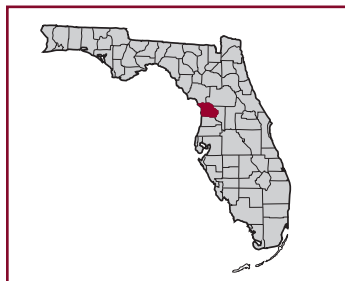


For more than twelve thousand years...

hunters and fishermen have been drawn to the ecologically rich coastline area we now call Citrus County, Florida. Amer-Indians followed the trails of hairy mammoths, saber-toothed tigers, camels and other tasty animals to this area, drawn by cool, fresh water pouring out of abundant springs.



These springs created major rivers and estuaries, birth sites of diverse sea life and the wildlife that feeds on them.

Europeans came in search of gold and precious stones. Hernando de Soto, a Spanish explorer, was here in 1539. He scouted up along the Withlacoochie River and then moved on up through the west coast line of Florida.

The invaders brought conflict, war and disease, eradicating most of the residents. A century later, other tribal Indians, displaced by English and French settlers entering northern areas, were forced into Florida. They became known as Seminoles. They moved into the old villages, some along the Homosassa.

The old Indian villages are now gone, but evidence of existence is still found as people dig new gardens, or water uncovers a trove of arrowheads. The earliest European settlers in the area were not recorded until about 1830.

That is where our historic trail begins...



The cemetery still accepts the remains of Homosassa families. Citrus County maintains Stage Stand Cemetery, its beautification is the gift of the Homosassa River Garden Club.

STAGE STAND CEMETERY 1

Stage Stand was a stopping place of the mail wagon run by the U. S. Army during the 1800s. It became a cemetery by chance. U. S. General Andrew Jackson first invaded Florida in 1813 to repel British settlers from the Pensacola area. He stayed to drive out the Seminole Indians and confiscate their land.

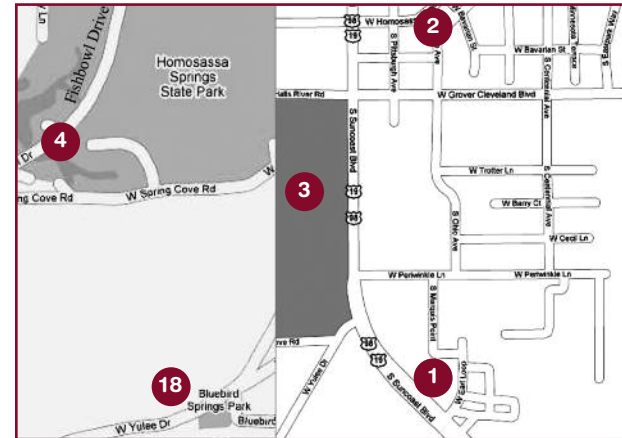
The Seminole wars lasted intermittently from 1818 until 1858. During that time American settlers moved in to hunt and cull cedar and pine from the forests.

Circa 1830 mail came from Fort Brooke (now Tampa) roughly along the old Indian Road (now US-19) to Stage Stand. From there it went to Lee's Mound (now Rock Crusher) and down to Brooksville before returning to Fort Brooke. The Homosassa Stand, just a rough shelter, bordered the farm of the Harrell family, running along Spring Cove Road east to present day State Road 490. They were squatters hoping to settle and own land.

Resenting forced migration, the Indians were fighting back, resulting in the Second Seminole War from 1835 to 1842. During this time, when the Harrells did not come one morning for mail call, neighbors traveled through their woods to seek them out. The Indians had murdered most of the family and scalped them: father, mother and three of their youngsters. Only one boy had survived, the sixteen-year old was out duck hunting.

Neighbors helped bury the family on a knoll just south of the Stage Stand, the first internments.

In those days, grave markers were simply a large stone, un-etched with dates or names. That practice continued for many decades and they are still in place today.



FLORIDA BOOM SIDEWALKS 2

A few streets north of the cemetery is a 20th century site, the nine-foot wide Florida Boom Sidewalks. In 1924 grand plans were made by developers H. S. Hoover, Bruce Hoover and Frank W. Boykin to create a "new" Homosassa sportsman's paradise, complete with casino.

The Florida West Coast Development Company planned for a hotel, shopping arcade, and residential lots. The original purchase was for timber land at \$2.00 an acre; they sold it for \$200.00 a foot.

The hotel and shopping center were built on the north corners of Hall's River Road/Grover Cleveland Boulevard and present day US 19. It included First Bank where the founder of Brannen Banks worked as a young man. Close to four miles of sidewalks were installed, radiating out in a grand design around the still existing "city" park. The partners decided to sell out in 1926 and move on to invest in Mexico, shortly before the Florida boom busted. Only parts of the sidewalk and the little park remain today.

The next stop is across US 19 going west down Hall's River Road. Turn south on Fishbowl Drive. Here is the First Magnitude spring, headwater of the Homosassa River, in the **HOMOSASSA SPRINGS WILDLIFE STATE PARK.** 3

From its earliest days, the big springs have made folks stop and stare. It was developed as a "roadside attraction" in the late 1880s and has been the site for several



Hollywood movies. In 1963 the famous underwater observatory was put in place for visitors to see the thousands of salt and fresh water fishes swim around quarantined manatee. Residents urged the County to buy it in September 1984, and it officially became a Florida State Park on January 1, 1989. The park is home to many of Florida's wildlife and one "naturalized" hippo. The Park is open daily throughout the year.

The first bridge by the park was put in to accommodate the famous Mullet Train brought in by Dunn and Dutton, see (12) and (13). On the side was the water tower, to create steam in the engine. For several centuries this area, called Blue Hole, was where everyone came for fresh water to carry home and for bathing and for Baptisms.



It is also in this area that the first general store by the spring was built by **WILLIAM COOLEY** 4 1782-1863. The river was the main conduit in for supplies from either Cedar Key to the north or Bayport, on the south side. Cooley chose this location to take advantage of the solid ground, fresh water and the huge number of fish that flooded into the springs every winter. At least once he was fined for selling liquor to Indians. Cooley came to Florida in 1813 as a surveyor in the US Army. His wife and two of his three children were massacred by Indians in 1836 near Fort Lauderdale where he had a shipping enterprise. Highly respected as a leader and pioneer, Cooley moved to present day Homosassa in 1841 with other Army Servicemen to settle under the Armed Occupation Act of 1840. That awarded soldiers with 160 acres if they farmed five acres for five years.

Cooley established a farm running 159 acres along the south side of the river. He cut cedar and sold it for twenty five cents a cubic foot. Cooley sold all of his holdings to David Yulee and moved to Tampa in 1849. The marker names ten other families that settled the Homosassa area with him in 1841.

Bluebird Springs was dedicated as a park in 1927 for the people of Homosassa by the same group of Chicago investors who built the nine-foot sidewalks, the Florida West Coast Development Company. At the same time they created the subdivision around Gator Hole.



Bluebird Springs

Gator Hole was used by local people as a bathing and swimming hole, despite the gators and snakes. The county added a parking area and a sand beach in 1978.

Unfortunately, the sand clogged up the springs. The slower flow and seepage from cow manure in nearby open ranges led to a rapid growth of unwanted plants.

Very quickly residents created "Springbusters" to clean it up. Using diving gear and hand tools they wrestled up buckets of sand and rocks. For a quarter-century, volunteers from all over the country have joined locals to help restore it to the depth of thirty-eight feet.

Recent efforts have focused on planting native species around the park. In 2006, the county honored the restoration efforts by naming the picnic pavilion in honor of the Phelps family and their Springbusters.

Despite many attempts to make Homosassa a village for the wealthy sportsman, it has remained home to independent, hard-working families who still fish, hunt and farm for the home table and take on other paying jobs to provide for their families. In addition to its full-time residents, Homosassa attracts "snow-birds" who fly or drive from the northern areas of the United States and Canada as well as those from Europe seeking warmth in the winter.



Recognizing its importance over thousands of years as a conduit for trade and traffic in Indian arrowheads, lumber and fish and its current use today by professional fishermen and crabbers as well as recreational craft, the Homosassa River has been designated by the state as an Outstanding Waterway.

The river is alive year-round with bald eagles, gulls, heron, ospreys, pelicans, anhingas, cormorants and owls, manatee, snook, trout, dolphin, blue crab, scallop and more. Whitetailed deer, otters, bobcat, puma and bear are less frequently seen, but they are here. During winter, the river basin becomes home to thousands of migratory birds including the rare white pelicans.

The Homosassa River basin is one of three First Magnitude springs groups in close proximity to each other on the west side of central Florida: Crystal River, Homosassa and Chassawhitzka.

Places To Stay

Citrus County has many RV parks, motels, hotels and rental homes. For further information, check Homosassa Websites, the Citrus County Tourist Bureau or the Citrus County Chamber of Commerce.

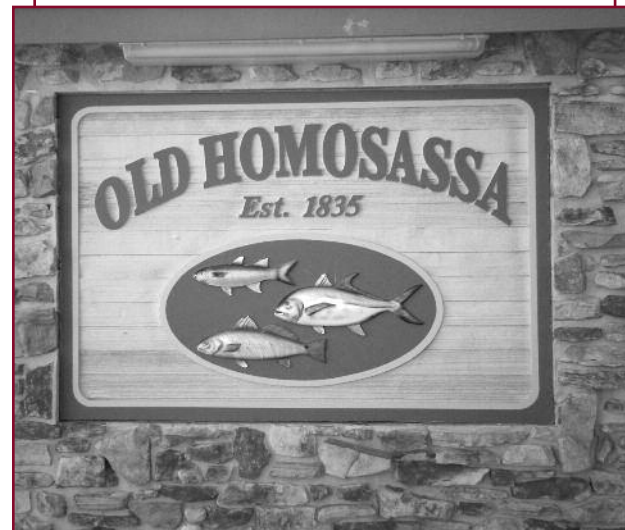
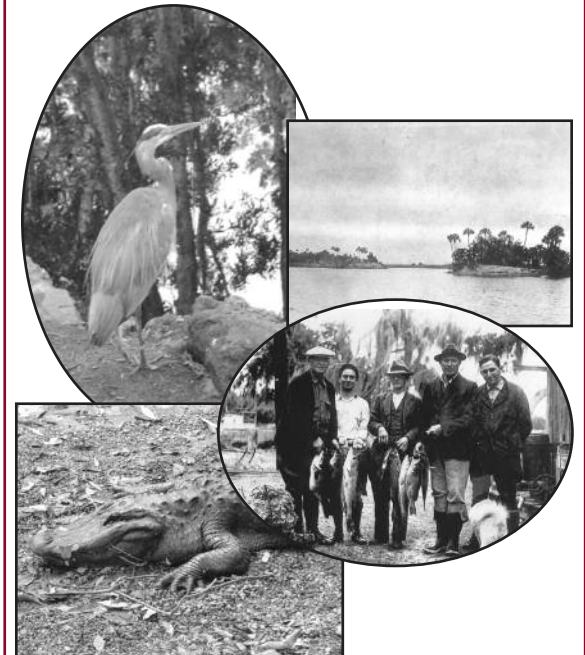


Photo credits: sidewalk by Carlis Harmon; alligator, heron, Yulee ruins, Chauffeur's Cottage, Cemetery, Whildon house, Croft house, and Bluebird Springs by Priscilla Watkins. All other photographs are the property of Citrus County Historical Society.

Funds have been provided by: Florida Humanities Council, Citrus County, WalMart and the Homosassa Civic Club.

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Historic



Homosassa





Sugar factory ruins.

The ruins were deeded to the State of Florida in 1953.

Travelling south along the river, Fishbowl Drive ends at the intersection of Yulee Road, named for one of Homosassa's most famous achievers, DAVID LEVY YULEE **5**. Yulee was serving in the U.S. Congress as Senator when he bought more than 5,000 acres here beginning in 1846.

He built a sugar plantation with one thousand slaves, and became a major supplier of sugar and molasses to the Confederate Army until Union sailors burned his home and fields in June 1864. All that remains is Tiger Tail island where he lived, the MILL CHIMNEY **6** and a few sugar boiling pans in the state park named for him. Yulee was famed for building the railroad that ran from Jacksonville to Cedar Key, creating a shorter shipping route from Atlantic coast to New Orleans.

Across from Yulee's chimney is the OLD PRINTING MUSEUM. **7** Examples of the machinery, plates and type faces are artfully shown throughout the interior of the building, which is also home to the Museum Cafe. Tours are given by appointment with the owner, a 4th generation Floridian named Jim Anderson, a printer himself. Open weekdays 10 am. - 2 pm.

Behind the museum is the CHAUFFEUR'S COTTAGE, **8** an early 20th century, double residence, built originally on site at the Atlanta Fishing Club, which is on the north side of the Homosassa river. The interior of each apartment holds a desk, bed, chair and bookcase. They share a fireplace set in the center wall. Some of the walls

in the cottage are lightly marked with names, addresses and a few telephone numbers of chauffeurs from Atlanta area and one from Macon, Georgia. In 2006, students of a North Carolina university began an historic search for the authors behind those names.



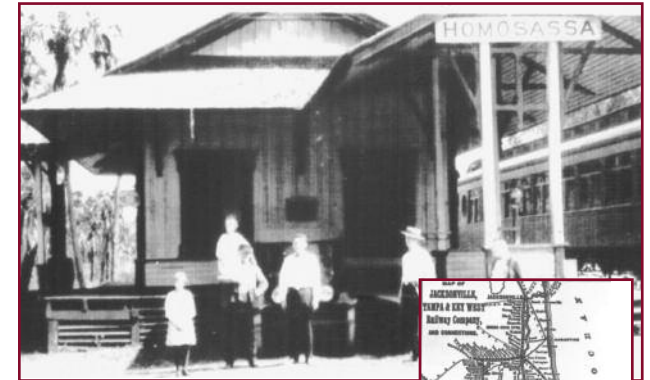
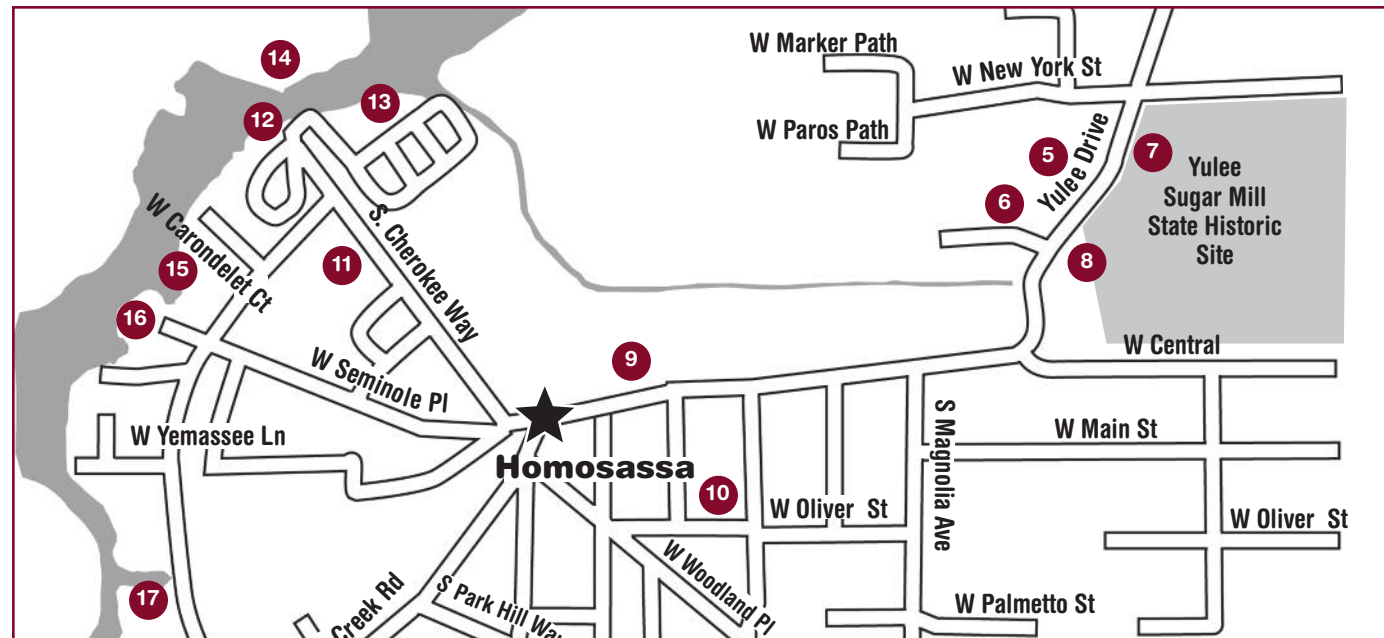
The chauffeur's cottage is on private property. The interior is not accessible, but the building is open to viewing from the garden.

Historically, Negroes have been in Florida since the 1500s. For safety before Emancipation they often allied themselves with the Seminoles. After most of the Seminoles were relocated from Florida, Negroes lived

here as farmers and mill hands. After the Civil War destroyed the sugar plantation, their cabins were moved from the sugar factory work site to the cedar mill works, placed along what is now Boulevard Way.



Continue on Yulee, around the curve and enter Old Homosassa. Where River Safaris now plies its trade in boat tours once stood the HOMOSASSA STATION. **9** It was part of the Silver Springs Ocala and Gulf Railroad. This spur was called the "Dunnellon Short" but locals called it the Mullet Train. For four decades it brought tourists in each afternoon and in the morning it carried out crates of dried mullet, wood and Spanish moss to northern markets.



The "Mullet train" was chartered by the efforts of JOHN DUNN. He discovered the west coast during the American Civil War.



Florida train routes circa 1890s

A short walk down R.K. Terrace, is the two-story WHILDEN HOUSE, **10** built for the train's Engineer, still occupied by his widow in 2007. The turntable was directly across from the house. Here the train rested each night until it was time to return with mullet and passengers to Dunnellon and on to Ocala. As a young bride, Mrs. Whilden was disturbed by the creaks as the metal cooled all night so it was parked overnight closer to the depot. The Mullet train ran from December 1888 until November 1941.



Whilden House

With partners Joshua L. Chamberlain, the famous Civil War General and Governor of Maine, and Benjamin F. Dutton of Massachusetts, Dunn created the Homosassa Company in 1884 to buy 12,000 acres along the river to develop as a gentleman's vacation spot. The land was all marsh and a great amount of fill was brought in to make solid footing for building.

The Homosassa Land Company created the wagon-wheel layout with residential lots radiating out from the town square, bordered today by art shops, a boat business, the fire station, library, civic club, a church and the elementary school.

Move along Cherokee Way to note the two-story C.W. CROFT **11** building adjacent to the public boat parking lot. To its left, is a one-story building, used as a general store and Western Union Telegraph office until the 1960s. Both structures were built circa 1914 by E. H. Gerock, and sold to Mr. Croft in 1925. Croft was a well known, World War 1 Navy veteran and served for a while as our county commissioner. In 1945 the two-story home was sold to Tom and Jessie D. Wright and has remained a residence to the current day.



Croft's House

As you move west you reach the river, dedicated as an Outstanding Florida Waterway. To the west side of the public boat ramp is where JOHN DUNN **12** built his family home on the river west of Cherokee Way, where it still stands today.



Dunn moved back to Dunnellon in 1895. His house was converted to use as Homosassa Inn. Now it is the private home of the MacRae family. It was returned to private use when the family built the new MacRae Lodge and Boat Shed on the property.



DUTTON **13** also built a lavish house on the river in 1885, east of Cherokee Way, with an ornate pier and gazebo where a restaurant stands today. He converted his home into Riverside Lodge by 1900. After fire destroyed everything in the 1960s, the site was redesigned and built as Riverside Resort.

Across the river from MacRae's, west of Riverhaven Marina, stands an old GAZEBO **14** once used as a hunting and fishing blind by Grover Cleveland, the 22nd and 24th President of the United States.



Step back from the river to the corner of Cherokee Way and Boulevard, around to traditional work sites for many generations of local people. At the corner, a cedar mill building, supplying wood for the Farber pencil factory in Cedar Key and Crystal River, was located; the mill was replaced by MacRae's General Store through the mid-20th Century. That was replaced with, and is still occupied by, MacRae's Fishing Lodge. The last of the pilings that supported the old cedar mill can still be seen from the river in front of MacRae's family home.

A number of fish houses were built along the river to buy and resell seafood. A few remain. T.L. Rogers built what is now called HAMPTON FISH HOUSE **15** at the end of Carondelet Point, the first lane after Cherokee Way. This is inactive as a business but very popular with painters and photographers.

The next lane, Seminole Point, leads to the HOMOSASSA SEAFOOD COMPANY **16** very active fish house of 20th century construction. The other one still in business is CEDAR KEY FISH HOUSE **17** on Boulevard and West Creek Lane.

In this same area once stood a pencil factory. Dropped cedar staves (pencil forms) are still found from time to time in the area of Otter Creek. In other private yards along Otter Creek, local owners still find Indian-made arrow heads as the tide or storms uncover them along the shore.

Fishing for scallops, stone crabs, oysters, and both fresh and salt-water fish was a huge business in Homosassa until the gill net ban in 1994/95. Even part-time fishermen kept boats ready for the season. All around the river yards of stick fences were strung with drying nets.



Nets drying in Homosassa

Another occupation for the local farmers and fisher families was to collect and wash Spanish Moss for sale to mattress factories up north.

One more stop on our heritage trail is BLUEBIRD SPRING **18** a group of five springs that resulted from digging for limerock to build roads in the area. It is a beautiful place for a picnic where adults and children can enjoy nature on its own terms. Originally known as Gator Hole, it is located on the eastern part of Yulee Drive (once known as Crooked Road), by the intersection with Bradshaw Boulevard.