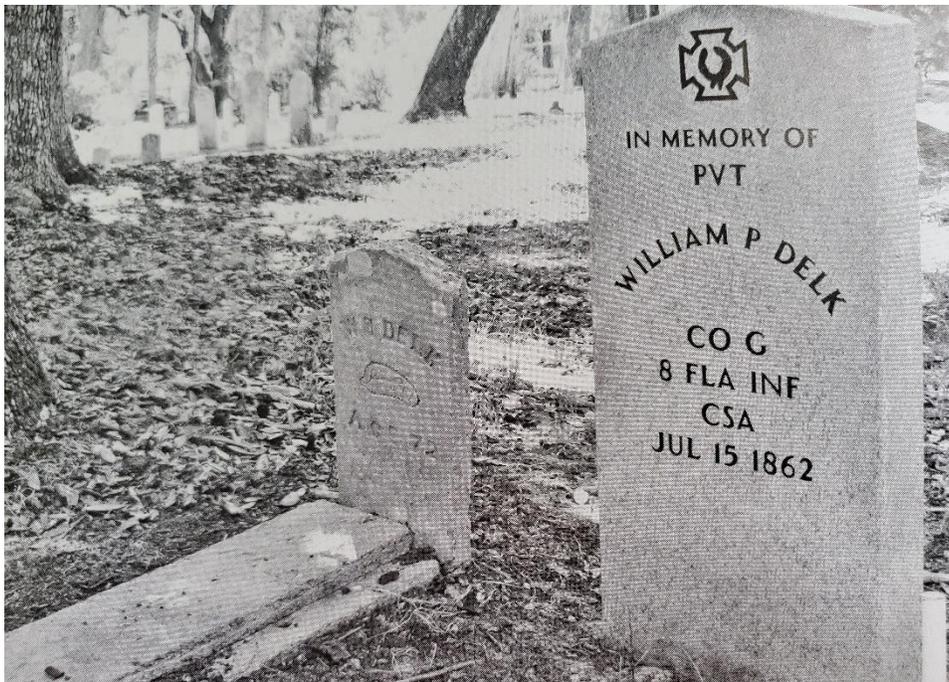
The slave quarters at the Delk Plantation. (Source. Florida Memory)

The first house was a log cabin just north of the springs. The house burned down when Delk tried to burn out the fleas from underneath it. The next house was built on the hill on the south side.

Ox carts brought in supplies from Hawkinsville, 18 miles away on the St. Johns River. At that time Orlando was a small trading post, the only one between Jacksonville and Tampa.

Around 1861, Delk built a dam across the stream about 50 yards from the spring and a flume with a big bucket water wheel in it. The dam was on the right-hand side as you look down the stream. The spillway was on the left and next to the waterwheel was a grist mill that ground corn from his fields. Other farmers paid him a part of their crop to grind their corn. He also milled timber from trees felled on his property and operated a cotton gin, one of the largest in the area.

In 1861, the year Florida seceded from the Union, Delk's son William P. Delk rode off to war. He joined a unit that would later become Company G, Eighth Florida Infantry. He died in July 1862 in Tallahassee, aged 22. Where he is buried although he has a memorial in the Apopka Church Cemetery. Delk was an old-line Whig and supported the Union while most of his neighbors supported the Confederacy. Despite the Confederacy's demand, he refused to buy bonds to support their war effort and in 1863, a Confederate cavalry unit was sent to seize his land. Delk freed his slaves and went into hiding in the Wekiva River swamps with his slave Roberts. They then made their way along the St. Johns River until they encountered Union troops. According to Roberts, who later recounted the flight, they both enlisted in the Union Army and were sent to units in South Carolina.



Tombstone of William P. Delk. (Source. AHS)

After the war, Delks and Roberts returned to Rock Springs to farm his land. Delks, still clashing with his neighbors, was involved in bitter litigation to recover debts owed to him from James S. Hackney. Because of his Unionist sympathies, he did not think he could get a fair trial locally, so his case was moved to Putnam County where a jury awarded him \$884.60 damages. Orange County Sheriff John Ivey was ordered to seize and sell 176 acres of Hackney's land to pay the judgment.

Later he became an active and prominent member of the community, and in 1880, he and two other men – Anthony Frazier and James Madison - were appointed road commissioners to supervise the building of a public road from Orlando to Rock Springs and another from Rock Springs to the Hawkinsville Road. He died in 1885 aged 70 leaving his estate to his second wife Samantha.

Roberts later settled in Sorrento and then farmed 10 acres near Mount Dora. He visited Rock Springs in 1926 with Mr. Wm. Edwards and Mr. A. M. Hall, editor of the Apopka Chief, to whom he related his life story. It was published in the Chief of May 13, 1926. Mr. Hall relates that Roberts stood by the spring with bared head, and chanted this greeting and farewell: "Best greetings, Mr. Rock, Howdedo, Mr. Spring! From whence you come, I do not know, from whence you came in the beginning. And whence do you flow, we do not know. Blessing for years you have continued to bring. Wherefore you are known as Old Rock Spring. For, lo, many years did I here remain. This you may know, it is old friend Joe, who worked here so long, midst sorrow and woe. Good night, old spring, forever."

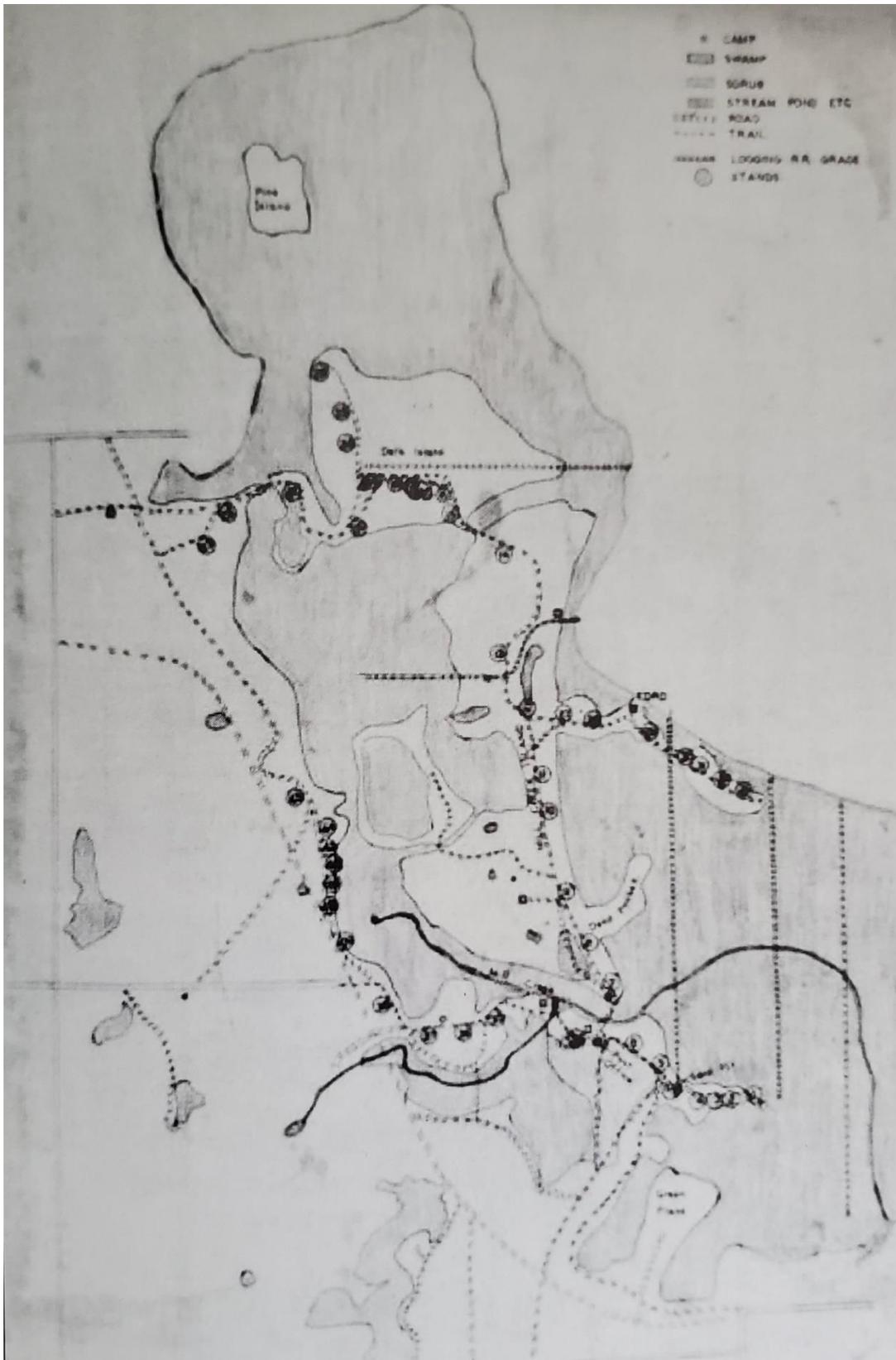
The higher ground that Delk Island and Pine Island afforded at the north end of the spring run, were popular spots with hunters.



Delk Island

Deer hunters, from left to right, Winfred Harris, Mark Ryan Sr., and Lee Lovell are shown on Delk Island, within the U-shaped bend of Rock Springs Run.

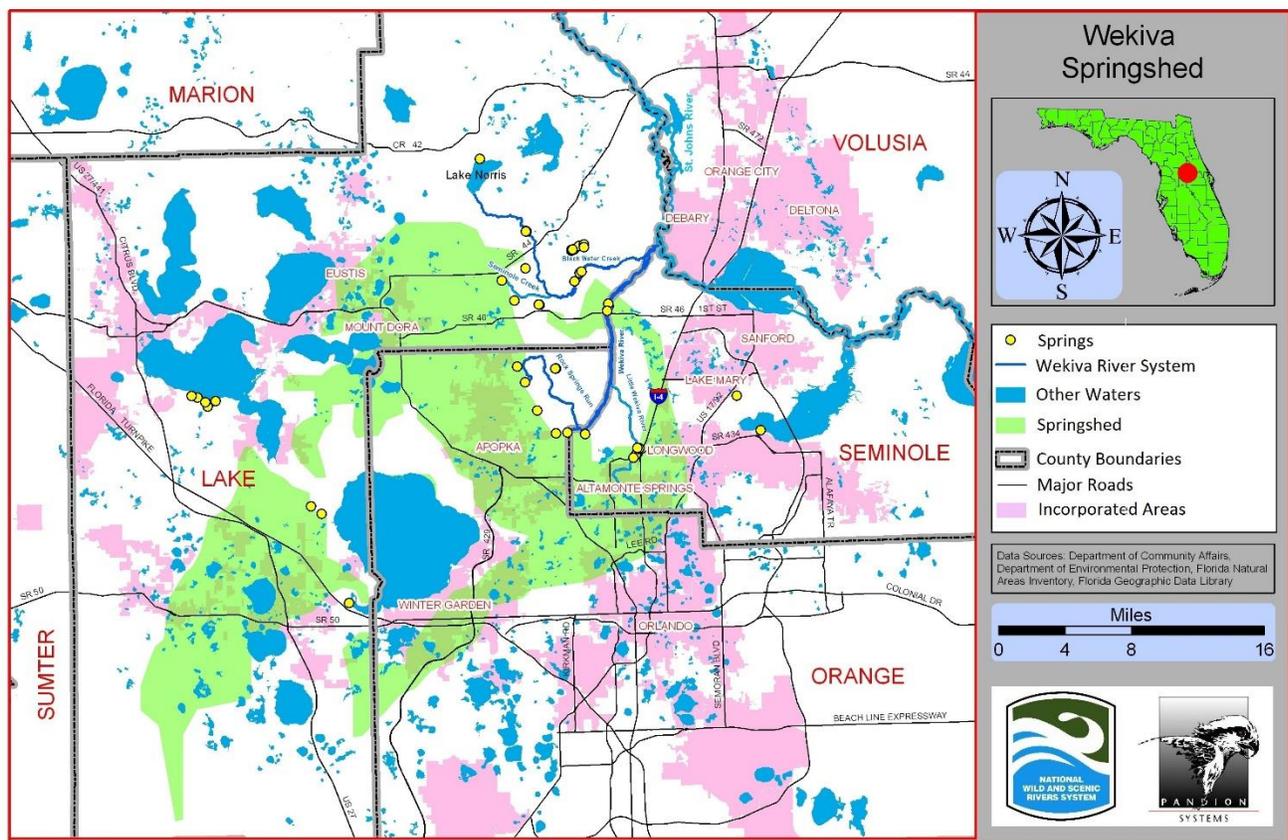
(Source. Orlando Sentinel)



Hunter's map of Delk Island. (Source. WSSP)

The islands are across from King’s Landing, which is named after landowner Elmer Stanton King, who was a member of the Apopka Sportsmen’s Club. His grandfather, Murray S. King, designed the 1927 Orange County Courthouse which is now home to the Orange County Regional History Center. In the 1960s realtor Gabrielle “Gaby” Gardener, bought the Landing site for a canoe rental business. When she became too ill to run the business (she died in 2007), she sold it to Bob and Steven Loomis in the early 2000s and they pledged to preserve King’s Landing for future generations.

The Landings was closed following the 2004 hurricane season when four major storms hit central Florida and destroyed the launch area with much of the Run impassable because of fallen trees. However, the landing area was restored and the debris in the river was finally removed and King’s Landing and Rock Springs Run today is one of the premier paddles in Florida.



(Source. St. Johns River Water Management District)

Friends of the Wekiva River

In 1978, a group of 19 friends got together to see how best they could protect the Wekiva River. Many of the group were members of the Orange Chapter of the Audubon Society and one day they organized a canoe trip along the river. They met at Katie’s Landing, where fellow members, Russ and Katie Moncrief, ran a small canoe and kayak concession. During the paddle, they detected a distinct burnt orange smell and they realized that it must be coming from wastewater being discharged into the river from the Hi Acres Citrus processing plant in Forest City. The plant, long since closed, was fined but the group started to monitor the river. They noticed that in many places, the eelgrass, an indicator of good

water quality, was being replaced by the invasive weed hydrilla, which was slowly clogging the river. The culprit this time was the City of Altamonte Springs and a new wastewater treatment plant that was allowing nutrient-rich water to run into the Wekiva. The nutrients allowed the hydrilla to grow and take over. The group decided it was time to act.

In 1982, they incorporated their citizen action group, the Friends of the Wekiva River and since then it has worked to protect, preserve, and restore the natural functions and beauty of the Wekiva River system.

One of their first successes was to get Altamonte Springs to build the huge water tower that is seen as you drive along I-4. The tower was part of Project Apricot (A Prototype Realistic Innovative Community Of Today). Instead of dumping nutrient-rich treated wastewater into the Little Wekiva River, the water is stored and reused for irrigation. Altamonte Springs was the first city in central Florida to use wastewater for irrigation and other purposes, although almost every other city has since followed suit.



Governor Jeb Bush at Wekiwa Springs after signing the Wekiva Parkway & Protection Act, June 29, 2004

As a result of their leadership and the cooperation of their river partners, the Wekiva is designated a Florida Outstanding Water, a Florida Canoe Trail, an Aquatic Preserve, and a National Wild and Scenic River with over 70,000 acres of state-protected lands in the basin.

The Wekiva River together with Wekiwa Springs Run, Rock Springs Run, and Black Water Creek were designated by the United States Congress as a National Wild and Scenic River in October 2000. Five Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) have been identified for the river system: scenic, recreation, wildlife and habitat, historic and cultural, and water quality and quantity.

Per the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, these ORVs, the river system's free-flow characteristics, and its immediate environment "shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations" (section 1(b) Wild and Scenic Rivers Act).

Unlike most rivers in the National Wild and Scenic River System that are managed exclusively by either a federal or state agency, the Wekiva River System is considered a "Partnership Wild and Scenic River." This means that it is jointly managed by a consortium of local stakeholder groups, referred to as the Wekiva River System Advisory Management Committee (AMC) with oversight and coordination provided by the National Park Service (NPS).

Despite this ample recognition, the Wekiva River and its fragile ecosystem face numerous threats. These include the fragmentation and loss of habitat, declines in spring flow, degradation in water quality, and wildlife mortality on the roads. FWR members work on issues that affect the Wekiva, ranging from pollution to smart growth to the welfare of wildlife, including bears.

In an editorial in the Orlando Sentinel on December 31, 2020, Mike Cliburn, a retired environmental engineer and secretary of the Friends of the Wekiva River and the Florida Springs Council, wrote:

Central Florida's Wekiva River and its springs are facing a double whammy: declining water levels and nutrient pollution. Two state plans meant to address the problems fall short and simply won't protect an ecosystem that generates \$60 million in revenue annually and supports 500 jobs.

Recently, the St. Johns River Water Management District adopted its 2020 water supply plan for Central Florida. The plan predicts that by 2040, groundwater withdrawals will increase by about 36% from 2015 levels unless more aggressive water conservation programs and alternative water supplies are used. However, the same plan estimates that the aquifer can support only a 14% increase.

According to the plan, projected groundwater withdrawals will cause flows in the Wekiva River and Wekiwa Springs to drop below the state's adopted minimum flow and level between 2025 and 2030. However, district data show that flow from Wekiwa Springs has been at or below its required level 60% of the time from 2003 to 2018. And the plan acknowledges that flows from Palm and Starbuck springs, which also feed the Wekiva River, are already less than the minimum needed to maintain healthy ecosystems.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has proposed new rules that would limit groundwater withdrawals by public utilities to their projected 2025 water demands. But that is only half the story.

The rules also would allow utilities to continue withdrawing more groundwater for up to five additional years, with approval only from the water management district's staff. And the district's board could even approve variances to the rules, potentially allowing utilities to withdraw even more groundwater.

Other users, such as commercial, institutional, agricultural, and landscape/recreational users, would need to demonstrate only how much water they need to continue withdrawing from the aquifer. We need withdrawal limits that protect our natural resources and leaders who will stick to them.

A second plan by DEP addresses increasing pollution — primarily nitrate and phosphate — that help fuel algae that choke the river. That plan is also woefully inadequate.

In 2018, DEP estimated that more than a million pounds of nitrogen annually flows into the portion of the upper Floridan aquifer that supplies water to Wekiwa and Rock Springs, and other local springs. More than 50% of the nitrogen comes from fertilizers used on lawns, sports turf, and agricultural lands. Another 30% comes from septic tanks.

Nitrate and phosphate levels in Wekiwa and Rock springs are already 3 to 4 times higher than DEP says is safe for healthy ecosystems. However, DEP's plan would reduce total nitrogen loads only by about 20%, which is insufficient to restore or sustain the aquatic ecosystem.

Friends of the Wekiwa River challenged the DEP plan in January 2019, and in November 2019 joined other environmental groups in testifying at an administrative hearing.

To date, the administrative law judge has not ruled.

The Wekiwa River is an Aquatic Preserve, an Outstanding Florida Water and one of just two rivers in the state to be named a federal Wild and Scenic River. These designations recognize the river's tremendous natural assets. And recently, FOWR joined with the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council to show the economic significance of the river and springs: \$60 million in revenue yearly and 500 jobs.

Taking the following steps could help save this economic and natural resource:

1. Develop prevention and recovery plans for Palm and Starbuck springs.
2. Require utilities, industry, agriculture, and other water users to implement aggressive water conservation measures, particularly for landscape irrigation. The district estimates that half of the water currently supplied for drinking is used for landscape irrigation — a very inefficient and costly practice.
3. Require Florida-Friendly Landscaping for new homes and businesses to reduce use of fertilizers and irrigation.
4. Offer incentives for conversion of existing lawns and landscaping to Florida-Friendly Landscaping.
5. Impose a per-gallon water use fee for water withdrawn from aquifers, streams, and lakes.
6. Establish and enforce restrictions on irrigation of lawns and landscaping.
7. Provide more incentives for agricultural best management practices.
8. Require central sewer systems for all new subdivisions within the Wekiwa and Rock Springs spring sheds.
9. Install central sewer systems in existing Wekiwa-area subdivisions that use septic tanks.

FOWR believes that groundwater withdrawals and excess nutrients will continue to degrade the natural treasures that have drawn people to Central Florida for centuries.

We must protect these environmental jewels for ourselves and future generations to enjoy.



View along the Wekiva River. (Source. WSSP)



Katie's Landing

For 27 years, Katie and Russ Moncrieff ran a canoe rental concession at Katie's Wekiva River Landing, an almost idyllic six-acres on the river and across the narrow road to Lower Wekiwa River Preserve State Park. They bought the property, then known as Camp Seminole, in 1974, six years after they married. It was mostly used by fishermen with rowboats as canoes and kayaks were hardly ever seen on the river. They changed that and allowed overnight camping. In December 2001, Seminole County and the State bought the land, and it is now part of the Lower Wekiwa River Preserve State Park. The old bulkhead was removed, and restroom facilities were installed, and the landing is a popular spot for canoeing, kayaking, fishing, and birding. There are interpretive signs about the Paleo-Indians who lived on the site 2,000 years ago and the Timucua who followed them. The site also contains the remnants of a shell mound (middens) and several artifacts have been found there. The Moncrieff's also played a key role in founding Friends of the Wekiwa River and getting the river state and federal protection.



(Source of top & bottom. WSSP)



Katie and Russ paddling the Wekiva. (Source. FWR)

Kelly Park

Kelly Park is named after Dr. Howard Atwood Kelly, an eminent gynecologist, surgeon, and amateur naturalist. He was born in Camden, New Jersey, in 1858 and after graduating medical school, he was a founder of the Kensington Hospital for Women in Philadelphia and one of the four co-founders of the John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.

He is credited with establishing gynecology as a specialty by developing new surgical approaches to gynecological diseases. He also developed several medical innovations, including the improved cystoscope, Kelly's clamp, Kelly's speculum, and Kelly's forceps, which made him a wealthy man.

In 1910, he vacationed in Florida and visited Rock Springs where he drank the “sweet” water that came from “a mysterious cave”. The doctor later wrote that the cave and its spring waters “were part of God’s open book of nature.”



Dr. Kelly at the Rock Springs cave entrance. (Source. OCRHC)

“When I saw Rock Springs, I thought it in every way the most beautiful and interesting of all I had ever seen, not only in Florida but in any other state,” he added.

At this time, the land, located on what is now Kelly Park Road, was controlled by a lumber company, whose owners were weighing offers to sell it or lease the mining rights to its limestone rock for use in state road-building projects. Dr. Kelly stepped in and bought the land, including the springs. Later, he turned down \$200,000 offered for the land by a group of investors who planned to establish fishing and hunting camps.

In his autobiography, Kelly wrote that he only became a doctor and surgeon because it was the best way for a naturalist to earn some money.”

On May 5, 1927, Dr. Kelly donated his 200 acres of land, which included the springs, to Orange County “for the purpose of public recreation and spiritual enrichment.” The commemoration event included a lavish picnic under one of the pavilions at the new Kelly Park.

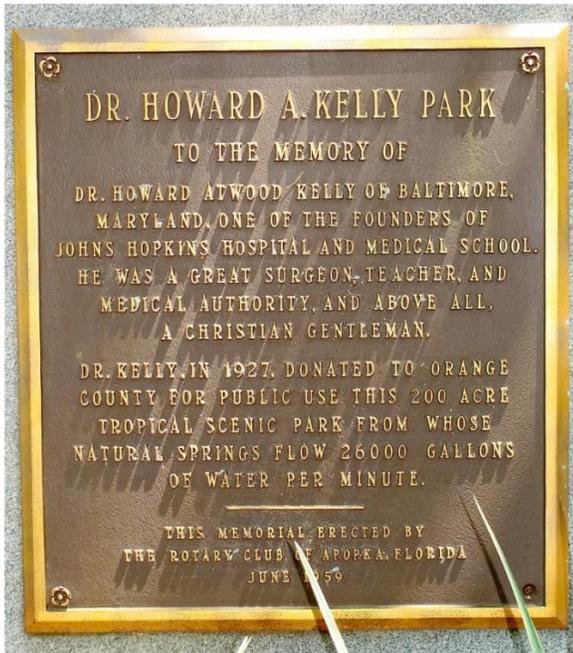


Dr. Kelly talking to Orange County Commissioners and others during the dedication celebrations. (Source. OCRHC)



Dr. Kelly and Orange County Commissioners outside the cave during the 1927 celebrations. (Source. OCRHC)

In 1929, the state presented a study to the U.S. Senate about the feasibility of building a canal to connect the St. Johns and Kissimmee Rivers. It suggested a canal to connect the Wekiva River with Lake Apopka. Luckily, the plan never materialized. In 1959, the Rotary Club of Apopka erected a stone plaque memorial in honor of Dr. Kelly. Rock Springs and Kelly Park remain popular attractions to this day.



Little Wekiva River

The Little Wekiva River is a 15-mile long, northward-flowing tributary of the Wekiva River, which later joins the St. Johns River, the longest river in the state of Florida. Along its path, it drops 58 feet in elevation which can lead to mini rapids after heavy rain.

The Little Wekiva drainage basin is about 42 square miles located in the urbanized area north and west of downtown Orlando. It is part of the middle basin of the St. Johns River. The St. Johns River Water Management District places the headwater of the creek at Lake Lawne, in Pine Hills, about 5 miles northwest of downtown Orlando, while the Geographic Names Information System (GNIS), list the source of the river at Spring Lake, an 84-acre spring-fed lake in Altamonte Springs, Florida. It also flows through Lake Lotus Park in Altamonte Springs. One reason for the confusion about the source is that the river's course has been diverted many times over the years because of urban development.

Wekiva Marina and Wekiva Island

Cliff Freeman built a "squatters" cabin on stilts on one of the islands in the Wekiva in the 1940s but later abandoned it and supported the state's fight to gain legal ownership of the islands. He paddled away from his cabin for the last time in 1975, on the same day that a circuit court judge ruled that the state-owned the islands. An early 1970s map showed the location of 36 squatter cabins along the river. While all the original squatters gave up their cabins, other people moved in and resisted efforts to remove them. It was not until the mid-1980s that the state finally won its court fight over ownership



The cabin at site #2 and below, the site after the cabin's removal. (Source of both. WAP)



In 1964, Freeman opened Wekiwa Marina, adjacent to Wekiwa Springs State Park and at the end of Miami Springs Road. Initially, it was mostly a private fish camp, a place for him and a few pals to fish, hunt, and play poker. Legend has it that Roy Rogers, the singing cowboy, was a frequent visitor. Freeman, a former Orange County commissioner and Ocoee mayor, soon realized the commercial possibilities of the marina, and he acquired another 16 acres and dug canals for more boat slips to expand the marina.

In the late 1960s, he opened the Wekiwa Marina Restaurant which quickly became a favorite dining spot for locals. In the 1900s, the restaurant became Alexander's Riverfront Restaurant owned by Michael Dowd and a group of family, friends, and investors. The restaurant was destroyed by fire in 1999.

Over the next few years, there was a small canoe rental and bait shack on the site. The bait shack burned down around 2006 – it is said that a candle ignited a stuffed turkey that was hanging on the wall. It was not until 2008 that things started to take off again.

That was the year that Bill and Mary Sue Weinaug bought the property for \$1.4 million and renamed it Wekiwa Island. It is an island because one side runs along the river while canals run along the other three sides.

Although a fire destroyed the main 50-year-old wooden building, housing the bar, office, and gift shop, in 2013, it was quickly rebuilt. There are now 10 cabanas along the water's edge, a volleyball court, and a classroom dedicated to the memory of Mike Barr, the former executive director of Keep Seminole Beautiful, who died in 2012. Mary Sue is the current executive director.

Wekiwa Island is a showpiece of environmental sustainability. They use rain cisterns to irrigate. They have an electric-car charging station. The classroom space for rent is built out of pieces of boardwalk and metal from an old boathouse. And they recycle all the beer cans.



Bill and Mary Sue Weinaug.



Wekiva Island. (Source. Wekiva Island)

Recent Discoveries

Recent discoveries in the park include a tree stand from the Apopka Sportsmen's, a human-made mill pond, a cement mixer, a gutter, a late 1940's trash pile, a water control feature in the spring run, a dock at the end of a tramroad, remains of a 1936 international pick up, an early 1960's bus site, a railroad marker, the start of a turpentine railroad bed, a turpentine railroad marker, a dairy complex. These finds reinforce previous knowledge that Wekiwa was a thriving tourist destination and turpentine and farming center in the early to the mid-20th century.



Remnants of an old crushed mailbox (Source. WSSP)

Wekiva River Basin State Parks

Over the years the basin parks have been expanded with the acquisition of more land. The Wekiva River is now a federally protected “wild and scenic river”, one of only two in Florida with that designation.

Today the parks are almost 42,000 acres of natural vegetation, habitat, and wildlife - little changed from when the first Indians arrived thousands of years ago.

On July 1, 2020, Wekiva Springs State Park celebrated its 50th anniversary.

Research resources and Acknowledgements

Altamonte Springs City Library (ASCL), special thanks to Library Director Diana Long

Apopka Historical Society (AHS)

Department of College Archives and Special Collections Olin Library, Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida (RC).

Special thanks to Prof. Wenxian Zhang.

Friends of the Wekiva River (FWR)

Orange County Regional History Center, with very special thanks to Melissa Procko, Research Librarian.

State of Florida Library, Florida Memory (OCRHC)

Wekiwa Springs State Park (WSSP)

Wekiva State Aquatic Preserve (WSAP)

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