

History of Citrus County

The first humans arrived in Florida about 14,000 years ago. They found a land that extended far out into the Gulf of Mexico. The present Citrus County shore line was at that time almost 200 feet above sea level. We don't know very much about these early nomadic people.

The earliest known settlers in Citrus County appear to be a people of the Deptford culture between about 200 B.C. until 1400 A.D.

In 1513, at least 200,000 Seminoles were scattered throughout Florida. In the same year the Spaniards claimed La Florida.

Approximately 1539, the Spanish explorer Hernando De Soto and his expedition arrived in Tampa. On their march north, they arrived at Lake Tsala Apopka in Citrus County. Many European artifacts have been found at this site. The impact of war and disease of the Spaniards on the small native Indian settlement has been devastating.

After the 1813 – 1814 Alabama war Gen. Andrew Jackson claimed the land belonging to the Creek Indians. Many Creek fled south and joined the native Seminole.

In 1818, the first Seminole war was fought in the northern part of the Florida Peninsular. Between 1835 and 1842, during the second Seminole war, 5000 Seminoles fought off the U.S. army, navy and marines. After spending over \$40 Million, the U.S. gave up fighting. 3,000 Natives were removed to the Oklahoma reservation. In 1845, Florida becomes the 27th state of the U.S.

Many adventurous settlers moved into what was to become Citrus County. A constant threat persisted from roaming Indian war parties. In December 1842, a petition was signed in Chucchochattee, asking the President and Congress to fulfill the promise made. The petition stated: "We the undersigned citizens inhabitants of that portion of the Territory of Florida, known as the Chucchochattee, Annuttaliga and **Homosassa** settlements to fulfill so much of the promise made us by the Commander in Chief, as will enable us to prepare the lands we have selected under the new occupation law to garner one crop – by granting a continuation of subsistence".

Nov. 6, 1843. An election is held in Hernando County. The three precincts are Chocochattee, Homosassa, and Toachadka (?). The results were as follows:

- Representative: James Gibbons 33 (elected), William Cooley 25, Cyprian T. Jenkins 18
- Surveyor: Richard R. Crum 63 (elected), Michael Garrason 16
- Clerk of the County Court: Isaac Garrason 33 (elected), A. Stringer 29, James A. Boyet 20

- Sheriff: Edward McVane Harville 66 (elected)
- Coroner (?): Rufus Hoyt 52 (elected), David B. Turner 21

[Robert M. Hill counted the votes. Information from the election certification document provided by Linda Hill.]

1845. William Cooley is appointed the first postmaster at **Homosassa**.

1844. The state legislature required that court be held at the home of Isaac Garrison at Chuckochatee. [The county seat was subsequently moved to Fort DeSoto, where it remained until 1853.]



Mar. 6, 1844. The legislature approves an act altering the boundary of Hernando County:

Section 1. Be it enacted by the Governor and Legislative Council of the Territory of Florida, That the Northern boundary line of Hernando county shall commence at the mouth of the Big Withlacoochee River, thence up said river to the junction of the Little Withlacoochee river, thence up said Little Withlacoochee to the head of the same, thence East to the Meridian line, thence along said Meridian line South to the Hillsborough river, thence down said river to Fort Fostee; thence running due West to the Gulf Mexico, thence along said Gulf to the mouth of the Withlacoochee the point of beginning, including all the land and islands, which said river lines and Gulf may enclose.

1845. Maj. Isaac Garrison is appointed the first postmaster of Chocochattee.

Jan. 30, 1845. A post office is established at Augusta. The first postmaster was Albert Clark. [The post office was discontinued Oct. 17, 1860, when Clark was murdered. The Augusta post office was near Lake Lindsey and near the Old **Crystal River** Road dead end, across State Road 476, according to Virginia Jackson.]

1846. Arthur Morse is appointed the first postmaster of **Chassowitzka**.

1845. Maj. Isaac Garrison is appointed the first postmaster of Chocochattee.

1846. A map shows **Ft. Cooper**, Chocochattee, and Fort Dade. It shows the Crystal and Weekiwachee rivers.



June 13, 1846. The Tallahassee Floridian reports that the Benton County grand jury has called for adherence to the patrol law “as we are of the opinion that that important law is much neglected.” The report warned citizens and officials that slaves had “too much privilege in carrying arms, and more particularly violating the Sabbath day.”

Oct. 20, 1846. Peter Peterson is convicted in the Circuit Court of Benton County of an assault and battery on John Alvary and is fined \$40. [He was unable to pay and an execution was issued to the Sheriff commanding him that “of the goods and chattels, slaves, lands and tenements of the said Peter Peterson he cause to be made” the

said sum of money. The execution was issued by Malcolm C. Peterson, Clerk of Circuit Court for Benton County, on Aug. 7, 1850. An old deed recites that the execution was levied on October 22 that year and the sale was made on the first Monday in December to Perry G. Wall for \$45. It was signed by Sheriff Nathaniel M. Moody and dated Feb. 4, 1851. The witnesses were Levi S. Whitehurst and M. C. Peterson. Information from Back Home: A History of Citrus County, Florida.]

1848. Perry G. Wall becomes Judge of Probate of Benton County.

1848. A post office is established at Cheesehowiska. [It operated until 1849.]

1850. The population of Hernando county is 604 whites and 322 black slaves. Census records show settlers at Buddy Lake, Chocochatta, Annuttalagga, and Melendez.

1857. The **Crystal River** post office is established.

1860. A map shows **Homosassa**, Augusta, Pierceville, Springhill, Bayport (county seat), and Ft. Taylor.

1860. The population of Hernando county is 1200.

Jan. 10, 1861. Florida secedes from the United States.

March 1861. Meetings of a battalion of the 20th Regiment of the Florida State Militia are held in Brooksville. [At that time, a militia company was formed in Brooksville under the command of Capt. LeRoy G. Lesley. Its missions were to protect the blockade runners who were to operate out of Bay Port and to furnish drivers for any cattle gathered from those grazing free on the plains of South Florida and sent to Confederate forces in Virginia. Information from Stanaback.]

May 14, 1862. The 3rd Florida Infantry arrives in Montgomery, Alabama, by train. [The Hernando Guards, Company C had placed their mascot, a Florida Wildcat upon the locomotive. From that day on, they were known as the Hernando Wildcats. Source: Hernando County Confederate Soldier, Thomas Benton Ellis, Sr., typescript, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History & Dr. David J. Coles article "Ancient City Defenders: "The St. Augustine Blues," Page 79, Vol. 23 of El Escribano, St. Augustine Historical Society, 1988.]

Fall 1863. Samuel J. Pearce is elected probate judge. [He resigned on March 14 and went to Fort Myers to join the newly formed Union 2nd Florida Cavalry.]

May 28, 1864. In a letter to the State Comptroller, Sheriff and Tax Collector John L. Peterson describes conditions in Hernando County:



In consequence of the operations of the enemy in this county and in South Florida every man who could use a musket was placed in service. A good deal of time has been lost in scouting after the enemy and in running Negroes from their reach. My fellow citizens thinking it of more importance to defend the country than to assess taxes which could not be collected if the country fell under the control of the enemy. This county has been partially under the control of the enemy in so far as all as all persons who did not flee up the country had to take up arms in its defense. An attack is expected here in Brooksville Thursday next and preparations are being made to repel it. We will fight them though they out number us three to one with what success remains to be seen.

Oct. 3, 1864. Capt. Samuel E. Hope is elected as a representative to the legislature for Hernando County, without opposition [Source: election certificate dated Oct. 8 signed by William Garrison]

Nov. 29, 1865. In an election, David S. Walker receives all 75 votes cast for Governor from Hernando County [Source: election certification dated Dec. 4].

1870. The population of Hernando county is 2938.

June 15, 1870. The Florida Peninsular reports:

A COUNTY JUDGE SHOT.—We learn that Henry Rountree, County Judge for Hernando County, was shot at his residence on **Crystal River**, in that County, on Monday night, 6th inst. The following are the circumstances of this deplorable affair, as we have heard them.

At about 3 o'clock in the morning Judge Rountree was called by some person at the gate and told that there was a message for him from Brooksville, whereupon Judge R got up out of bed and stepped to the door when he was fired upon by the person at the gate, the ball or shot taking effect in the groin and passed through to near the spine. The wound is supposed to be mortal. There is no clue as to the perpetrator of this horrible outrage. It will doubtless be set down as a K. K. outrage, but those who seem to be the best informed do not think that politics had anything to do with the outrage, but that it is attributable to some unfortunate domestic difficulties.

[On July 27, the newspaper speculated that the perpetrator might have been the husband of his colored mistress.]

The newspaper also reports, "We learn that Hon. S. J. Pearce has been appointed U. S. Deputy Marshal to take the census for Hernando and Hillsborough counties, and we hope that the citizens generally will render

Judge Pearce every assistance in their power in the discharge of his duties.”



1880. The population of Hernando county is 4248.

1880. A post office is established at Cove Bend. [It operated until 1884.]

1880. The Florida Crescent, the first newspaper to be printed in Hernando County is established by Col. Fred L. Robertson. [Another source has 1879. The newspaper was later absorbed by the Brooksville Register.]

Mar. 4, 1880. The Sunland Tribune reports that J. W. Williams (alias Herb Williams), who was a refugee from justice for six years, having been sentenced to the penitentiary in 1874 for horse stealing, was killed at Brooksville.

July 23, 1881. The Tampa Guardian reports:

It really does seem that Hernando County is doomed to be the scene of more murders than any other place in the State. There is scarcely a week that passes but what some sort of crime is committed in that county. There appears to be a dreadful fascination, with the people of that locality, both white and black, in the taking of human life. Within the last three weeks no less than five murders have been committed in that county. First, the two children of Mr. Mickler, killed by Sidney King, then followed the murder of King by lynching; next was a man by the name of Ashley, killed while catching his horse on his own premises by unknown parties. The fifth and last, is the killing of a colored man named Abe Timmons by T. J. Pearce, better known as T. J. Cook, of Brooksville.

1883. A post office is established at **Lecanto** and at Scrub.

1884. Post offices are established at Add, Oakdale, Rosehill, Mannfield, Oriole, Wiscon, and **Floral City**.

Nov. 25, 1885. John L. Crawford certifies that the 1885 Florida State Census shows 1,259 families in Hernando County [Charles Blankenship].

1886-1887. The Florida State Gazetteer and Business Directory lists these post offices: Add, Anclote, Arlington, Bay Port, Blanton, Brooksville, Carmel, Chipco, **Crystal River**, Dade City, Earnestville, Eilerslie, Fairmount, **Floral City**, Fort Dade, Gulf Key, Hernando, **Homosassa**, Hudson, Istachatta, **Lecanto**, Lenard, Loyce, Macon, Mannfield, Mount Lee, Oakdale, Oriole, Orleans, Port Richey, Rose Hill, Rural, Saint Thomas, San Antonio, **Stage Pond**, Tomkinsville, Tuckertown, Twin Lakes, Wiscon.

Oct. 29, 1886. A letter written on this date in Brooksville from Mrs. Hattie D. Foy to her mother Mrs. John Davis includes the following:

It was dark when I reached here last night, so went to "Hernando Hotel," the best kept house I have been at, either North or South. This is a good boarding place, but it ought to be, for I pay \$2 per day or \$9 per week. But then I have fire in my room, and tonight, for the first time in Florida, I sit by a fire. Last night was the coldest we have had—slept with sheet, three blankets and spread over me, and then was cold. When the sun is two or three hours high it is very pleasant here, and the air seems to be so pure and good. ... Brooksville is a smaller place, (only 500), but healthful location. Have two churches here, Baptist and Methodist, the Presbyterians and Episcopalians have organizations, but no church buildings. B. is situated on a hill and gradually slopes each way. This country is more rolling and has more good land than any in the State. It is 18 miles from Gulf coast, has one railroad and expects another this winter. Mother, I wish you were here to enjoy eating sweet potatoes and fresh fish; I never tasted any so good as they are here. In two or three weeks they will begin to gather oranges to ship. Some are just beginning to turn; the trees grow as large as half grown apple trees, and the oranges look like big green walnuts on the trees. They are fine eating now; so much better flavor than what we get North.

When exploring the recent history of Citrus County, we are looking at a time span of less than 190 years. The County of Hernando, named in honor of DeSoto, was established On February 27, 1843.

In 1885, the census ranked Floral City twice as bigger than Miami, with a population of 300 persons to Miami's 150. In that same census, Mannfield, which was to become the county seat of Citrus County a few years later, had a population of 250 and Crystal River had a population of 200. The town of Tompkinsville, which would later become Inverness, had a recorded population of 30.

On June 2, 1887, Florida Governor E. A. Perry signed into law a bill dividing Hernando County into three counties, Citrus to the north and Pasco to the south. Legislation stipulated that the town of Mannfield would be the temporary county seat of Citrus County as it sat in the geographical center of the newly created county.

The establishment of Citrus County meant a permanent county seat needed to be named. The matter was to be put to vote but it took several years and a midnight raid before the issue was finally settled once and for all. The battle raged with Mannfield being favored by one side and Inverness (formerly Tompkinsville) being favored by the other. A majority vote in 1891 finally approved the move to Inverness but the opposition had no intention of giving up ... not until a midnight raid in which the courthouse and everything that had to do with Citrus County government - records, court furniture and fixtures - was "stolen" and moved to Inverness by horses and wagons - including Captain (W.C.) Zimmerman, the County Clerk, who refused to move from his office and was picked up with his chair and desk and transported in a wagon to the new County Seat!

Here are some interesting statistics from the year 1995. Native Americans have been in Florida for over 12,000 years. Europeans have been in Florida 482 years. Florida has been a part of the U.S. for only 150 years.

During the Civil War, the Yulee Sugar Mill was operated on the Homosassa River, supplying sugar to the Confederacy. Around the same time, Citrus became the big industry in the eastern part of the county, helped along when the Florida Orange Canal and Transit Company built a canal from the groves to the Lake Panasoffkee railhead in Sumter County allowing fruit to be barged through the canal and along the Withlacoochee River. The big freeze in 1894-95 ended the citrus industry in the county just at the time that phosphate was discovered in the area and the worker population swelled until World War I terminated the flow of phosphate to European markets, the mines closed, and the population plummeted.



Nestled in a small wooded area near **Homosassa**, the ruins of the Yulee Sugar Mill are one of Florida's most evocative historic settings. The picture

was taken during the archaeological assessment of the mill works and equipment.

David Levy Yulee, one of Florida's most outstanding historic figures, was born June 12, 1810, on the West Indies island of St. Thomas. A merchant and contractor, Yulee's father was a prosperous man who developed an enduring interest in the new territory called Florida. In 1817, he bought 36,000 acres near Micanopy and settled with his family there.

When David was nine, his father sent him to a private school in Virginia, and later to law school in St. Augustine. An intelligent and personable man, Yulee became a member of Florida's first constitutional convention in 1838-39, and in 1841, was elected as a territorial delegate to the Congress. When Florida became a state in 1845, he was chosen as its first U.S. senator.



Courtesy National Archives

He married the daughter of a Kentucky governor and moved to his 5,100-acre plantation called Margarita near the **Homosassa River**. Though a politician, he stayed involved in agriculture and built some of Florida's first railroads. His Atlantic and Gulf Railroad, completed in 1860, connected Fernandina on the Atlantic coast to Cedar Key on the Gulf Coast.

In 1851, 69 workers built the Yulee sugar mill, using expensive machinery imported from New York. The operation employed some 100 slaves. The mill was in operation until 1864. For 13 years, it was a time of peace and prosperity for Yulee, until the Civil War drove him to a fateful decision.

In 1861, he made the hard choice of serving in the newly created Congress of the Confederacy, but resisted the idea of using his rails to make connections that would better aid the war effort. The mill served as a supplier of sugar products for Southern troops, and his mansion became a stockpile for ammunition and supplies.



Yulee was briefly imprisoned in Georgia, accused of aiding the flight of Confederate President Jefferson Davis and his Cabinet. After a presidential order from Ulysses Grant, he was freed and resumed his railroad interests. He died in New York in 1886.

Hewn from native limestone. the mill has been partially restored. It currently consists of a large chimney with an extending structure about 40 feet long that houses the boiler. Beside the mill's remains are parts of the grinding machinery.



First presented to the Citrus County Federation of Women's Club in 1923, the 6 acre Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins site was deeded to the state in 1953. Since then the Florida Park Service has made several improvements to this small wooded area in Homosassa, Florida. With the most recent stabilization effort of the masonry in 2006 (picture above), using the original Lime and sand mortar mix proportions, the Yulee Sugar Mill Ruins Historic State Park has become a true landmark of Old Homosassa.

Visitors can tour the ruins at their own pace with the help of a concrete path and interpretive plaques. The site also offers picnic facilities. With 10 days notice, a guided tour for groups of 10 or more can be arranged based on the availability of park personnel.



The picture of Tiger Tail Island shows Carlis Harman's great grandfather and great grandmother, William Davis Harman and Maude Gates Harman, in the boat and their children in the water. A 10 year old daughter, Mattie Lee, drowned there on Feb. 25, 1899. William moved his family to Homosassa and built a home on Tiger Tail Island in 1896. William built his home down river, or west, of the ruins of David Yulee's mansion, "The Margarita", (which was burnt down by Union troops). The picture shows the chimneys of "Margarita" and William D. Harman's home behind and under trees.

William D. Harman/Harmon & Maude H. (Gates) moved to Florida by mules or horse and wagon in 1882 from Odessadale, Meriwether Co. Ga. Karl, their 2nd child was born on Sept. 3, 1882, just after crossing over the Withlacoochee River near Dunnellon. Records show that Karl was born in Benton, which was once the county's name. The county was first named Hernando, then Benton (after a state senator), then back to Hernando, and later divided into three counties, one of which is now Citrus County. They settled on Turner Camp Road in Tompkinsville, now named Inverness, Fl. William was a farmer and planted an orange grove. He also took care of other groves in the area. The "Big Freeze" hit Florida in 1894 and 1895, killing the citrus groves in Citrus County.

At about the age of 14, Karl developed an illness known as "dropsy" and his doctor recommended they move to a saltwater area. William, Maude and their children (truck farmed) on Tiger Tail Island, raising vegetables and shipped them out by train on "The Mullet", to be sold. William also mullet fished for a living. It is said he became one of the best on the

Homosassa River. Two of William D's sons, Karl and Jim, also learned the skills of Mullet fishing and would net fish during run season. They would guide visitors to Homosassa during other times of the year. Fishing was really good during those years

One of the early school buildings, called the *Old Palmetto School House*, was located along the Homosassa River (below).



These pictures give us a great insight in the hardships associated with education. Note that Old Homosassa in the early 1900s was also called "Homasassa" and "Homasana". Students received a lovely School Souvenir in 1918, probably the equivalent of a diploma. It is interesting to note that descendants of many of the students are still residing in the Homosassa area.

HOMASANA SCHOOL

District No. 2

Township 19, Citrus County, Florida

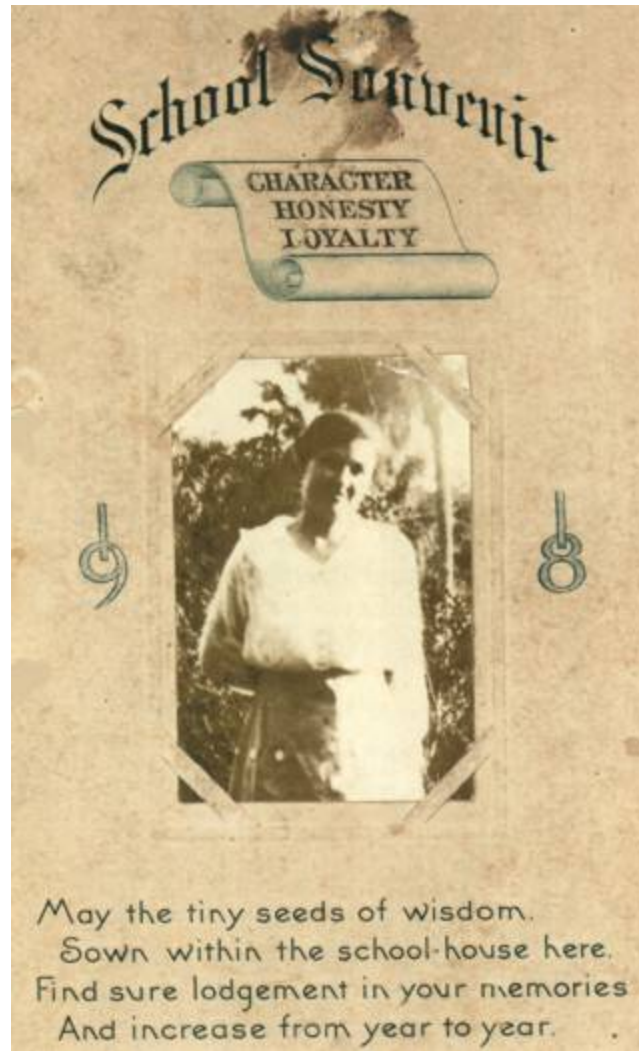
~~~~~  
WILLIE HARMAN, Teacher  
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PUPILS

Daisy Horne	Virgie Horne
Katie Horne	Etna Trotter
Pauline Locklear	Elta Loennecker
Esther Fischer	Juanita Cato
Ethel Thompson	Eddie Thompson
Vernon McReynolds	Adelina Harman
James Harman	Laurel Lyles
Mildred Black	James Fischer
Hermun Gerock	Eugene Miller
Drew Miller	George Dilland
Willis Trotter	Wiley Locklear
Willie Rapson	Arnald Black
Maude Strickland	Carrie Cato
Johnnie Fay Lyles	Annie Gerock
Maggie Harman	

SCHOOL BOARD

C. D. Shultz	Mr. Dick
Mr. Priest	



The above picture shows Willie Harman and a list of students in 1918

Homosassa received its first post office in 1845, with Bill Conely being the first postmaster. This was the first post office to be established in what is now Citrus County. This was the same year Florida became the 27th state. The post office was discontinued and reestablished a number of times in the following years. After the post office was reestablished on April 7, 1886, it has continued to serve the community to this day. The picture below shows the cabbage log post office that was built by Postmaster Russell M. Adkins's father in 1948. It was located across the street from the two story brick school house which burned in December, after Christmas, in 1969. Gulf Coast Marines is now on the site the post office was located.



The reputation of the great fishing and hunting opportunities on the Homosassa River soon reached adventurers, even President Grover Cleveland, in the northern states. The availability of rail transportation put Homosassa on the map. In 1924, Mr. Bruce Hoover from Chicago Ill., founded the "Homosassa Development Co. He bought up the land around the springs and a large number of acres in what is now Homosassa Springs. The Homosassa Hotel was built at what is now the NW corner of Hwy 19 and Halls River Road. In 1925 a second depot was built at the junction of what is now Halls River Road and Fishbowl Dr. It was a one room building about 9 X 12. The conductor would sound the whistle when he had guest, and they would send someone from the Homosassa Hotel to pick them up. The hotel has now been replaced by a large shopping center.



At the same time the Homosassa Arcade was constructed on the NE corner of Hwy 19 and Grover Cleveland Blvd., known by the locals as "Chicken farm Road". The Arcade was the equivalent of a modern shopping center. It was destroyed in the late 1950s. CVS Pharmacy is now located on that site.

The first post office in Homosassa Springs was established on August 26, 1927 and has existed unto this day.



Upon arrival in Homosassa, the train whistle would alert the hotel to come and pick up their guests at the train station near the corner of what is now Halls River Road and Fishbowl Drive.

Some references were taken from websites Fivay.org, Seminoletribe.com, DEP historical library and individual contributions.