

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUWANNEE COUNTY

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INTRODUCTION

Suwannee County, the thirty-seventh county created in the State of Florida, was formed on December 21, 1858 out of the western portion of Columbia County. Named for the river immortalized by Stephen Foster (who never visited it, but used the name because it sounded better than other river names), the word "Suwannee" is sometimes thought to originate from the Indian word for "Echo River," "Muddy Waters," or something similar. Another possible origin, and the one this author finds to be the most likely based upon old maps, is a corruption of the Spanish name for the river and Spanish mission near its banks, "Rio San Juan de Guacara," which translates into the "River of Saint John of Antiquity," referring to John the Apostle. It is possible, of course, that the Spanish purposely named the river and mission "San Juan de Guacara" based upon their hearing of the pronunciation of the Indian word for the river. If it is indeed true that "Suwannee" is a corruption of "San Juan de Guacara," it would mean that two of North Florida's principal rivers are named after the same apostle. Either way, by the late 1700s, most maps showed the river's name as simply "San Juan." Apparently, Creek Indians moving from Alabama in the late 1700s as white settlers forced them off their ancestral property intermarried with runaway slaves and the few Timucua Indians that may have remained. Their descendants became the Seminole people and began calling the river San Juanee after a corruption of the nearby Spanish mission. From then on, there were a number of variations in the old maps, including "Seguano River" and "Suquana River." After the English moved into the area in the early 1800s, the river went through several spelling variations, including "Sawaney River," "Suwaney River," "Suwanney River," and "Suwanee River," before the maps standardized on "Suwannee." In fact, the part of the Suwannee River upstream of the Withlacoochee River was named such differing variations as "Little St. John's River," "New River," "Little Suwanee River," "Little Suwannee River," "Suanee River," and "Sawanee River" before becoming part of the Suwannee River. Additionally, several maps in the 1820s and 1830s show the Withlacoochee River as part of the Suwannee River.

Suwannee County is full of natural wonders. The Suwannee River is one of eight magnificent waterways in North Central Florida. It proudly boasts to be the "diving capital of the world;" over 70 clear, fresh springs stand in stark contrast to the tannin-colored river water. There are many types of fish that thrive in its waters, including sturgeon, and the river provides a habitat for many species of wildlife. The river originates in the Okefenokee Swamp in southern Georgia, meanders some 240 miles through North Central Florida, and empties into the Gulf of Mexico on Florida's western shore.

EARLY HISTORY

The first settlers in the region that would become Suwannee County were Native American Indians, including the McKeithen Weeden Island culture, which flourished between 200 and 750 A.D., and the Suwannee Valley culture, which developed from the McKeithen Weeden Island culture and thrived between 750 A.D. and 1539. Unfortunately, very little evidence of these cultures has been discovered other than some burial mounds, shards of pottery, and remains of the plants and animals that they ate.

By the time of European colonization of the New World five hundred years ago, villages and trails of what came to be called the Timucua (pronounced "Tee-MOO-qua") Indians dotted southeastern Georgia and northern Florida, including what would become Suwannee County. The Timucua were a fierce and proud group of people that probably earned their name from the Timucua word "thimogona," which means "my enemy." They shared a language unique in North America; it was not Muskogean in origin, as was most every other language group in the Southeast, and there were at least 9 regional dialects of the language known to have existed according to the writings of Spanish missionary Francisco Pareja, who served the Timucua between 1595 and 1625. The Timucua were never organized into a single political unit, but instead were based upon some 25 to 30 small chiefdoms, each consisting of 5 to 10 villages each. From time to time, these chiefdoms would form temporary alliances with one another for military or other purposes. The introduction and threat of the Europeans into the New World led to further Timucua alliances. Modern scholars have labeled the chiefdoms of Columbia, Suwannee, and Hamilton Counties as the region of the northern Utina.

At the beginning of the 16th Century, approximately 150,000 Timucua were living in small villages throughout northern Florida and southern Georgia, part of a larger population of Native Americans living within the Southeast. After the introduction of Europeans, however, approximately 80% of Native American tribes succumbed to diseases to which they were not immune. The Timucua were no different than other Native Americans; by the end of the 17th Century, only 1,000 Timucua remained. The last recorded survivor of the Timucua speakers was Juan Alonso Cabale. He was born in 1709 at the Mission Senora de la Leche, St. Augustine, which served some of the last remaining Timucua in Florida. He was one of a handful of Native Americans, and the only surviving Timucua, who left with the Spanish upon the transfer of Florida to British hands in 1763 and then moved to Cuba. He died in Guanabacoa, Cuba, on November 14, 1767. It is also possible that some Timucua joined the Seminole Indians and survived at least until the transfer of Florida to the United States in 1821. At any rate, with the death of Cabale, the Timucua culture was gone, leaving many archaeological items and a history to be rediscovered by explorers and historians. Even today hundreds of arrowheads can be found along the Suwannee River, and occasionally canoes and other implements of life are excavated in the area.

ARRIVAL OF THE SPANISH

Early European history of what would be called Suwannee County began in 1517, when a member of Panfilo de Narvaez's expedition became the first recorded casualty of drowning in the Suwannee River while the expedition skirted the Gulf of Mexico in search of treasure. In 1539, Hernando De Soto led a party of Spaniards through what would become Suwannee County, following an Indian trail along Ichetucknee Springs. A book written after the adventure by Rodrigo Ranjel, De Soto's secretary, gives us a wealth of knowledge on local Indian culture, but unfortunately recognizable landmarks are few and far between. We do, however, read in the accounts of a large river "with banks 28 feet high" about 210 miles north of Tampa that the expedition crossed before heading westward to winter quarters near what would become Tallahassee. Plotting this "river with banks 28 feet high" on a map, only the Suwannee River meets this description. Evidence supports the theory that De Soto's famous and bloody "Battle of the Lakes" or "Battle of the Ponds" was fought between Live Oak and Houston, near the Timucua village of Napituca (also spelled Napetaca). On September 16, 1539, several Timucua chiefdoms banded together to ambush the Spanish as they passed through a swampy area, but were instead surprised by the Spanish and routed, many drowning in the ponds and nearby swamp as they fled the superior Spanish weaponry. De Soto's secretary recorded that nine village chiefs and several hundred warriors were killed in the battle and its aftermath. After traversing much of the interior of the County, De Soto's party crossed the Suwannee River (what he called the River of the Deer), probably near what is now Charles Springs. Local legends state that De Soto was forced to dump some of his gold on the Suwannee County side of the river because it had reached flood stage, although the supposed treasure has never been found.

After de Soto's trip through Florida, little European contact was made within the interior of the territory for the next fifty years. The establishment of the short-lived French colony of Fort Caroline near Jacksonville in 1564 and permanent establishment of the Spanish town of St. Augustine in 1565 increased European contact with the native peoples of Florida. After the destruction of the French colony in 1565, the Spanish began a period of establishing missions within the coastal regions of Florida. An attempt by Jesuit missionaries to settle within the interior of Florida met with little success, but by the end of the century, Franciscan missionaries were expanding westward beyond the coastal regions.

THE SPANISH MISSION PERIOD

Between 1605 and 1612 (many historians think 1609), the Spanish Indian Mission of San Juan de Guacara was established at Baptizing Springs. It lay near the Camino Real, the Spanish trail that was means of communication from the Presidio of Saint Augustine and the Spanish missions and forts to the west in Pensacola. At times, the Spanish Army garrisoned the mission because of its strategic importance. After a Timucuan uprising in 1656, the mission was shifted about seven miles westward to a location on the Suwannee River at Charles Springs, where its occupants ferried travelers across the river. In 1691 the Apalachicola Indians destroyed the mission, and it is unsure if and when the mission was rebuilt, although there is a reference to it being rebuilt in 1727. Another early mission settlement in Suwannee County was the Franciscan Mission called Santa Catalina de Afucia (also spelled Afuyca, Ahoica, or Afuerica). Like many Spanish missions, the name came from the Catholic saint's day on which the mission was founded (apparently Saint Catherine's Day on November 25) along with the name of the nearest Indian village (Afucia). Possibly built near Ichetucknee Springs in 1608, it also served as a stop on the Camino Real and as a school for education and religion. Other records indicate that the mission was not built until around 1675. In 1685, Englishman Lord Cardross at Port Royal incited the Yamasee (also spelled Yamassee) Indians to raid and destroy the mission. Records show that the mission chapel and Franciscan houses were burned, fifty Timucua slain, and another 220 taken as slaves during the raid. A third mission, Santa Cruz de Tarihica, originally established in 1611 or 1612 near the Indian Pond site in Columbia County, was probably moved southwest to a location near Little River Springs or Branford Springs after the Timucuan uprising of 1656. The ultimate fate of this mission, however, is not known. Yet another mission was the Utina mission of San Agustin de Urihica (sometimes spelled Utoca or Niahica), possibly established after 1616 near Live Oak or Suwannee Springs. Although its actual founding date and location is unknown, the mission's greatest period of activity appears to be in the 1620s based upon surviving documents of the period. San Agustin de Urihica was probably abandoned as a result of the Timucuan uprising of 1656, as it is not mentioned after that date in Spanish records by that name. However, there is mention of a convent by the name of San Agustin de Ajohica in the area after the Timucuan uprising, so it is possible that the settlement continued in use under this new name, or was moved to a location closer to the Camino Real and renamed at the same time. More recent archaeological research suggests that perhaps San Agustin de Urihica was actually located in Columbia County. As with other facets of early American history, our understanding of Spanish missions continues to evolve as further archaeological and historical research gives us more insight into when and where many of these missions and settlements existed.

DOWNFALL OF THE SPANISH

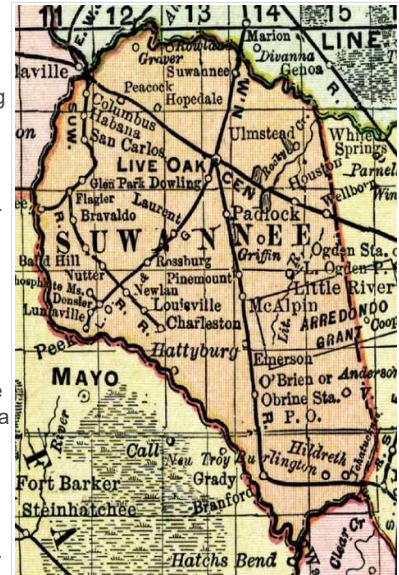
Following the establishment of the Spanish missions, the next two hundred years saw sporadic battles between the Spanish settlers, the indigenous Timucua, and other tribes and nations, with the Europeans gaining the upper hand as warfare and disease wiped out the Native Americans. The history of Spanish missions in North Florida records the gradual decline of Native Americans in the area, with missions consolidated in order to retain a sufficient number of Native American laborers and converts due to warfare and disease. In 1656, after the Timucuan uprising, the Spanish governor of Florida ordered several missions to be abandoned or relocated along the Camino Real. At the same time, Native American populations were redistributed to assist these missions. In order to assist the rapidly declining populations of the Timucua, the Spanish introduced several other native tribes, including the Yamasee, into the areas once inhabited by the Timucua. The end of the Spanish mission system came about after a series of British raids originating from the Carolinas that occurred between 1702 and 1705 and destroyed many missions within interior Florida. Most survivors relocated closer to St. Augustine and the interior of Florida was for the most part abandoned.

There were, however, apparently some non-mission settlements in what would become Suwannee County. The Spanish town of Alachus (also spelled Alachua in the earliest 18th century maps or Allachos in maps from the 1830s and 1840s) is listed on the 1733 Jeffreys map and others as having been located in the northern portion of Suwannee County. Early maps show that it was on a road that was one of the

two major east-west routes across northern Florida, the other road later known as the Bellamy Road, or the “low road.” Based on this evidence, the road upon which Alachus straddled must have been the equally important “high road.” Both were part of the Camino Real that allowed Spanish explorers, travelers, and missionaries to traverse Florida. Like much of Suwannee County’s early history, the ultimate fate of Alachus is not known, as the town has not yet been located by archaeologists. Perhaps the town’s major importance is to show that northern Florida was not entirely depopulated after the breakdown of the mission system in the late 1600s and early 1700s. Alachus was not the only town mentioned, as there were other Spanish towns shown on some of these old maps from the 18th and early 19th centuries. One in southwestern Suwannee County and found on several of the maps was named San Francisco (also known as St. Francesco or St. Francis in maps from the 1830s and 1840s), as well as three settlements in Madison County. However, despite these sporadic efforts of colonization, practically all of Suwannee County continued to be a frontier. Eventually, these settlements, like the missions that preceded them, were abandoned.

ENTER THE AMERICANS

During these years, Spaniards, French, English, and American explorers crossed and re-crossed the land. With the War of 1812 concluded, many American colonists began to drift southward into Spanish Florida. One of the earliest American settlers was a Colonel John Talcon Lowe, who secured a Spanish Land Grant of 27,000 acres along the Suwannee River in what is now Columbia and Suwannee Counties. He is reputed to have built the first water mill in Florida on this land. Among the early American settlers were Ruben (also spelled Reuben) and Rebecca Charles, who chose to live under Florida’s last Spanish occupation. Ruben Charles set up a trading post west of St. Augustine and became friendly with the Indians living further inland. He followed their trails and the Spanish trail westward from the St. Johns River and even as far as the “Savanny River.” The United States purchased Florida from Spain in 1821, and General Andrew Jackson was appointed military governor. Two counties were formed, Escambia in the west and St. Johns in the east, with the Suwannee River the dividing line.



Increasing troubles with the Indians soon led to the building of a military road connecting the three cities on the route of the Old Spanish Trail and later known as the Bellamy Road after one of its primary builders. Ruben Charles knew the proposed location of the road and in 1824 decided to build a trading post and ferry at what is now known as Charles Springs, an area with which he had been familiar since at least 1817, to serve on the incomplete road. Soon thereafter, trouble with the Indians in the region increased, including those residing near Charles Springs. Ruben and Rebecca Charles, still friends of the Indians, were allowed to live in peace under the legendary stipulation that they wear a red scarf to signify who they were; otherwise, the Indians would attack them. Although many communities in the area were attacked and burned by Indians in those early years, not once was the Charles’ little community attacked. Ruben Charles died around 1840, apparently from an Indian attack while walking along the banks of the Suwannee, but the Indians allowed Mrs. Charles and her children to continue using the springs for water as long as they wore their scarves.

On January 25, 1852, at the age of fifty-seven, Rebecca Charles was shot while standing on her front porch. It is possible that hostility with the local white settlers over her friendliness with the local Indians was the actual cause of Rebecca Charles’ death. Tragedy continued to strike the Charles’ Family. According to legend, one day Ruben and Rebecca Charles’ daughter Mary rushed out to meet the stagecoach. In her hurry, she forgot to wear her scarf, and an Indian mistakenly killed her. The descendants of the Charles operated the ferry until about 1875, when it was abandoned. Mrs. Charles’ grave, along with that of her husband and some of their children (perhaps including Mary), one of the oldest American cemeteries known in Florida, still stands near the springs that bear their name. Adjacent to the cemetery is an Indian burial ground from the time of the Spanish mission San Juan de Guacara and earlier as well as a portion of the Bellamy Road that has recently been marked for visitors.

POPULATION INCREASE AND INDIAN WARS

With Florida now a territory, dozens of U.S. Army officers were commissioned to construct military roads in order to fight the Indians and survey the land. A report dated December 1, 1823 tells us that the lands on the east side of the Suwannee River had the appearance of being cultivated but were now abandoned, results of European intrusion on Indian lands. Another report, dated February 12, 1825, says that the Suwannee River had overflowed two to three miles and inundated area farms. During these numerous surveys, St. Johns County was divided in 1822 to form Duval County, embracing all lands between the Suwannee and St. Johns Rivers, with the County seat at Cowford (now Jacksonville).

Two other early settlers, Joseph A. Dyal and Thomas Hawkins, arrived in Suwannee County from Ware County, Georgia in 1821. They, with their families, established the first settlement in Suwannee County east of Lowe’s land and named it Pine Grove. In 1822, they built a log church and named it the Pine Grove Methodist Church, which records state is probably the oldest Methodist Church in the State of Florida. The 1830 census listed some ten males as heads of families who lived in what would become Suwannee County: Alexander Stapleton, Aaron Vickers, Joshua Sharp, Thomas Hawkins, John Bonnell, Burie Brewer, Joseph Dyal, Maxey F. Whitton, Ruben Charles, and Thomas Herrington. For a short time, the land that would become Suwannee County was a part of Alachua County, which had been formed on December 29, 1824 with the county seat at Newnansville (now Gainesville). In 1832, the entire northwestern portion of what had been Duval County was formed into a new county, Columbia, with the county seat at Alligator (now Lake City). On February 11, 1835, Joseph Dyal was appointed county judge; at that time, the area that would become Suwannee County was still a part of Columbia County. By 1840, the present area of Suwannee County showed 23 families despite the Seminole Wars, which had been raging since 1835. As a matter of note, Florida’s population was rapidly expanding. In 1830, the census showed that there were a total of only 1,970 people, including slaves, in all of Duval County (which at the time spanned from the St. Johns River to the Suwannee River). The 1840 census showed 2,202 people,

including slaves, in just Columbia County (which at the time still contained the land that would become Suwannee County). Due to the concern of the growing number of settlers, the United States Army established several forts in Suwannee County. One of these was at Suwannee Springs (at the time known as Mineral Springs, Lower Sulphur Springs, Lower Mineral Springs, or Suwannee Sulphur Springs), and we have accounts of Indian massacres that occurred during this time. A family by the name of Clemons left the fort to attempt to settle about five miles southeast of what is now Live Oak, but was slaughtered when Mr. Clemons returned to the fort to get the rest of their belongings. It was also during this time that steamships provided supplies to the fort at Suwannee Springs from 1836-1837, after heavy flooding had isolated the garrison. The last recorded Indian raid in the County was in 1841, when the wife and four children of Dick Tillis were massacred while he was helping a neighbor roll logs near what would become Wellborn. Rescuers, including future Suwannee County politicians Captain George E. McClellan and Captain Angus McAulay, found his only other child, Jimmy, still alive although badly wounded. The lad recovered and later served with distinction in the Civil War.

STATEHOOD

In 1838, a constitutional convention was called in the territory of Florida for the purpose of drawing up a constitution in preparation for Florida's admission into the Union as a state. Among the fifty-six men that attended the convention in Port St. Joe was George E. McClellan, who delivered the keynote address to the Constitutional Convention. McClellan was an early settler who had a large plantation and home near what is now Wellborn and who had also organized the first militia in the area to fight in the Seminole Indian Wars. Later, he was probate judge from 1841-1845 (while Suwannee County was a part of Columbia County) and afterwards served as representative in the Florida Legislature. In the Civil War, he was a captain in the Confederate Army.

The first chartered (American) community was Columbus, which was founded sometime in or before 1842, as its post office was established on February 17, 1842. A stagecoach road eventually joined Columbus on the western boundary with Suwannee (Mineral) Springs and Houston near the eastern boundary; County Road 132 roughly follows part of this old road, and it is still more commonly known as the Stagecoach Road. A visitor to Columbus in late 1843 described the town as having two large stores and other mercantile establishments that bought cotton from surrounding counties. He stated that over 3,000 bales of cotton were shipped in the fall of 1843 from Columbus, with towering piles of cotton still awaiting shipment on the river banks. Columbus' population was already some 500 at that time. By 1873, however, Columbus had dried up as markets shifted and financial depression hit the United States until only one store remained in the town. The final demise of Columbus became inevitable when George F. Drew, first post-Reconstruction governor of Florida, built a sawmill at his newly established town of Ellaville close to his home across the river in Madison County. This community is now too a ghost town. All that remains of Columbus today are a cemetery (one of the oldest known in Florida), Confederate earthworks from the Civil War, the remains of the ferry landing, and a few ghostly relics. These are all found within the Suwannee River State Park, one of Florida's first state parks.

In 1851, a young musician was searching for a Southern river that would fit into a song he was composing. Searching an atlas with his brother, Morrison, he located a meandering river in North Florida that would fit his intentions. Taking out the "u" and an "n," Stephen Foster created one of the most well known melodies in the world. Originally published on October 1, 1851, as "Old Folks at Home," the song is more familiar as "Way Down Upon the Swanee River." It was played at the composer's funeral; it was played on the USS Missouri when Japan surrendered to the Allies in September of 1945, thus ending World War II; it was played when President Roosevelt and Premier Joseph Stalin met at sea during the Second World War; it was played to welcome General Stillwell and his troops to India during the same war; it was heard during the Grace Kelley-Prince Ranier of Monaco wedding celebration; and it has continued to be heard in hundreds of other places throughout the world. It has been stated that "Way Down Upon the Swanee River" was the world's first international folk song, and is the world's most familiar melody. All of this from a composer who history records as never having visited the river he made so famous.

BIRTH OF SUWANNEE COUNTY

At the time of its formation on December, 21 1858, Suwannee County contained a mere two hundred families. Elections were held in April of 1859 to elect a Judge of Probate (who also held the office of County Judge), Clerk of the Circuit Court, Sheriff, Coroner, County Surveyor, an Assessor and Collector of taxes, and four County Commissioners. The temporary County seat was designated by Florida Legislature as "the house of William Hines," the County's first judge and owner of 24 slaves whose land was northwest of Live Oak, until permanent facilities could be determined and constructed. The town of Houston became the first permanent seat, with County records in the fall of 1859 dated there, perhaps written on a portion of the eighty acres of land purchased by the County Commissioners near what would become the Pensacola and Georgia Railroad Line. The first "Suwannee County" post office was established in Houston on December 22, 1859 and run by Craven Lassiter, although there were other post offices in the area prior to the land becoming Suwannee County. In 1860, the first census taken in the County showed a population of 2,303 citizens, of whom 1,467 were white and 836 black. Only one of the blacks listed in the census was free. The principle owner of slaves was T. D. Dexter, with 53. Twenty-six men, with none having less than 10 slaves, owned 487 of those 782 remaining. Another fifty-seven men owned less than 10 slaves each.



Other communities sprang up in the first decade of Suwannee County's history. In 1857 construction began on an east-west railroad, known as the Pensacola and Georgia Railroad Line, across North Florida, and it was completed in 1861. Near the center of Suwannee County, this railroad passed a particularly massive Live Oak tree (*Quercus virginiana*) and nearby pond that was a favorite stopping point on the military road that from varying accounts began in Suwannee Springs, White Springs, or Georgia, and led to the Gulf of Mexico. This military road was more commonly known as the Old Salt Road, because it led to Deadman's Bay on the Gulf, a popular area for retrieving salt to be used

for the preservation of foods. Settlers and railroad workers would stop at the Live Oak tree to rest in the shade, eat their lunches, and water their horses. When the railroad selected the area as the junction point for a northward line that led to Dupont, Georgia, the area's real fortune began. These railroads were the only access any rail passenger or shipper had to other states in the South and in middle and east Florida, and as a result all travelers had to pass through "the Live Oaks" on their way north, east, or west. The town that grew up around the Live Oak tree at this railroad junction finally received its name in 1863 when a railroad station was erected there. William H. Rousseau, one of the early Pine Grove settlers and the County's first state senator, was made the first station agent. The north-south railroad to DuPont, Georgia was completed in 1866. In 1882, it was extended southward to Rowland's Bluff (now Branford) and later to Tampa, increasing the flow of passengers through Suwannee County and in particular, Live Oak.

THE BEGINNING AND EARLY YEARS OF THE CIVIL WAR

On January 11, 1861, Suwannee County resident James A. Newman was among those who signed the Act of Secession, declaring Florida to be a part of the Confederate States of America. Among Newman's other achievements was serving as a County Commissioner from 1859-1865, when the end of the Civil War stripped all Confederate office holders from their positions. Several points of Suwannee County history occurred during this horrible war that pitted one brother against another. The steamship Madison, operated by Captain James Tucker, had been a fixture on the Suwannee for several years as a floating country store that ran all the way up to its captain's hometown of Columbus. For a time, the State declared that the Suwannee River was navigable only up to Columbus, but Captain Tucker said that the river could be navigated all the way up to White Springs. Despite warnings from those around him, Captain Tucker set out to prove the State wrong. While on his journey, the Suwannee flooded over its banks, and he was able to get to White Springs and back, albeit minus his pilothouse and funnels. By the time Captain Tucker had repaired Madison, the Suwannee River had been declared navigable all the way to White Springs. During the first months of the Civil War, Captain Tucker and Madison operated as a supplier of necessities for the settlers; later, he organized a group of soldiers and the steamship served as a warship, capturing a Federal gunboat at the mouth of the Suwannee on a daring night mission. In 1863, Captain Tucker and his troops were ordered to Virginia to serve in the infantry there. Without a crew, he ordered the ship scuttled at Troy Springs when the ship could no longer be used; it is thought that he wished to recover the steamer after the war and return her to service. With Tucker and his men off to Virginia, the Madison was used in a final run to deliver food to starving families down the river. With this mission accomplished, the steamboat was scuttled in Troy Springs according to her owner's wishes, but during the war her funnels, cabins, and boilers were used for a variety of purposes, and by the end of the Civil War, little remained except for her wooden hull. Not considered worth salvaging, her remains can still be seen in the clear waters. At low tide, it is easy for a swimmer to touch the remains of the vessel.

The Madison saga was not the only event that affected Suwannee County during the Civil War. At the northwestern boundary of Suwannee County in Columbus stood a railroad bridge that served as the primary supply line for Confederate forces outside of Florida. This railroad became all the more important after 1863, when the fall of Vicksburg cut off Confederate supplies from Arkansas and Texas. In 1864, Union troops under General Truman Seymour were ordered to march from Jacksonville and take the bridge, which would then cut off the supply of thousands of heads of badly needed cattle to the rest of the Confederacy. At the start of the campaign, Confederate forces in Florida were badly outnumbered, but eventually numbers increased as troops from other states were moved into the area via the railroad. The Union forces of about 5,000 men were turned back at the Battle of Olustee, east of Lake City, on February 20, 1864 by a similarly-sized Confederate force under Brigadier General Joseph Finegan. With casualties of nearly 50% on both sides, the losses were the highest percentage of any Civil War battle. The bridge over the Suwannee River thus remained in Confederate hands, supplying Confederate forces until the end of the Civil War. Some of the bridge supports and Confederate earthworks built near the bridge as a final defensive position remain visible and are part of the Suwannee River State Park.

COUNTY TIES TO LINCOLN'S ASSASSINATION

Perhaps Suwannee County's most infamous part in the Civil War came about because of a young lad, Lewis Thornton Powell. His father, a Baptist minister, moved the family from Georgia in 1859 to a homestead outside the hamlet of what would become "the Live Oaks." In 1861, at the age of 17, he joined the Hamilton Blues (also known as the Jasper Blues and later known as the 2nd Florida Infantry, Company I) of the Confederate Army. After fighting throughout the Peninsular Campaign, he was captured at Gettysburg, but managed to escape not long thereafter with the help of a young Union nurse. Unable to find his own infantry company, he joined the 43rd Battalion, Company B, better known as Mosby's Rangers. Powell was found to be an "eager youngster, always keyed up for battle, chivalrous, generous," and a "gallant gentleman" according to those that served with him. He left the 43rd Battalion in January of 1865 after apparently joining the Confederate Secret Service in the fall of 1864. Coming to Baltimore, he was arrested after a fracas with a black maid, but released when a witness failed to appear. Required to sign an Oath of Allegiance, he signed it as, "Lewis Paine;" he had boarded with a Payne family while part of Mosby's Rangers, and apparently spelled the name phonetically. While in Baltimore, the lad was introduced to John Wilkes Booth, who planned to kidnap President Lincoln and hold him in exchange for Confederate prisoners. The plan evolved into an assassination attempt on not only Lincoln, but also on Vice President Johnson, General Grant, and Secretary of State William Seward. Powell was given the responsibility of assassinating Seward, who had recently been involved in a carriage accident and was recuperating nearby. On April 14, 1865, as Booth performed *Our American Cousin* at Ford's Theater, Powell went to the house in which Seward was recuperating and gained entrance as a doctor's delivery boy. Within minutes, he had wounded several men, included Seward, and then fled the scene. Two nights later, he was captured when he appeared at the doorstep of one of the other co-conspirators, Mary Surratt, and was promptly charged as a co-conspirator in Lincoln's death. During the ensuing trial, Powell was found to be stoic, dignified, and chivalrous, and the press published more on him than any of the others save Mary Surratt. Found guilty, Powell went to the gallows on July 7, 1865, along with fellow co-conspirators Mary Surratt, David Herold, and George Atzerodt. Buried near the gallows, Powell's remains were exhumed by his father and surviving older brother George in 1871 and buried at his mother's side as per her dying request. Oddly enough, his skull was lost for nearly 130 years until a search in the Anthropology Department of the Smithsonian Institution found a young white male's skull mixed with numerous Native American ones. The #2244 on the skull referred to the "Cranium of Lewis Payne, Hung at Washington City for Complicity in the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln." In 1994, the skull was returned to the family and interred with the rest of the youth's remains.

END OF THE CIVIL WAR

After General Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse in April of 1865, Confederate President Jefferson Davis, General John C. Breckinridge (former 1860 Southern Democratic presidential candidate and last Confederate Secretary of War), and Secretary of State Judah P. Benjamin were among those who set out for Florida to escape to the Bahamas, Cuba, or Mexico. Their goal was to meet up near Tallahassee or Madison; unfortunately, President Davis and his entourage were captured near Irwinville, Georgia on May 10, 1865. On May 14, using a map that Robert E. Lee had composed while a surveying lieutenant years before in the Army showing Suwannee River crossings and springs, Secretary of State Benjamin stayed at the home of Lewis M. Moseley on the Lafayette County side of the Suwannee River. He then crossed by ferry over to Suwannee County near Charles Springs and continued to travel on the St. Augustine (Bellamy) Road through the southern portion of Suwannee County on his way further south, from whence he eventually reached Great Britain. Two days later, after stopping to see friends in Madison (including General Joseph Finegan, hero of the Battle of Olustee and lately in command of the vast majority of Florida Confederate military units), General Breckinridge followed this same route on his way south and in due time reached Cuba. On May 19, 1865, just north of O'Brien, the Confederate baggage and treasure train, including the last records of the Confederacy, stopped on its way southward. On the night of May 22, 1865, the baggage and treasure train procession learned that President Davis had been captured and further flight was futile; they therefore disbanded the Guard in Archer, Florida.

These were just a few of the events that related to Suwannee County during the four-year war. According to the known records, it is probable that Suwannee County gave at least 250 men, or 15% of the white male population (a large percentage compared to most regions), to Confederate service during the Civil War. Except for the loss of slaves, whose value was estimated at half a million dollars, the County suffered little direct loss.

POST-CIVIL WAR

With the Civil War over, Suwannee County's growth continued at a steady pace. Little was kept for the first ten years in the way of records except for some court and clerk records, as county commissioners did not have the duties they have now. In 1865, a new Constitutional Convention was called, with Suwannee County's representative being Silas Overstreet. In 1868, another Convention was called, with Thomas Urguhart and Andrew Shuler the County's representatives. Immediately after this 1868 Convention, the Florida Legislature dramatically changed the responsibilities of commissioners and ordered them to keep suitable records of their transactions. It was during this time that a mansion opposite Columbus was built by two brothers of George F. Drew. He founded the town of Ellaville, naming it after one of his servants. Drew also built the Florida Railroad from Live Oak to Mayo, which operated until 1920 when it was abandoned, and the State's first steel bridge near Telford Springs. After being abandoned, the bridge was swung out over the River, where it stood for many years. The magnificent old Drew mansion was finally burned in approximately 1970 after having been discussed as a possible candidate for historical restoration.

Several businessmen moved to Suwannee County in its first decade, most notably John Parshley, who arrived in Live Oak with his wife and six children to regain his fortune about 1867 and soon built himself a two-story house opposite the present Courthouse. Mr. Parshley laid out many of Live Oak's streets that are even today used; at his arrival, the only street had been a short section of Conner Street, with a few roads through the woods created by frequent travel. Furthermore, he built a large sawmill and planing mill in what is now downtown Live Oak, increasing commerce in the area. Howard and Wilbur Streets were named for his sons, Ohio for his home state. Within a year of Mr. Parshley's arrival, the community of Live Oak boasted fifty people, with the first post office in town having been established in 1866 to serve them under the direction of Moses L. Stebbins. Parshley also erected the first schoolhouse in Suwannee County, which was privately run as part of the Baptist Church, and provided large tracts of land to his daughters. Unfortunately, this public-spirited man died of a fever on August 8, 1868, and was buried behind what would become the Suwannee Hotel. In later years his body, and those of his wife and a daughter, were removed to the City Cemetery founded by the Helvenston family.

A NEW COUNTY SEAT

The Parshleys remained in local politics after the death of Mr. Parshley, and in 1868 his widow, Nancy M. Parshley, proposed the location for the Suwannee County Courthouse, although it would be several years before a purpose-built courthouse was actually constructed there. The proposal did, however, cause the county seat to be moved from Houston to Live Oak, which officially occurred on August 1, 1868 after a spirited competition between a former business partner of Parshley, Mr. Nathaniel H. Walker. County officers apparently made the move very quickly, as the last records dated from Houston were the end of July 1868, with Live Oak being dated by the first week of August. In 1869, the Florida Legislature changed its laws to allow the citizens of the County to choose their county seat, and a first election was held on March 27, 1869. There were six polling places: Houston, Wellborn, Live Oak, Columbus, Plowdens, and Boston. The final results were inconclusive; Houston received 215, the Parshley site in Live Oak 168, and 91 for the Walker site in Live Oak. Since no site gained a majority of the votes and there were several conspicuous irregularities (such as votes by several of the already deceased), a new vote was demanded. This second vote on May 15 resulted as follows: 288 for the Parshley site and 164 for Houston, with ballots from Boston not counted due to their delayed canvassing; it would not have made a difference anyway because of the large margin of victory. County Commissioners' (at the time called Commissioners' Court) minutes indicate that each meeting cost \$1.00 in rent at the Baptist Church in Live Oak built by John Parshley, with \$2.00 a day for Circuit Court hearings. In August of 1869, the County bought the Baptist Church for \$300, the same year in which the first official Suwannee County School Board meeting took place. The Baptist Church was used for only a short time as the County Courthouse before it was destroyed shortly before the Commissioners' meeting of May 13, 1870. The reason stated in the minutes of the next Commissioners' meeting for the loss of the Courthouse is because Clerk of the Circuit Court Nelson Conner, "having failed to put said House in its proper place, and being left in an insecure condition, has been blown down." Court was then held upstairs above the Parshley Store, free of charge for the first year. Eventually, a large two-story, 5,400 square foot wooden structure was purpose-

built as a Courthouse in 1873 at a price of \$8,000 on the land donated by Mrs. Parshley, and it was used until 1904 as the County's Courthouse. Mrs. Parshley's influence in local politics continued, and in 1887 she donated land for the first public schoolhouse. Wilbur Parshley completed his college education in New England and married the college president's daughter. He returned to Live Oak and preached at the First Baptist Church, the congregation for which his father had generously built their first building before his death, and was there when the church reached its fiftieth anniversary. Wilbur also established the first Baptist Missionary Society in this part of Florida at this time. After preaching in Live Oak, he and his wife served as missionaries to Japan and taught English at one of the colleges there for five years before finally returning to Live Oak.

GROWTH OF THE COUNTY AND INCORPORATION OF LIVE OAK

By 1870, Suwannee County's population had increased by some 50% to 3,556, and a two-story jail had been built on the courthouse grounds in late 1869 to accommodate inmates. About that same time, a business partner of John Parshley, Mr. N. H. Walker, secured land on the west side of Howard Street and attempted to start a new town. He built a large structure and offered it to the County as a courthouse, but his offer was declined. His business failed in 1870 and he left town in the middle of the night, never to return. The building he left behind was used as a school in Live Oak until the black community bought it. It became Florida Memorial College, one of the first colleges in Florida dedicated to serving minorities. After serving as such for some twenty years, it was sold at public auction and torn down to make way for the Suwannee County Hospital. By this time Live Oak had its first newspaper, the Live Oak Advertiser, which was bought out in 1875 by Daniel M. McAlpin and renamed the Florida Bulletin. It was the forerunner of the present Suwannee Democrat. During this period, C. K. Dutton, formerly of New York City, and Major H. A. Wyse operated what was probably the largest naval store business in Florida. The demand for these stores was so large that in 1877, shortly after George Drew became governor, he leased all the State convicts to work in Suwannee County for the manufacturing and processing of naval stores. The growth in industry led to a 100% increase in population between 1870 and 1880 to 7,161.

The community of Live Oak was not incorporated as a town until April 24, 1878, when a group of 39 citizens met to create a seal and government for a town that at the time comprised an area of 960 acres. The seal that was created showed a large live oak tree with the words "Live Oak, Florida" appearing at its base. Next, a government was created. The first mayor was Major A. L. Woodward, assisted by a town council consisting of H. A. Blackburn, H. M. Wood, C. K. Dutton, Major H. A. Wyse, and Thomas Thompson. S. W. Hicks was appointed town sheriff and tax collector. Among the five ordinances passed at the meeting were ones fining the use of profanity; prohibiting shops and establishments from opening on Sundays; outlawing the parking of mules or horses on the paths and sidewalks; and punishing those who might "needlessly hammer pots at hours when slumber should have been the order of the day!" The meeting adjourned and the town of Live Oak was born.

PROSPERITY AND FAME

Live Oak grew slowly in the 1880s as it was no longer the only rail route north in the state. By 1881, the number of schools had increased to 49, nearly double the number of 28 in 1879. School property and salaries increased, with teachers making between \$15.00 and \$25.00 per year, a great improvement over prior years. In 1884, the first big public improvement came when an artesian well was put down on the southwest corner of Ohio and Howard Streets; beforehand, residents used cisterns that could easily dry up during periods of no rain. The completion of this well allowed a number of ponds within the city to be drained, easing the mosquito problem. In that same year, there were three newspapers published in Suwannee County: The Florida Baptist, The Florida Bulletin, and The Florida Intelligencer. A statewide outbreak of yellow fever occurred in 1888, and five cases were reported in Live Oak. A detention camp was established with Dr. H. F. Airth, County health officer, in charge. A statistical paper published in New York City at that time showed Suwannee County as having 18 post offices, with the major towns being Live Oak, Branford, and Wellborn.

In the 1890s and early 1900s, Suwannee County, and especially Live Oak, saw tremendous growth, with the number of public schools increasing to 82, 57 of which were for white students and 25 for black students. Thomas Dowling, another prominent businessman of the late 1800s and early 1900s, opened a lumber mill in Live Oak in 1890. An immense amount of lumber and turpentine, used for shipbuilding, was harvested and shipped via the Suwannee River, and brick manufacturing, whole selling, and farming thrived. Many large Victorian homes were built, hotels went up, and several additional commercial structures were constructed. It was at this time that Live Oak reached its golden era, and was the fifth largest city in Florida (after Jacksonville, Pensacola, Tampa, and Key West, in that order) and was the state's largest inland city. It is estimated that during this period of history, Suwannee County was producing some 300,000 barrels of turpentine, 1,000,000 barrels of rosin, and 2,000,000 feet of lumber. Many made their fortunes from timber products during this time, including the Parshleys, the Tedders, T. T. Scott (who owned one of the last large sawmills in Suwannee County), Captain W. J. Hillman, Thomas Dowling, and Richard W. Sears, co-founder of Sears, Roebuck, and Company. Hillman, a penniless boy when he arrived in Live Oak from Warren County, Georgia, began his work in Suwannee County by carrying grips from the railroad station to a nearby hotel. Soon thereafter, he began a short stint at the Banner, and then moved on to a career in a turpentine camp 11 miles south of Live Oak. It was not long before he was in charge of over 460 convicts, and earned the title that stuck with him for the rest of his life. As with many in his line of work, Hillman prospered during the heyday of the turpentine business, becoming Suwannee County's first millionaire. An advocate of better roads, he served as chairman of the State Road Department, was an original stockholder in the First National Bank of Live Oak, and organized and erected the Suwannee Hotel, a famous city landmark across from the Courthouse for many years. His home on Ohio Avenue and Maple Street was a community showplace. Captain Hillman died on August 29, 1931. Unfortunately, he, like others who prospered with timber products during Live Oak's golden years, was not a conservationist. Later, however, citizens such as P. C. Crapps, Jr., demonstrated the wisdom of reforestation and conservation. Suwannee County sites such as Suwannee Springs attracted thousands of visitors, who came to the popular resort, spacious hotel, and trolley line that ran down to the bathing area by the River from nearby Suwannee Station.

THOMAS DOWLING

In 1908, after building the Live Oak, Perry, and Gulf Railroad (popularly known as the "Loping Gopher") to serve his sawmill and later freight and passenger traffic, Mr. Thomas Dowling moved his lumber mill to the west side of the County. The community that eventually evolved from it became Dowling Park. Mr. Dowling's sawmill was one of the two largest sawmills in Florida (the other was also located within Suwannee County). By 1910, Dowling Park boasted of several stores, a hotel, a railroad depot, the lumber company's administrative building, 73 tenant houses for sawmill workers, and several large homes along the river for prominent members of the community. In 1913, Thomas Dowling's minister, Burr Bixler, persuaded him to donate a large tract of land on the river where he could establish an orphanage and a home for "old and worn out ministers and missionaries." Begun on December 17, 1913, the Advent Christian Village was Florida's first retirement center and one of the most progressive retirement villages in the state. Mr. Dowling also began Live Oak's first waterworks, cut purely from his own resources (and coincidentally built across the street from his mansion on Duval Street). The original 75,000-gallon tank constructed by Thomas Dowling in 1897



Suwannee River, Dowling Park, Fla.
This is the first view of the Park

is quite possibly the oldest water tank in the nation still in use. Three years after its construction, it is recorded that only eight residences had bathroom facilities, but slowly its use increased. Mr. Dowling was also probably the first person in Florida, and certainly in Live Oak, known to have owned an automobile. On the first day he drove his new Toledo Streamer through the streets of Live Oak, he caused such a stir that one Sam McGinniss, a janitor in the Suwannee Democrat building, thought that the devil had come to get him, fell to his knees in the street, and prayed! Mr. Dowling's mansion on Duval Street has recently been the focus of a renovation project by a local preservation group composed entirely of volunteers that has converted the once-beautiful but since neglected building into a community center and restaurant.

LIVE OAK BUILDINGS AND BUSINESSES AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

The newfound prosperity of the area drew many other people to Live Oak. Live Oak's oldest existing business, the B. W. Helvenston and Son Insurance Agency, was founded in 1892. Mr. Helvenston also ran one of the County's oldest newspapers, The Banner, and participated in the organization of the First National Bank. He established the City Cemetery in 1904 when a daughter died; before this time the closest cemetery was at Antioch some seven miles away, or an hour and a half trip at that time! By 1896 the first ice plant had arrived in town, and in 1901 the first electric plant was built, erected originally to serve Major Porter's planing mill next to Mr. Dowling's large sawmill on the east side of Live Oak. A brick County Courthouse was built in 1904, and it is one of the few courthouses from that era still serving in its original function. The old courthouse was moved across the street, on the corner of Pine Avenue and Wilbur Street, and operated as the "Brown House" and "White House" for many years, before finally being moved again on Pine Street by Fred J. Green and used as an apartment house before being torn down. By 1906 the city had purchased Mr. Dowling's waterworks. It was also in 1906 that a two-story building was constructed on the corner of Wilbur Street and Ohio Avenue as a combined Post Office (on the first floor) and local business and County offices (on the second floor). After a new Post Office was constructed in 1915 south of the 1906 one, much of the first floor of the "old" Post Office was torn out and converted into a drive-through for a gas station, with office spaces still above it. By the early 1970s, the second floor had burned down, but what was left of the first floor was still used as a gas station and other offices, and has since been used by a variety of businesses.

It is unknown where the first Live Oak town council meetings were held, but in 1894 a new Masonic Temple was constructed on the corner of Duval Street and Ohio Avenue and used for town meetings, Episcopal services, and an armory for the Suwannee Rifles, the local militia group. A dedicated Live Oak City Hall was completed in 1909 across the road from the Masonic Temple, and was a magnificent structure for a town that at the time of completion only contained 3,000 residents. Also remarkable was that a single local contractor built it solely with the aid of a local architect. Neither had previous experience in public buildings, nor, as far as is known, built any thereafter. Apparently, though, their design was sound, and the building until recently housed the Live Oak Police Department. Old City Hall is now the focus of grant requests to renovate the historic structure to serve further purposes. By 1913, the main streets were bricked and a sewage system had been introduced. In 1915, the present Post Office was completed, serving two city routes twice a day. At the time, Suwannee County had a population of over 20,000, and it was in this year that a new charter was issued and Live Oak became a city. In these early years of the 20th Century, Suwannee County produced approximately one tenth of all Sea Island cotton produced in the world until a devastating boll weevil attack in 1915 decimated the cotton yield. Attempting to find a crop that would replace cotton, A. D. Gaskins and W. H. Lyle were among the first to start growing bright leaf-flue tobacco. W. G. Burch, Sr., came to the area from North Carolina to demonstrate and instruct farmers in the growth and marketing of flue-cured tobacco, and bright leaf tobacco took over as the main crop within the County. Even today, nearly a century later, tobacco is still a strong industry within the County.

BRANFORD

The major towns within the County in the early 20th Century were Live Oak, Branford, and Wellborn. Branford, formerly known as "Rowland's Bluff" and the location of a ferry into Lafayette County, was first incorporated as a town in 1886 as "New Branford." The latter name came from the hometown of H. B. Plant, pioneer railroad builder, Florida financier, and one of the town's early settlers in 1886. Later, the "New" was dropped and the town became Branford. It should be noted that one of the places discussed for the original state capital was a point about ten miles south of Branford where the Santa Fe River joins the Suwannee River, as it was deemed to be halfway between the extremities of Key West and Pensacola. Branford was soon a major point from which steamers hauling timber would travel to Cedar Key, and this service was the town's major business for many years. Captain Robert Ivey of Branford was one of the most prominent steamship builders in Florida, and a park in Branford is named in his honor. Among his achievements was the construction of the famous steamship Belle of the Suwannee, built in 1889. This ship, famous for her "bridal suite" and a favorite of honeymooners, navigated the Suwannee River until sunk by a hurricane in Deadman's Bay in 1896 that also destroyed part of the town of Branford and much of the timber in the area.

Other famous ships built by Captain Ivey were the Louisa and City of Hawkinsville, the last steamboat on the Suwannee. In 1923 she was tied up down river at Old Town and allowed to sink at her berth. Thus ended the era of steamboating on the Suwannee River, once the lifeline of commerce before Florida became a state. Captain Ivey did not stop with steamship building, however, as he also operated a hotel that was a popular stop-off point for his steamboat passengers. Now Branford is known as the "Cave Diving Capital of the World," with its many springs and caves that along with others in the County make up a large percentage of Florida's total number of springs.

SURVIVING COMMUNITIES OF THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

The community of Wellborn was founded in 1860, at a time when cotton was king and one of the largest cotton warehouses in the area was found within its town limits. The town was named for Louis Wellborn Dubose, a civil engineer from Tallahassee who worked on the railroad from Tallahassee to Jacksonville. In appreciation for his help, he was given 162 acres near the town that would bear his name. On some maps, Wellborn was spelled "Welburn." During the Civil War, Jesse N. McLeran served as its postmaster. Later, in 1884, A. W. McLeran opened a general mercantile store before serving as a state senator from 1893-1897. His family's house still stands as a popular Bed and Breakfast. The town of Wellborn has the distinction of being the first place in Suwannee County with brick paving; a road $\frac{3}{4}$ mile long and one block north of old Highway 90 (now CR 10A). Today, however, Wellborn is a quiet residential community.

Luraville was settled in 1878 and had a population of 75 in 1886. Colonel Washington Lafayette Irvine named it for his then five year-old daughter, Lura V. Irvine. Unfortunately, Ms. Irvine was horribly burned in a girl's dormitory fire in 1888 and she died on December 26th of the same year at the age of 15. Her grave is located just upstream of Luraville in the Ivey-McIntosh Cemetery in the even older community of Riceville, which was named for an early judge that lived in the area. Among Luraville's early settlers was W. B. Telford, a preacher who arrived in 1864 and for whom Telford Springs is named. The major industry for the community was the mining of phosphate, and this brief chemical boom saw the town grow larger than Live Oak. Unfortunately, the community shrank when phosphate was no longer mined in the area.

The town of McAlpin was settled in 1882 and was named for Daniel M. McAlpin, an early publisher of the Suwannee Democrat. Products during its early years were naval stores and cotton, and McAlpin had a population of 30 by 1886.

The town of O'Brien was originally called Obrine in 1880, when it was established, and soon boasted of two churches, sawmills, a turpentine still, cotton gins, and five stores. Later, it was called Obrine Station, before finally changing to O'Brien.

FORGOTTEN COMMUNITIES

Other communities were not as lasting. Before bridges spanned the Suwannee River, ferries operated at various points. From these ferries usually grew small communities. They included Barrington Ferry, Levingston's Ferry (near present-day Dowling Park), Charles Ferry (Charles Springs), and ferries near Mineral Springs (Suwannee Springs), Platt's Ferry at Columbus, and Rowland's Bluff Ferry at what would become Branford. However, once bridges began to be built to consolidate traffic across the rivers, these ferry communities for the most part vanished. There were also many communities that arose near major points of travel or natural resources. Cuyler was established in or before 1862 east of what became Live Oak. Fort IZard, halfway between present-day communities of Luraville and Branford, was also settled in or before 1862, and is found on at least one map of Suwannee County. Riceville was settled sometime before 1878 at a site exactly two miles north of what would become Luraville. It was named after the Honorable John W. Rice, judge of Suwannee County in 1868. Padlock was settled in 1873 and named for a convict camp located there. The community was the center of operations for C. K. Dutton and Company, a general stores manufacturer, but other products were also harvested there. Pinemount was settled in 1883 on the Savannah, Florida, and Western Railway. Its population in 1886 and 1887 was 200, with lumber, cotton, and vegetables the main products. Rixford was named for George R. Rixford, naval stores manufacturer, sawmill owner, gristmill owner, rice mill owner, and cotton gin owner in the community. Little River was settled in 1880, and its principal products were cotton and vegetables. The community boasted a population of 75 in 1886 with two saw mills, a gristmill, and an academy. By 1895, there were several other small communities in Suwannee County, including Bravaldo, Hopedale, Flagler, San Carlos, Hudson, Bald Hill, Charleston, Hattsburg, Burlington, and Hildreth. A casual glance at old maps adds dozens of forgotten communities to this list. After a decrease in the production of turpentine, lumber, and cotton by 1920 and the economic recession that followed, these small communities dried up, and little remains of these once-thriving areas of life other than a few country roads, scattered houses, and vanishing relics.

AFTER THE BOLL WEEVIL

Cary Augustus Hardee, one of Suwannee County's most famous citizens, moved to Live Oak from Taylor County in 1900 and opened a law office. By 1915, he had been elected to the Florida House of Representatives, holding the position of Speaker of the House for two sessions (unprecedented at that time), including during his first term in the Senate. In 1920, he was elected Governor of the State of Florida. It was under his administration that the first highway system was begun, historical markers and monuments were erected to preserve the State's history, state income and inheritances taxes were prohibited, and he signed the Convict Anti-Whipping Bill, which abolished corporeal punishment in the State's prison camps. Under his guidance, six new counties were formed, included Hardee County, a permanent tribute to his achievements. After retiring from politics, he returned to Live Oak, where he entered the banking business. In 1925, he helped found the oldest and largest flue-cured tobacco market in the State to serve the newfound success of tobacco. A successful businessman as well as politician, Governor Hardee served as receiver of closed national banks in Washington, D.C. during the early years of President Franklin Roosevelt's term and Board Chairman of the First National Bank in Live Oak until his death in November of 1957. Governor Hardee was recently named as one of the most important Floridians in the 20th Century.

The 1920s saw additional growth in Suwannee County and even a few firsts. Suwannee High School began its first sports program in 1922, a soccer team, which was apparently the first of its type in Florida. The soccer team won the State championship the next year (perhaps

because there still weren't many soccer teams in Florida after only one year!), and was popularly dubbed "The Fighting Hebrews" for the number of Jewish members on the team. The 9-hole Suwannee Country Club was founded at Houston in 1926 on land earlier owned by the County, with such locals as F. D. Helvenston, Cary Hardee, R. H. Helvenston, B. W. Helvenson, Jr., and Dr. W. C. White present at its dedication. Ruby Gould Strickland became mayor of Live Oak in 1924 after serving as postmistress of Dowling Park from 1908, thereby becoming the first female mayor south of the Mason-Dixon line.

GREAT DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II

During the height of the Great Depression in the 1930s, Suwannee County had over 30 schools, most of which contained one or two rooms. However, it was not long before a consolidation was begun by the School Board that drastically reduced the number but increased the size of available schools. Despite the economic hardships endured during the Great Depression, especially by farmers around the United States in general, Suwannee County still retained some 3,000 small farms. In 1937, J. L. McMullen became Clerk of Circuit Courts at the age of 22, the youngest elected official in United States history to that point. A new jail was constructed behind the Courthouse in 1938, holding in its more than 55-year life such infamous people as Ruby McCollum and Ted Bundy. The Junior Chamber of Commerce ("Jaycees") was also organized in 1938 and composed of several prominent members of society; at its inception future Florida Governor Collins and several influential State officials were present. Two of the Jaycees' most enduring legacies were setting into action proposals that would eventually become Florida "welcome stations" and the State Board of Parole and Probation Commission.

The 1940s saw economic growth in Suwannee County as World War II raged around the globe. Many of her men and women participated in the war effort, and some did not return. With the postwar economy booming, the Suwannee County Hospital was constructed; this hospital was the first to be built under the Hill-Burton Act of 1948, which gave Federal assistance to state and local communities for such public welfare projects. Also during the 1940s, the Suwannee County Chamber of Commerce was organized and two bridges across the Suwannee River into Lafayette County, the Dowling Park Bridge to Day and the Hal W. Adams Bridge to Mayo (the only suspension span bridge in Florida), were completed.

A PERIOD OF CHANGES

In the 1950s, electricity was expanded to include most rural areas by the addition of a power plant near Ellaville and services from Suwannee Valley Electric Cooperative, whose new building was completed during this time but has since been vacated. Rural telephone lines were established with the expansion of the North Florida Telephone Company (now Alltel), and the Suwannee County Agricultural Coliseum, the Pineview School (now the Suwannee High School), and a two-story library addition provided additional services to the community. In August of 1957, the Florida Sheriffs' Association called for 160 acres of land near a body of water to be used for troubled and abandoned boys from around the state. The next week, local politician and businessman Thomas Musgrove offered the required amount of land in the north end of Suwannee County along the Suwannee River, and by 1958 the Florida Sheriffs' Boys' Ranch was receiving its first boys after an additional purchase of 562 more acres. One of its original patrons was Elvis Presley, who donated a cottage used in one of his movies. It was also during this decade that perhaps Suwannee County's most infamous murder occurred when Ruby McCollum, wife of local "Bolita" Sam McCollum (reportedly involved in playing numbers, or the bolita), killed local doctor and politician Clifford Leroy Adams on August 3, 1952. The resulting trial drew national attention to the County, as quests for racial equality around the country came to a head. After the first trial was thrown out by the higher courts, McCollum was deemed to be insane and sent to the State's Mental Hospital at Chattahoochee, where she remained for twenty years.

The 1960s and 1970s was the era of the Vietnam Conflict. Many Suwannee County citizens answered the call to duty; some never returned. Also during this period was a dramatic change to the center of Live Oak as many old buildings were torn down to make way for newer ones. Many of the historic homes that had stood since the turn of the century were demolished, and such old landmarks as the Suwannee Hotel and Governor Cary Hardee's home (once thought of as "way out of town") were replaced by modern businesses as the city expanded its boundaries. Among the businesses that came to Suwannee County during this time was Goldkist (now Pilgrim's Pride), whose large chicken processing facility west of Live Oak opened in 1967 and now provides some 1,500 jobs to the region. It was in 1978 that Ted Bundy, perhaps America's most infamous serial killer in recent times, was captured after a vicious murdering spree; his last victim, twelve-year old Lake City native Kimberly Leach, was found in the north part of Suwannee County after eight weeks of searching. The trial for Kimberly Leach's murder began in November of 1979 at the Courthouse in Live Oak, after Bundy had already been found guilty of the Chi Omega Sorority murders in Tallahassee. Jury selection for the Leach trial began on November 7 in the upstairs courtroom, but was soon moved to Orlando because of the media coverage. The trial, along with those for several of his other murders, brought to light many horrible atrocities committed by the handsome and intelligent psychopath who defended himself throughout much of his trials but was nevertheless found guilty and later executed.

THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The 1980s were a time of economic expansion as President Reagan's "Reaganomics" shifted into high gear around the country. The Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park, where numerous folk and country stars perform and a number of other activities are held each year, was opened to the public in 1983-1984 by the Suwannee County Development Authority after having been owned by the County. Bought out by private individuals in the late 1990s, this park has continued to attract thousands from around the United States and provides a great economic boost to the County as it continues to expand.

The last fifteen years have seen a number of achievements to Suwannee County's school system, with various sports, academic teams, and bands receiving recognition as state champions; the Suwannee High Brain Bowl academic team, for instance, has won more State championships than any other team in Florida. Furthermore, many public buildings have been erected, including a new Criminal Justice Complex, new libraries in Live Oak and Branford, and a new middle school in Live Oak and elementary school in Branford. Businesses

continue to expand and enter the County, and more recent additions include Wal-Mart, Holiday Inn Express, and Lowe's. Unfortunately, several other buildings that have graced downtown Live Oak for decades, including the old jail and old library, have been demolished because of possible structural damage caused by subsurface movement. These have been replaced by parking for the downtown area, a much-needed relief to traffic problems currently facing the City of Live Oak.

Suwannee County has always been committed to freedom, and has furnished men to serve her country in all military conflicts since the Seminole Indian Wars of 1835, when George E. McClellan organized a company of 77 foot and mounted soldiers about that time to combat the threat of Indians. Many locals have lost their lives while in service to their country, and in the last decade have been honored with a park on the corner of Pine Avenue and Howard Street named Veterans' Park, the central piece of which is a monument bearing their names. General Mahone Rees of Suwannee County was instrumental in the formation of the Florida Army National Guard during the 1920s, and Suwannee County has furnished several high-ranking military officers of all branches to the cause of freedom.

The Suwannee County Clerk of Circuit Court is dedicated to preserving the rich history of our small but illustrious County. The office retains a variety of public records, including court cases, property deeds, marriage licenses, and newspapers, and practically all are available for public viewing. Present Clerk of Court Barry A. Baker is committed to continuing historical preservation in the County.