

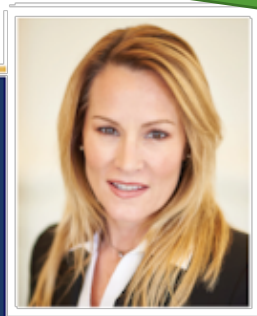
Welcome

TO

CLAY COUNTY

Stories from the Water's Edge

By Archives Specialist Vishi Garig



FROM THE HONORABLE
TARA S. GREEN

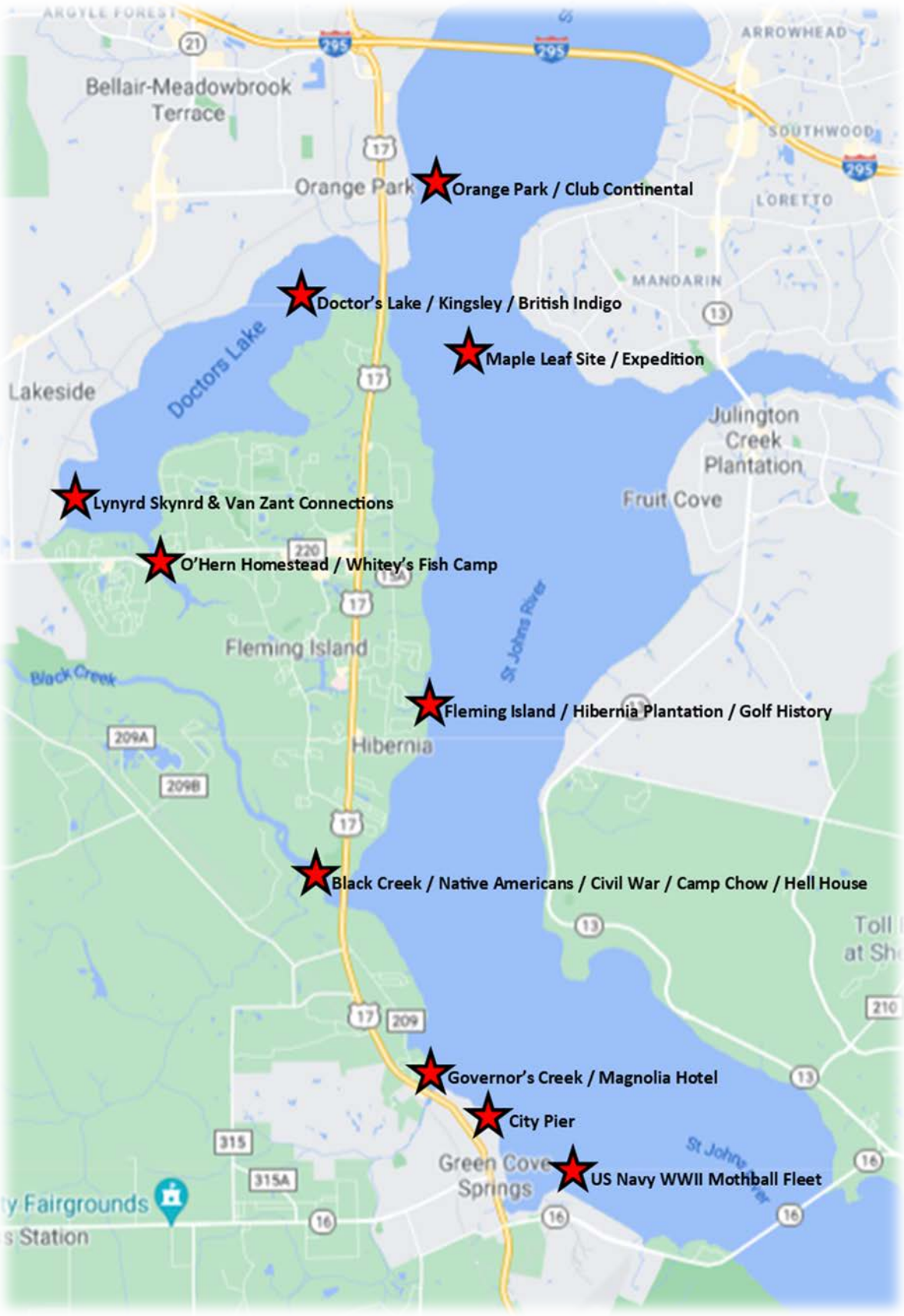
The Clay County Archives Center, a service of the Clay County Clerk of Court and Comptroller's Office, contains a wealth of historical documents, artifacts and photos dating back to the 1850's. Archives staff preserve and protect these important records and are happy to share information about our home. The many waterways around and through our beautiful county help tell the many stories of our people and events. What better way to learn these stories than while out on a boat, cruising along the water's edge. Enjoy your tour.



This booklet contains examples of stories that can be told “from the water’s edge”, but there are many, many more! Please contact our Archives Specialist with questions about other historical locations in and around Clay County.

Clay County Archives Center (904) 371- 0027





- Orange Park / Club Continental
- Doctor's Lake / Kingsley / British Indigo
- Maple Leaf Site / Expedition
- Lynyrd Skynrd & Van Zant Connections
- O'Hern Homestead / Whitey's Fish Camp
- Fleming Island / Hibernia Plantation / Golf History
- Black Creek / Native Americans / Civil War / Camp Chow / Hell House
- Governor's Creek / Magnolia Hotel
- City Pier
- US Navy WWII Mothball Fleet

United States Navy WWII Mothball Fleet

The period immediately before and during World War II brought new growth to Green Cove Springs. In



September 1940, the U.S. Navy opened Naval Air Station Lee Field in honor of Ensign Benjamin Lee who had lost his life in a crash at Killinghome, England during World War I. In August 1943, the facility was renamed Naval Air Station Green Cove Springs (Lee Field) and consisted of four 5,000-foot asphalt runways. After the war, NAS Green Cove Springs was downgraded in status to a Naval Auxiliary Air Station (NAAS) as part of the greater NAS Jacksonville complex. A total of 13 piers were also

constructed along the west bank of the St. Johns River adjacent to NAAS Green Cove Springs (Lee Field) to house a U.S. Navy "Mothball Fleet" of some 300 vessels, primarily destroyers, destroyer escorts and fleet auxiliaries. In 1960, the Navy decommissioned NAAS Green Cove Springs and the pier facility. Some of the mothballed vessels were transferred to foreign navies while others were relocated to other Reserve Fleet locations. The base is present-day Reynolds Industrial Park. From Spring Park, you can see what is left of the piers.



Companies like Mobro Marine are currently using it to repair ferries and smaller ships. For example, the *Research Vessel Arctic Discoverer* which was the workhorse of the successful effort to find and salvage the greatest shipwrecked treasure in United States history. In September 1857, the *SS Central America*, a sidewheel steamer bound for New York from Panama, found itself at the mercy of a hurricane off the coast of South Carolina. On board were 38,000 pieces of U.S. mail, 578 passengers and crew, and tons of California gold (an estimated 40,000 pounds of gold when the ship sunk).

Also, one of the Space Shuttle Program's fuel tank is stored here.



In 2019, in a driving thunderstorm, a B737 over ran the runway at NAS Jax and plunged into the river.



Later, it was towed to Mobro Marine in Green Cove Springs.

FORT SAN FRANCISCO DE PUPO

Did you know that we have a Spanish era fort in our county? Located on the banks of the St Johns River, south of the Shands Bridge, on private property, once stood Fort Pupo (the sister fort of Fort Picolata which was located across the river on the east bank). Fort Picolata protected the Mission San Diego de Salamototo. Initially a 1650's ferry crossing, Fort Pupo was used by Spanish friars traveling from St. Augustine to Picolata, who then crossed the river to land on our side.

Thus began the Spanish Mission Trail west across Florida. The mission trail was the result of efforts to Christianize the Native Americans shortly after Pedro Menendez's victory over the French when Spanish colonists needed to build profitable Catholic settlements. Not all Spaniards had the same agenda in Florida. Some wished to use the Native Americans as laborers and military allies for the new colony. Others were there for the religious conversion of the native people. Since the local Timucua were semi-nomadic, in order to convert them, missionaries needed to gather the Native Americans into permanent settlements. Thus began the mission system and the subsequent Camino Real (King's Road). This road later became known as the Bellamy Road (first federal highway) and it cut southwest across Clay County from the Bayard Conservation area to around Melrose.



The British colonies to our north were not on good terms with the Spanish. Both regularly raided each other's territory. In the early 1700's, when James Moore, the English governor of colonial Carolina, carried out attacks, he succeeded in wiping out most of the Spanish missions in Florida. This caused the Spanish to begin building more forts and attacking the British. It is thought that this is when Pupo was first built. Pupo's first incarnation was a simple wooden sentry post which barely held 8 men and their guns. It was only 8 feet in diameter; quite small. Fort Picolatta was similar.

By 1714 an uneasy peace accord was reached. In 1737, the Spanish Royal Engineer Arredondo, took notice of the two small forts and found them falling down and crumbling. He recommended an immediate rebuilding and reinforcement. The 1714 peace agreement did not last long. In 1740, General Oglethorpe, the British general from the colony of Georgia (of which he was a founder), chose this as an opportunity to invade St Augustine, beginning with raids on Forts Pupo and Picolatta. He landed his troops, with a full contingent of native scouts, about four miles up from the fort. In a classic pincher movement, he trapped the fort between the river and his troops. A day-long artillery barrage ensued and finally the Spanish surrendered. Oglethorpe took out Fort Picolata and went on to raid St Augustine.

This was the end of Pupo as a fort. In 1818, George Clarke received a 1,000 acre Spanish land grant which included what was left of the fort. Later known as Bayard, it became part of Clark's larger grant of 16,000 acres. His heirs later sold off the land. Later, Clay County Sherriff John P. Hall owned part of the property which lead to the creation of the Bayard Conservation area, enjoyed by citizens today. The fort is a sensitive and archeologically significant site. 1950-1952, Dr. John Goggin, a well-respected archeologist, conducted a study of the fort. When he dug his trenches, he discovered Native American pottery dating to the "Orange Series" (1000 BC), which means the site at Pupo was used by early native people long before it ever became a Spanish fort. 1,532 potshards and 210 artifacts including locks, a gun barrel, pipes Today, it is eroding into the river and will eventually be lost to time and the elements.

Magnolia Hotel/ Military Academy



The Magnolia Hotel was the largest and grandest of the hotels built in Clay County. She was located across Governors Creek from Green Cove Springs. Today, the St. Johns Landing Apartment complex stands in her place. The Magnolia existed since before the Civil War, but on a much smaller scale. It was in the 1870's that the huge 300-room hotel was built. An artesian well feed a pool and a water bottling plant on the grounds. The hotel burned down in 1924 when it was being used as a military academy. President Grover Cleveland and Harriet Beecher Stowe were once guests. President Grant enjoyed a day visit there and Thomas Edison was also once a guest.



Guests delighted in the latest innovations of elevator, intercoms to summon liveried servants and both gas and electric lighting. Ladies took tea in the lavishly decorated lounge amidst oriental rugs, European landscape paintings, and crystal chandeliers. Diplomats, congressmen and even Italian opera stars were seemingly charmed by the Florida scenery, customs and people. They bought woven palmetto hats, shipped oranges to everyone they knew, and doffed stockings and laced ankle boots to dangle their feet in the sulfur spring. One

supposed grand dame even stood in line in a shop in Green Cove to purchase a live baby alligator for her grandchildren.

The Black Creek

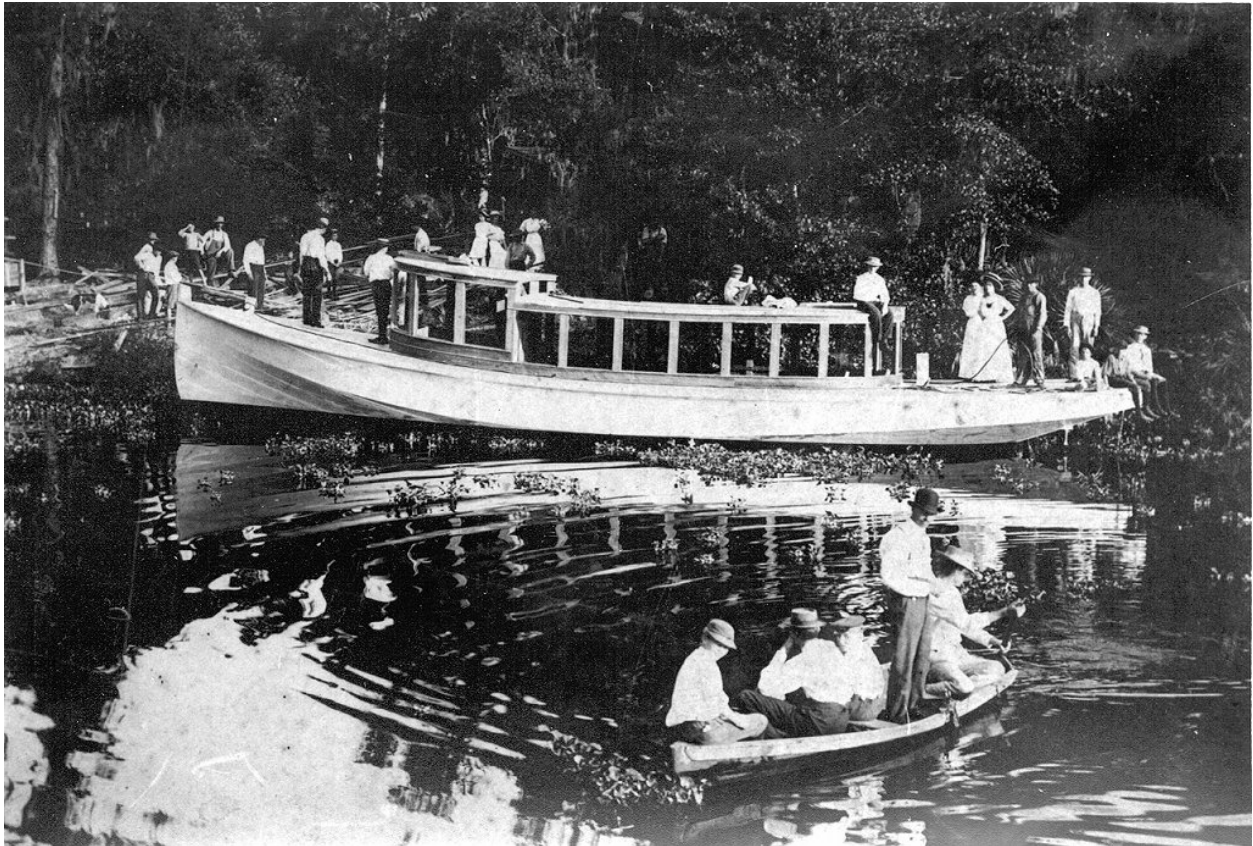
Black Creek is a major tributary of the St. Johns River. It is navigable approximately 12 miles into the interior of Clay County. Middleburg is located at the forks of the Black Creek. Prehistoric peoples lived along the banks of the creek evidenced by burial mounds, some several thousand years old. (Bubba Midden, Princess Mound).

During the Second Seminole War, Fort Heileman (the supply depot for all Northeast Florida) was located in the forks of Black Creek in Middleburg. During the Civil War the creek was a major transporter of troops and cotton. There were a few skirmishes along Black Creek's shores and a Civil War era Confederate battery and trench exists in the Lake Asbury area. The name of the development is Battery Bluff.



The creek was home to purveyors of timber, cattle, cotton and other agricultural products beginning in the 1830's. Currently, it is best known as a major recreational area. There is a conservation area (Ravines Park), fishing piers, boat ramps, kayak launches, nature walks, and abundant fishing.

Black Creek is home to the endangered Black Creek crayfish (*Procambarus pictus*), gators of all sizes and many families of manatees. Black Creek is also one of the cleanest, deepest waterways in Florida, despite the color of the water (caused by cypress trees), which is deceiving.



Camp Chowenwaw



In the 1930s, a group of Duval County women with a mission were bewitched by a 42-acre parcel with 1,500 feet fronting on the south bluff of Black Creek. The 1933 Chowenwaw Campers quickly mastered the bow and arrow at the archery range on the shore of Black Creek. With limited funds and infectious enthusiasm, they set out to build a summer camp for Girl Scouts to be named Chowenwaw, meaning “Little Sister”. It was a bold plan in the midst of the Great Depression, but they never faltered. These women pinched every penny.

They enlisted the support of the Duval County Emergency Relief Council, the overseers of federal funds to create jobs for skilled and unskilled laborers. With unflagging zeal they enticed potential contributors to visit the site and become infected with their vision. It worked. Scores of Jacksonville muckety-mucks traipsed through the woods beside Black Creek in that January 1933. As many Black Creek settlers since the mid-1800s, the women took advantage of the natural bounty of the land to provide building materials and stretch their limited budget. Trees were cut and a leased tractor-powered sawmill began cutting boards as soon as the first one hit the ground. A supply of suitable pine trees was set aside, and men commenced scraping bark and shaping them for construction of the main log cabin. Cypress shingles were hand sawed and hand whittled pegs used instead of nails. Clay mined from the site was used to chink the logs in the main cabin. In the hands of skilled carpenters, a few carefully selected magnolia trees became furniture.

On July 1, 1933, the camp was dedicated and the first camper arrived. For decades, Camp Chowenwaw enriched the lives of generations of young women and girls by providing them a place to master new skills and explores new talents.



Peter's Creek



A tributary of Black Creek, Peter's Creek is famous as being the waterfront home of the "Hell House", Lynyrd Skynyrd's rehearsal cabin, the birthplace of

many of their best-known southern rock anthems. The house was perched on the bank of the creek and was where band members spent whole days and nights practicing, writing, rehearsing, fishing, swimming and "relaxing". It afforded privacy for the famous Van Zants and their bandmates as, at that time in the early 1970s, it was in the middle of nowhere. Now, it's a subdivision called Edgewater where several streets

are named after band songs - Freebird Loop and Tuesday's Cove, for example. A chunk of concrete from the Hell House foundation is on display at the Clay County Archives Center.



Ed King, Allen Collins, Gary Rossington, Ronnie Van Zant, Billy Powell, Leon Wilkeson, Artimus Pyle at Hell House



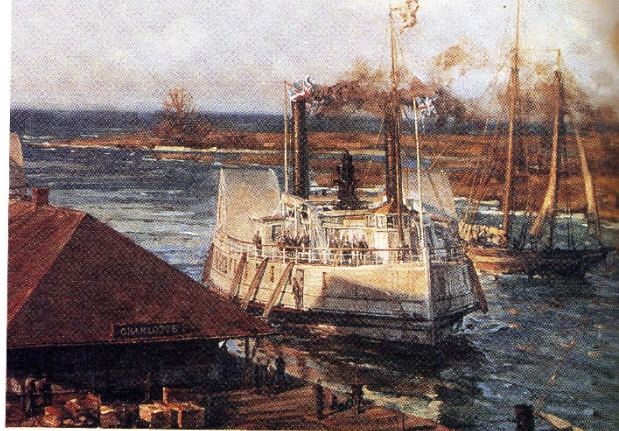
The Lynyrd Skynyrd Band down by the creek.

Several Van Zant family members still live in Clay County and are involved in charitable projects. Johnny Van Zant, the current lead singer of the band (seen here with Lark Smith, daughter of county Archives Specialist Vishi Garig), helped make a recent fundraiser for military veterans a success at the Thrasher-Horne Performing Arts Center.



The Maple Leaf: An Underwater Archeological Site

The spring of 1864 brought mine warfare to the shores of Clay County. The Union was running troop transports and gunboats up and down the St. Johns River under Union General Truman Seymour's campaign to gain control of North Florida. Captain E. Pliny Bryan, from Charleston, was a member of the Confederate signal corps and a Confederate spy. Bryan was sent by General Alexander to Clay County to conduct mine warfare in the river. Bryan's first move was to enlist the help of the locals. Enter one Joshua Daniel O'Hern.



O'Hern was 37 when he enlisted in the Florida Volunteers, 2nd Regiment. He signed up for the duration of the Civil War. His wife, Mary Jane Brantley, and their six daughters lived on land on the south side of Doctor's Lake in an area that is now called Swimming Pen Creek and Doctors Inlet. His photograph shows a man with pale eyes and a worn face. In 1865, this same man was elected sheriff of Clay County.

The Confederates found that placing the cheap and easily-made "beer barrel" mines in the river was a great way to sink Union ships. They were made of wood, used a good amount of gunpowder and were easily concealed under the surface of the water. They were simple but deadly. Ships who struck the mines had large holes blown in their hulls and frequently sunk. A waterway could be effectively shut down by the strategic placement of the mines or "torpedoes" as they were then called.

Captain Bryan requisitioned 12 forty-pound torpedoes, 800 hundred pounds of gunpowder, 300 Rains primers and some anchors. It is speculated that O'Hern and a few others built the mines at his property on Doctors Lake and placed the mines in the St. Johns. One such mine was placed near the shores of Mandarin, on the side opposite Clay County. This was done, on May 30th by Bryan and his local helpers. They waited past dark and rowed across the river. The mine was tied to a rope and a weight then thrown overboard. There it lay just below the surface waiting for an unsuspecting victim.

The *Maple Leaf* was that victim. The steamship and troop transport *Maple Leaf* was not a new ship. Her keel was laid in the 1850's in Ontario. She first worked the waterways of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River before being leased to the Union Army. Her Captain was Henry Dale of Massachusetts. The day she was sunk, she carried Union troops, officers, Confederate prisoners and three regiments worth of troop baggage. She came up the St. Johns and stopped at Palatka. Loaded and low in the water, she departed Palatka late on March 30th, 1864 on the way back to Jacksonville.

4:00 a.m., April 1, 1864, near Mandarin: The *Maple Leaf*, the *General Hunter* and the *Harriet A. Weed* were nearing Beauclerc's Bluff, near Mandarin. Most of the people on board *Maple Leaf* were sound asleep in their berths. The crew manning the ship, likely dozing at that hour, were suddenly awakened by a huge explosion which shook the entire ship. Wood splinters flew everywhere, and smoke, fire and water consumed the bow. She began to take on water *quickly*. The alarm sounded and the crew and their Confederate prisoners and Union guards rapidly went overboard to get off the sinking ship.

When the smoke cleared and order restored, it was evident that the Confederate mine had not only sunk the *Maple Leaf* but killed four of its crew. It could have been much worse. The ship was not totally under water; her smoke stacks protruded and created a major shipping hazard. About 2 feet of water covered her deck. But, she was a complete loss, water filling her hull. Bryan wrote his commanding officer, General Alexander, bragging about the success of mining mission. In particular, he named Joshua D. O'Hern as being particularly helpful. On April 2, Bryan and members of the First Georgia Regular Infantry and the Florida Light Artillery unloaded their artillery on the wreck. Bryan set fire to what remained.

By no means were the Confederates done with mining the river. On April 16 the *General Hunter* was passing the wreck of the *Maple Leaf*, hit a mine and was blown to bits. It took her 3 minutes to sink and took with her the quartermaster of the ship. As fast as the Union found the mines, Bryan replaced them. On May 9, the *Harriet A. Weed* was sunk near Cedar Creek, taking five men to the bottom. On May 11, *The Vixen* was passing the wreck of the *Weed* when a sharp-eyed sailor saw ripples in the water, the kind of ripples that indicate something hidden just under the surface. Upon investigation, a mine was discovered. On June 19, 1864, the *Alice Price*, was sunk.

O'Hern and his compatriots became wanted men. The Union sent troops to find and "summarily deal with anyone caught putting down torpedoes in the water." A few days late and a dollar short, the Union realized that O'Hern and Bryan had been building torpedoes on the shores of Doctors Lake.

The *Maple Leaf* sunk deeply into the mud of the St. Johns River. And she lay there for over 120 years till she was explored by Dr. Keith Holland and his team of underwater archeologists in 1984. Today, the *Maple Leaf* is on the National Register of Historic Places. The public is not allowed to dive on her. However, her artifacts, of which there are over 3,000, makes it the *largest* Civil War confederate collection in the world. You can see some of them at the Clay County Courthouse in Green Cove Springs.

General Information about the St. Johns River

- Longest river in Florida - 310 miles long – and one of the few rivers in the USA that flows north.
- Because the river flows north, the upper basin is the area to the south that forms its marshy headwaters. The middle basin is the area in central Florida where the river widens forming lakes Harney, Jesup, Monroe and George. The lower basin is the area in Northeast Florida from Putnam County to the river's mouth in Duval County.
- Source of the river, or headwaters, is a large marshy area in Indian River County; it flows north and turns eastward at Jacksonville to its mouth in the Atlantic Ocean
- Width of the river varies. It is a broad marsh at its headwaters and averages more than two miles in width between Palatka and Jacksonville. It widens to form large lakes in central Florida.
- Total drop of the river from its source in swamps south of Melbourne to its mouth in the Atlantic near Jacksonville is less than 30 feet, or about one inch per mile, making it one of the "laziest" rivers in the world.
- Amazing wildlife includes manatees, alligators, and many varieties of fish, snakes and birds – and an occasional shark.
- Major tributaries, or smaller streams and rivers that flow into the St. Johns River include the Wekiva River, Econlockhatchee River, the Ocklawaha River and Black Creek
- The St. Johns River was designated an American Heritage River by President Clinton. The St. Johns is the only river in Florida and one of only 14 rivers in the entire United States to receive this prestigious national recognition.

Fleming Island: Hibernia, The Fleming Family & Golf in Florida



George Fleming received Hibernia as a Spanish land grant during the Second Spanish Period. The land is now known as Fleming Island. The area where the original homestead was is still called Hibernia. After the Civil War, Margret Seton Fleming, wife of Lewis Fleming (son of George Fleming) opened up her home as a winter retreat for northerners. She was taking advantage of the reliable railroad travel, steamboat routes and the boom in Florida tourism.

Fanny Brown Brings Golf to Hibernia

Golf at Hibernia, on Fleming's Island, was a game dominated by women – and, on top of the heap of trendsetters was Miss Fanny Brown. It was around 1880 when Fanny and the Fleming Family became acquainted. In 1882, she bought five acres of land along the St. Johns River at Hibernia. Miss Brown was from Pennsylvania's Philadelphia Main Line area, the upper crust social region of suburban Philadelphia. This wealthy spinster lived off a trust fund. She named her winter home here The Myrtles, which was a delightful cottage on the grounds of the old Hibernia Plantation. The family members were personal friends of President Ulysses S. Grant. Eventually, Fanny Brown bought several more parcels of land and built a golf course with nine holes. Originally known as "The Links", the golf course surrounded Fanny's house on three sides. Today, you can still see the fairways outlining the houses of the Hibernia Links subdivision. The course was also known as Hibernia Golf Club and officially opened as such in 1899. During this decade, records show the state of Florida only had about eighteen golf courses in all. The oldest golf course in Florida is Belleaire at the Belleaire County Club, built in 1897. This course is located on our state's west coast near Tampa.



Hibernia Golf Club's 1899 opening likely means this course was just the second public golf course built in Florida, and certainly the first in Northeast Florida. Fanny Brown's success, wealth and politics frayed the nerves of some local "gentlemen". Miss Brown put her money where her mouth was during the suffrage movement, which led to anti-vote protests on her golf course. Brown was undaunted. Fanny had world-class golfers playing at her course and she too had world-class tastes. A hand-written note reveals that she was fond of ordering liver pate and fancy biscuits from a northern

firm, an order delivered express to her at Hibernia. This note can be seen at the Clay County Archives in Green Cove Springs along with many photos of golfers on the original course.

The Hibernia Golf Club course was a simple affair but loved by all who golfed there. William Hoyt, a wealthy grocer from Chicago and winter resident of Green Cove Springs, crowed about it in a 1908 golf magazine.

“I came here to my winter home in November,” Hoyt wrote. “I found the golf links as perfect as ever. I play every day and am pleased to say my game is as good as ever. I wish all my friends could be here to enjoy the perfect weather we are having and see nature at its best.”



A yearly tournament was held at Hibernia that attracted professional golfers. The most famous female golfer of the time, Pansy Griscom, played at the course. Pansy, winner of the Women’s USGA Golf Championship in 1900, was, like Fanny, a wealthy Philadelphia Main Liner.

In a 1971 newspaper interview Griscom talked about playing golf at Hibernia. It was in 1888 that she first came to Hibernia. “It was the year of our famous blizzard. We came to a place called Hibernia on the St. Johns River. We boarded with the Fleming Family that owned Hibernia. We’d come down in a private railroad car. Father was the director of the Pennsylvania Railroad. I had never spent the night in anything other than a private railway car....never saw the inside of a Pullman till I was 30.”



Interestingly, Pansy’s father Clement Griscom later went into the marine shipping business and ended up investing in the White Star Line, famous for the Titanic disaster. The Griscoms bought a few acres from one of the Flemings and built a winter home. After Mr. Griscom’s death, Fanny Brown bought the property and the home. She later sold it back to the Flemings for just \$100. That home is all that is left of Hibernia Plantation today. It is called Holly

Cottage and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Miss Brown’s 1916 will (available for public viewing at the Clay County Archives) gave the golf course land to the President and Board of Directors of the Hibernia Golf Club. She left her niece, Fanny Brown Coleman, in charge and left her money to maintain the course at her discretion. In 1925, Fanny’s niece sold the course back to the Flemings for, ironically, \$100. There are numerous golf courses now in operation on Fleming Island. Many of the same perks exist as were mentioned in the 1900’s advertisements.

**Hibernia, Fleming’s Island,
FLORIDA.**

AN ATTRACTIVE old-fashioned Southern home, surrounded by oak and orange groves, delightfully situated on the beautiful St. Johns River, twenty-three miles South of Jacksonville.

Among the many attractions are pleasant society, pure artesian water, swimming pool, tennis court, good boating and fishing; a short distance from the famous Black Creek, a pleasant drive to Magnolia and Green Cove Springs.

Excellent table, fresh vegetables, milk and poultry.

Steamers leaving Jacksonville for Hibernia are:

Sylvester or Hancox at 8.30 a. m. daily, Sunday excepted.

Manatee 2.30 p. m. daily, except Sunday.

Governor Safford, Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8 a. m.

Hibernia can be reached ^{from} by rail to Green Cove Springs or Magnolia ^{by} and carriage or boat.

For further particulars address

F. A. FLEMING.

Doctor's Lake

Truth is, it isn't a true lake, as it is actually an inlet, openly connected to the St. Johns. Because of the estuarine nature of the St. Johns River, Doctors Lake is itself somewhat brackish. Zephaniah Kingsley originally owned much of the land around Doctors Lake, and established the Laurel Grove Plantation there in the early 1800s. Kingsley captained a ship in the West Indies and was absent from the plantation much of the time. An overseer was left in charge of his 100 or so slaves, while the plantation's house was looked after by a 13-year-old slave, Anta Madjiguene Ndiaye, who Kingsley purchased in Havana in 1806. Kingsley later married the young woman and had four children.

During the British period, the shorelines of the lake were lined with indigo plantations. John and William Bartram traveled and explored Doctor's Lake and Black Creek for seven days in 1746, staying overnight at one of these plantations.

Why is it called Doctor's Lake? No one has figured that out yet. Briefly called Lake Levett (after the Francis Levett land grant) during the British period, it has been known as Doctor's Lake since the second Spanish Period.

Swimming Pen Creek Ferry (replaced by the bridge at Whitey's Fish Camp)



Orange Park

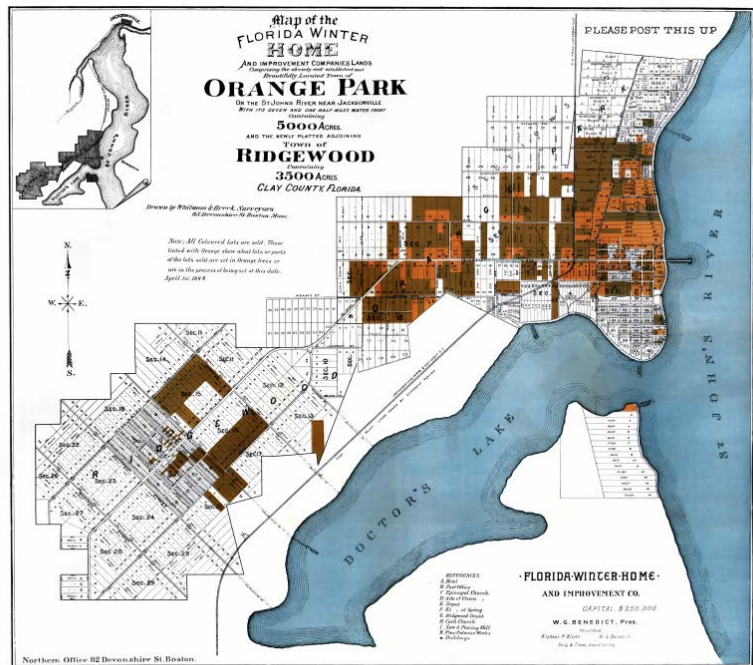
The Town of Orange Park was founded in 1877 by the Florida Winter Home and Improvement Company, with owners and trustees predominantly from Boston. As a direct result of hard times following the Civil War, the old "McIntosh" plantation at Laurel Grove was in shambles and changed hands several times. After purchasing several thousand acres of property in the area, the Florida Winter Home and Improvement Company created a new town and called it Orange Park. The property was subdivided into building lots and small farm tracts, and the present street

system was laid out which included Kingsley Avenue, River Road and Plainfield Avenue. To enhance the sale of the property to northerners, many lots were planted in Orange trees, a cash crop even in those days. Two years later, following a local referendum, the town was incorporated by a Special Act of the Florida Legislature in 1879. A large hotel was built at the foot of Kingsley Avenue, along with a 1,200 foot wood pier which extended well into the river, accommodating steamboats and the growing northern tourist trade.

As a young United States began to grow, it flexed its' military muscle along the Spanish border which was also the Georgia frontier. By a secret act passed by the U.S. Congress, President Monroe was authorized to bring Spanish Florida under United States control. By the summer of 1813, General Matthews, using volunteers and the Georgia Militia, invaded Spanish East Florida which triggered the "Patriots Rebellion". Reluctant at first, Zephania Kingsley and other wealthy planters along the St. Johns River joined the short lived revolt against Spanish authority. Several weeks later, the general's forces left East Florida and Laurel Grove was burned to the ground.



Since those early days, Orange Park has grown dramatically and developed as the northeastern gateway to Clay County. Commerce and business flourish. The new Town Hall built in 1995 is a tribute to the Town of Orange Park and stands as an outstanding example of the character of residents and the farsightedness of those who call Orange Park home.



Map of the Florida Winter Home and Improvement Companies Lands, 1884
Whitman & Breck. (Boston, MA: Heliotype Printing Co., 1884)
Downloaded from Maps ETC, on the web at <http://etc.usf.edu/maps> [map #3861]

History of the Club Continental Estate (in Orange Park)

Club Continental history begins in the 1880's when B.J. Johnson, founder of the Palmolive Soap Company, was looking for a place to escape the harsh Wisconsin climate. He brought his family to the little town of Orange Park to winter. His daughter, Karrie, came to love her new home, and in 1906 she and her husband bought a circa 1870 waterfront estate in Orange Park. They named their property Winterbourne, or "Winter Waterway" in her husband's native Scottish tongue. The house still stands and serves as a beautiful venue for weddings, receptions, business meetings and other gatherings.

A few years later, Karrie persuaded her brother Caleb Johnson to buy a portion of her property. He and his wife Elinor commissioned an architectural firm in Milwaukee to design a Mediterranean structure they named Mira Rio. Building began in early 1922 and the family took up residence in May, 1923.

Elinor Johnson and her daughter Margaret loved to have their friends from the north visit during the "season", and often all nine bedrooms were full of guests. In the early 1920's there were parties and activities of all sorts from bridge, horseback riding, boating and swimming to formal balls. Fountains and tiles from the era remain. Jon Masee, Margaret Johnson Masee's son, conceived the idea of turning Mira Rio into a private member club. Thus, in 1966, the Club Continental was born. The Club Continental, managed by Karrie Masee, Jon's daughter, has grown to over 700 members who enjoy and appreciate the atmosphere of "Old Florida" the Club has grown to represent.



Your tour of Clay County's easternmost side along the St. John's River may very well begin or end at Whitey's Fish Camp on Swimming Pen Creek. This location is iconic in Northeast Florida and has been the place where locals relax for generations.



Open since 1963 Whitey's Fish Camp is a family-owned establishment offering delicious seafood cuisine, bar, fishing, boat rentals, campgrounds, and more. Many a big fish tale has been told here! After a day on Clay County's waterways, you may have a fish tale to tell, too!

On behalf of Clay County Clerk of Court and Comptroller Tara S. Green and her entire staff, thank you for your interest in Clay County history. We hope that you learned more about our interesting county and its rich history.



A special thanks to Archives Specialist Vishi Garig, a wealth of knowledge and a great story-teller.

If something Vishi mentioned in these articles sparked your interest or resulted in a new-found desire to know more about Clay County's history, please don't hesitate to reach out for more information.

www.clayclerk.com (click on Historical Archives)

(904) 371-0027 (Archives)