

Search For Yesterday

A History of Levy County, Florida



Chapter One



Published By The
Levy County Archives Committee

Sponsored by the Levy County Board of Commissioners

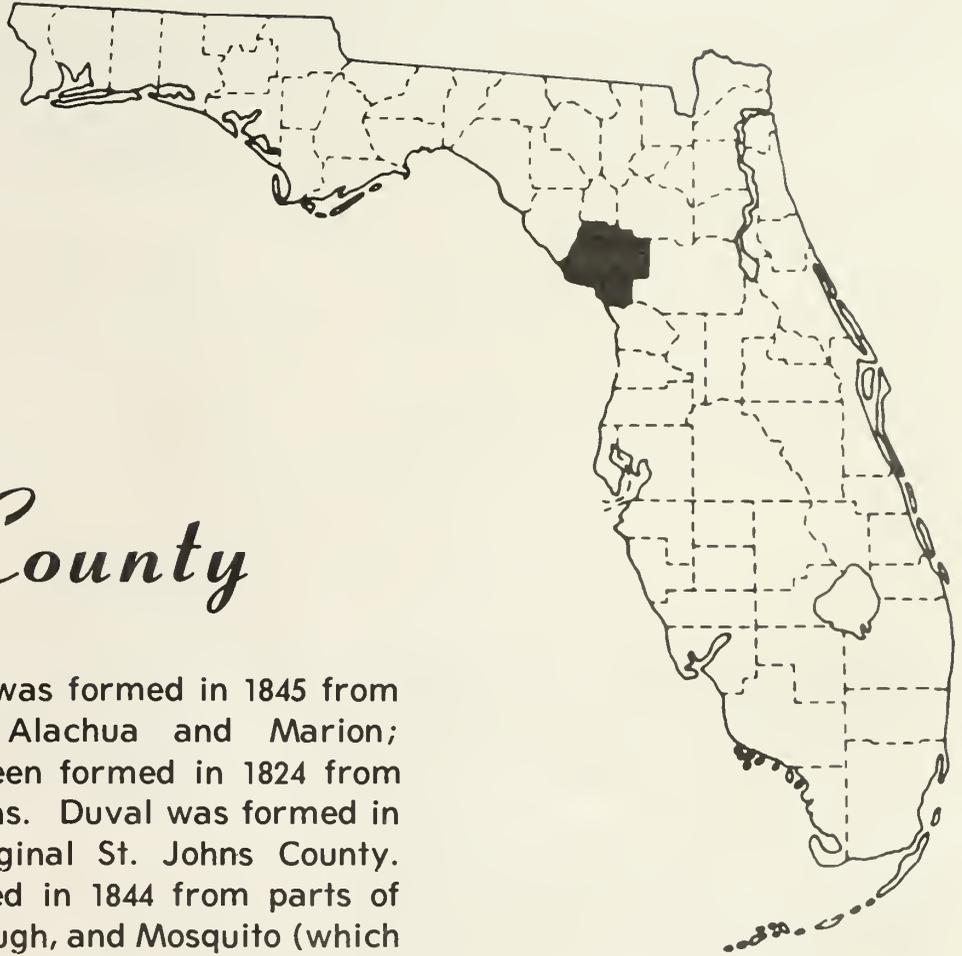
February 1, 1977

at

Bronson, Florida

A Bicentennial Publication

**Copyright © 1977
Levy County Archives Committee**



Levy County

Levy County was formed in 1845 from the counties of Alachua and Marion; Alachua having been formed in 1824 from Duval and St. Johns. Duval was formed in 1822 from the original St. Johns County. Marion was formed in 1844 from parts of Alachua, Hillsborough, and Mosquito (which was changed to Orange County in 1845).

Levy County is now bounded on the south by the Gulf of Mexico, west by Dixie County, north by Gilchrist and Alachua, and on the east by Marion County. The county seat is Bronson, Florida.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2018 with funding from
University of Florida, George A. Smathers Libraries

<https://archive.org/details/searchforyesterd1119levy>

Introduction

This first and the following chapters of the History of Levy County are being compiled by members of the County Archives Committee and other contributors. Writers of each chapter will be identified at the chapter's beginning.

Plans are to publish the history one chapter at the time, each publication being separated by an interval of time from the previous chapter. The format is designed for use with a loose-leaf binder so succeeding chapters may be added as they are published. These binders will be available through the Archives Committee.

The original intent of the committee was to produce a brief, but factual history of the area now known as Levy County -- we in our naivete thought this could be accomplished by midsummer 1976 and by year's end we would have a film nearing completion. THAT was before we became immersed in the study of the documents

available to us -- before we interviewed dozens of descendants of those colorful but hardy pioneers who have made dozens of treasured photographs available to us.

Faced with such a treasure-trove of information, we have found it an almost impossible task to decide what to publish and what to delete, thus the decision to publish the story in several editions, and in more detail.

Our effort has been one of continued excited discovery and we are convinced our past has all the romance and drama to be found anywhere. We believe you will find pleasure in sharing our findings.

We appreciate the tremendous help we have had from so many people and wish that we could acknowledge all of them by name. The best we can do is to simply say, thank you.

--Jean Cooper

Handwritten signature or name at the top of the page.

First paragraph of faint, illegible text.

Second paragraph of faint, illegible text.

Third paragraph of faint, illegible text.

Faint text on the left side of the page.

Second block of faint text on the left side.

Third block of faint text on the left side.

Fourth block of faint text on the left side.

Dedication



SIDNEY ESTUS GUNNELL

We who have worked for this past year and a half with Mr. Sidney Estus Gunnell are delighted to have this opportunity to dedicate Chapter One of "Search for Yesterday," a History of Levy County, to his untiring efforts, profound knowledge and his love of this County.

He was born in 1918 in Mississippi and grew up on a farm there. He earned a Bachelor of Science Degree from the Mississippi State University and his Masters from the University of Southern Mississippi and also studied Electronics at the University of Chicago. He is a veteran of the U. S. Army having served in World War II.

He is married to the former Allie Mae Britt and they moved to Bronson, Florida, in 1954. He taught High School Science at the Bronson School for thirteen years and English at the Chiefland School for three years. He retired from teaching in 1971.

We say retired from teaching because he is very active right on, writing the column for the newspaper "Search for Yesterday" which this committee voted unanimously to use as the only fitting title for the History of this County. He also is a member of the American Legion Post at Williston, Florida, and the Levy County Archives Committee and the Historical Society of Levy County. In addition to all the above, he has served for the past few years as the agent for the Levy County Education Association.

We of the Archives Committee deem it a privilege to have served with him in this endeavor and proudly dedicate this first chapter to Mr. Sidney Estus Gunnell.

Resha E. Hudson, Sr.
Lindon J. Lindsey
Jean Cooper
Norma M. Hutson
Iris N. Garner
Norene Andrews
Kay Hall
Kathryn Harris

The Land and the Waters

By S. E. Gunnell

The Levy County area has been in and out of the sea several times. Over the eons of geological time the local landscape has presented drastically different aspects from its appearance today. Steaming tropical jungles have alternated with the snow of hardwood and coniferous forests as the prehistoric earth went through its hothouse and ice ages.

During the long reign of the giant reptiles, this area was mostly under water and their fossils are found here but rarely. There were some sea-going dinosaurs and other giant reptilians and a few finds have been made in the state. But the scope of this writing is intended to provide only the immediate background for the present topography of Levy County.

At one point during the Lower Pleistocene period, the Waccasassa Bay was tremendous in size. Its southern shoreline curved inland beginning at the Crystal River area, on west of Williston, touched Archer, went east of Trenton and headed toward Bell. It had to curve around and come back with the northern shore returning to the Gulf, but the shoreline is lost in the northern part. Subsequent happenings have blurred the evidence. At this point, the Bay would have been a diminutive remnant of the much older width of open ocean which separated Florida from the mainland. That northern shoreline was near Perry.

To get back to the Bay at our point during the Pleistocene, its southern shoreline stayed relatively stable for a long, long time. The surf had to be very turbulent and there would have been violent storms. Sand



Store in Old Williston.



Part of the Big Mills at Otter Creek, About 1905.

dunes were piled up by all this action, causing the shoreline to recede, slowly. Finally, a belt of large sand dunes from five to eight miles wide rimmed the shoreline, which at this new point ran just west of Rainbow Lake Estates, right through the middle of Bronson, and into the southwest corner of Gilchrist County.

And at this second point, the dune-building was halted by the beginning of another and bigger happening -- the last Ice age started. The prehistoric Waccasassa Bay disappeared rather abruptly, maybe within thirty thousand years. In geologic time, that's abrupt. So much water was trapped in the gigantic polar caps and glaciers that, down here, the sea level dropped, the Bay was drained, its flat bottom rose (weight of the water had exerted a compression effect), and the edge of the Gulf would have been miles west of Cedar Key. We now call the Bay bottom the flatwoods.

During that Ice age, some rather exotic animals strayed out into the newly formed

marsh -- mastodons, camels, large ground sloths, small horses, and a few others which no longer exist as such. Some of them got stuck in the muck, so to speak, and died. Their bones were covered by mud and silt and turred into stone fossils, albeit somewhat soft fossils. About that camel and horse, this continent was their original home. They migrated to Asia when the Bering Strait was a connecting land bridge.

After the ice age waned, the sea level rose again, and at this time, we are somewhat between ice ages.

Back to our second point during the Pleistocene, a County map shows the residue of offshore deeps or "gouge-outs" as a chain of loosely defined lakes and ponds running parallel to the old shore line. When you start from Bronson to Archer, you are going through the old dunes. They now appear as gently rounded hills of sand and show no strata lines characteristic of sediment-formed and erosion-shaped hills. The topography of the dunes must have been



Old Chiefland in the thirties.



Otter Creek Lumber Company.



Ira J. Carter Home in Judson about 1880.



A. A. Carter on the Suwannee River.

Cedar Key about 1900.

wild and picturesque at their second point during the Pleistocene, but their outlines have been much softened by many years of rain and wind. The old sea bottom is still under there. The Waccasassa River is an old tidal marsh drainway.

East of Bronson where highway construction has cut through one of the ancient sand dunes, a superficial profile is visible. About twenty feet below the surface, the original material of a small hill is still there under the overlay of beach sand. The "old" earth shows some indication of being volcanic in origin.

Our Gulf shoreline has moved in and out several times. Years ago, a trawler found the petrified stump of a tree on the bottom some forty miles offshore from Cedar Key.

The present shoreline is moving inland at some places and receding at others and this is a function of wave erosion or sediment buildup, whichever happens to be at any specific location.

The land surface moves vertically. If we imagine time-lapse photography from a point two miles up with one frame each fifty years, and this went on long enough to accumulate a reel of film, the film would show the land surface slowly undulating in random swells much like the deep sea surface.

That vertical motion from subterranean shifts, plus erosion and sediment deposit, plus the sea level fluctuating in synchronization with tropical and ice ages, plus continental drift, all those factors change the face of the land slowly, ever so slowly that a mortal human never directly notices the change during his relatively short lifetime.

When the whole place was under the sea, the process that would lead to the formation of limestone was slowly taking place. The sea bottom would not have been a smooth plain, it would have hills and canyons. The prevailing sea currents would have eroded out some places and piled up material in other places. There would have been "land slides". Today's Pacific has a



House in Cedar Key, said by old residents to be oldest structure still standing in that town and dating back to Spanish times.



One of the Primitive, unspoiled areas in Levy County.

trench that would make Arizona's Grand Canyon look like a ditch.

Then the thick layer of limestone was formed, covered by an overlay of sediment. Some of the limestone was buried deeply enough to develop the necessary pressure and heat to form flint. The spine of the Florida peninsula was completed but still under the sea. One of the ice ages came, the sea level dropped, the spine was exposed, and released from the weight of the water, rose still higher. Erosion of the surface lowered the elevation of the initial topography somewhat.

Eons later, the earth went into another ice age. The peninsular spine kept its head above water between ice ages, but just barely. The sea got across the northern part, but without enough depth to exert the compression effect.

The earth started out of that ice age. Not too far to the north of us was the leading edge of a towering wall of gigantic glaciers.

Their weight would have been beyond comprehension. As they melted, water formed or ran under the ice, the ice shifted and exerted a pressure on the trapped water. There was no place for the pressurized water to go but down, so it sought the flaws, fissures, and faults; the subterranean limestone, blew out, dissolved, blew out again, until a tunnel was formed, rather, a labyrinth of tunnels. Those tunnels came to the surface many miles to the south.

There must have been some great geysers of spring water erupting down here in Florida. Those eruptions started the springs -- some of them. Others appeared later. Some of the originals were slowed or stopped by their feeder tunnels becoming obstructed by debris or clogged by cave-ins somewhere upstream. It may take a long time, but that is the eventual destiny of any one of our big springs. The aquifer system feeding the springs is in some states north of here.

An example of a dying spring is Blue



Ira J. Carter's House, 1976.



Depot in Williston.



Otter Creek Lumber Company.



Dr. Eugene Yearty, holding Bertie Hudson; Mrs. Pearl Yearty, holding Orton Yearty; and Mildred Yearty, who married Randolph Hodges.

Springs, between Chiefland and Bronson. The legend goes that, at the time the first settlers arrived, that spring had a massive flow going into a rock-walled run averaging six feet in depth. The legend must be true, because the present feeble current could have never formed a basin that big or cut such a wide run. The run is now filled with sediment but the rock walls are still there. Blue Springs may sit there like it is for the next thousand years, or the obstruction may blow out next week, letting the old springs loose to its full flow again. The obstruction could be forty miles from the basin.

The dry tunnels and those with reduced water volume tends to develop cave-ins; a plug drops down out of the roof, and that's a new sink hole. The sink hole phenomena occurs only in tunnels near the surface. This labyrinth of tunnels beneath us is three dimensional and it is not known how deep they might go.

In the case of a spring being fed from a horizontal tunnel, the exposed roof edge of the tunnel sluffs off. It is being worked on by external erosion. The net effect is that the spring boil or basin creeps along, forming an ever-lengthening run. Wekiva Springs has the longest run of any of our big ones. The spring was once very close to Waccasassa River and is now about six miles away. If you know the area to the south of Hunter's Trail called Forty Seven Runs, that is a spot where the tunnel does a loop downward and back up again. The roof of the loop refused to fall; upstream, where the tunnel is near the surface again, a plug fell in, forming pipe, or chimney. The loop section clogged with sediment and debris, the water came out of the pipe and flowed in multiple little channels across the swamp surface to find its way into the main run again.

Manatee Springs is a young spring. Hart Springs is middle-aged and its run channel indicates that it once flowed a more massive current than it does now. Back to Manatee, its outlet is now so far below the surface that the spring will probably be stable for a long time; that is, relative to the tunnel roof cave-in and the creeping upstream by the boil. There are more forces

and factors inherent to the subject of springs that we have mentioned.

We do not know where we are headed at this time because we do not know where we are. We do know that we have come out of the last glaciation, but whether we have bottomed out and headed for the next ice age or we are still going tropical, we do not know. It all happens ever so slowly.



John Paul Hopping (1837-1910), Postmaster in Gulf Hammock.

Florida Indians

By Charles E. Cason

At the beginning of the historical period at the opening of the Sixteenth century the Florida Indians numbered about 25,000. They had come a long way from the primitive nomadic hunting culture of the first comers. They had developed relatively complex economic, social, and political institutions. They had developed governing, religious, and warrior classes. They planned and executed large construction projects that required the labor of large numbers of people over a long period of time. Some lived in large communities and traded at greater distances. They were good in battle with each other, and with the white man.

The Indians found in Florida by the white man were the Timucvans with 14,300, Tocobega with 1,300, Calusa with 2,375,

Mayaimi with 550, Ais and Jeaga with 800, Apalachee with 6,800, 500 Chatot, 800 Apalachicola, 300 Pensacola and 800 Tequesta.

The Seminoles did not enter Florida until early in the eighteenth century.

The Timucvans occupied an extensive area from Cape Canaveral to Georgia, west to the Aucilla River. They encouraged physical attributes of height, strength and fine appearance by natural selections and physical exercise in games. They obviously had an adequate diet from hunting, fishing and agriculture. They used none of their food for trade, but kept nonperishables in a public warehouse. This to be used in winter and during emergency conditions.

The Apalachee occupied the area from



Section Crew near Rosewood about 1895.



Some children at old Chiefland School that was on West McKenzie Avenue.



Docks at Cedar Key about 1890.



The new Epperson Store on Original Main Street in Bronson, Late 1870's.



Alexander Long and Elviann Long-lived at Deer Pond near Bronson.



Wesley Haden Locke (about 18), in front of Mose Wood's Store and Post Office in Chiefland.

the Aucilla to the Ocklockonee and its tributaries in the west and north into Georgia. This was the fertile country around present-day Tallahassee. They lived on corn, bean, pumpkins, fruits, birds, venison and fish.

The Ais occupied the coastal and Indian River region from Cape Canaveral to the St. Lucie River and inland twenty to thirty miles. A non-agricultural tribe, they ate fish, palm berries, coco plums and sea grapes. By 1696, they had Spanish knives and hatchets to add to their basic bow and arrow technology.

The Jeaga, "cousins" of the Ais, were usually included with them. They occupied only three villages.

The Tequesta had possession of the region from modern Pompano Beach to Cape Sable, where they merged with the more powerful Calusa from the west coast. They lived near the mouth of streams, on inlets, coastal beaches, and off shore

islands. Their food seemed to be palmetto berries, coco plums, sea grapes, palm nuts, pigeon plums, prickly pears and wild figs, also a nutritious flour made from the coontie root. They were great fishermen but practiced no agriculture. They were especially fond of sea cows or manatees, and inland they ate venison, terrapins and other land turtles.

The Calusa occupied the region from Tampa Bay on Charlotte Harbor south to Cape Sable, and they most certainly exercised control over Lake Mayaimi, now known as Okeechobee. They may also at times have exercised political control over the culturally related Tequesta. As non-agricultural as the others of the lower Peninsula, they lived on shellfish, conchs, clams, and oysters. This type of food being plentiful in the ten thousand island region. They used bows and arrows as well as spears and axes, both with stone projectile points, and made many tools and ornaments of bones and shells. They were not the only ones to use wood for practical and

ceremonial implements ranging from bowls and masks to boxes and boats, some of which were painted. They had an unusually high level social structure for a non-agricultural people because they could reside permanently in rather large villages and live abundantly on the bounty of nature.

The white man introduced European diseases, slavery, and some Indians migrated out of the area. By 1763, the last of 200 Indians left with the Spanish, and did not return with the Spanish second occupation some twenty years later.

The Seminoles arriving in the early eighteenth century had to survive a number of unique cultural shocks as they moved into the northern part of the state. They were engaged in wars of removal that pushed them into the southern part of the peninsula, some two hundred being forced to move to Oklahoma.

Never more than 5,000 in number, strong elements of their culture, nevertheless, survive in Florida today.



Belle of the Suwannee. Captain was Bob Ivey, first mate was Dan McQueen, black man.

The First Settlers

By S. E. Gunnell

When the Spanish Province of Florida became the American Territory of Florida, some of the Spanish people remained, names like Rodriguez, Sanchez, Gonzales. So did a few Americans, Scotch, Itallans, Irish, Greeks, Africans, Germans, French, English, and persons of other national origins. From the Spanish census of 1783, the Cannons and Hudsons were in the area, although they were being urged to leave by the Spanish Government.

As to who first came into the area now known as Levy County from nearby American states, there is no way to know. The documentation is either too vague or non-existent. There was undoubtedly a lot of going back and forth to Georgia. Some of the Americans who were being urged to leave (they were unwanted interlopers) probably left the St. Augustine area and disappeared into the primitive wilderness instead of returning to the United States. That may well have been the course taken by the Cannons, Hudsons, and a few others. At



James Napoleon Horne and His wife, Eugenia Masenia Cain Horne.

least, they were among the first settlers of the Levy County area.

Some of the following persons from the Spanish Census of 1783 may be the ancestors of some present day residents. Any commentary following a name was that written by the census taker.

Jacob Smith; Native of England

Isabel Mason: Native of Germany, widow, has three sons, runs a tavern, intends to migrate to the British Dominion.

William Maxwell; Native of England, Catholic, widower, has one daughter, he is an Architect.

George Barnes: Native of Ireland, married, one son, is a Merchant, owns five hundred acres.

Rufero [Spanish for Rufus] Cannon:



The old Otter Creek Livery Stable.



D. G. Roland Store, 1890, Judson, Florida

Native of Georgia, bachelor, farmer, has left with orders never to return.

William Johnson: Native of Scotland, married, three sons, is a pilot, intends to leave for the British Dominion.

Alexander Patterson: Native of Scotland, married, two sons and two orphaned girls.

Thomas Jones: Native of Georgia, married, two children, his occupation, Master of Sails.

Henry Newberry: Native of England, married, no children, Merchant, owns a ship.

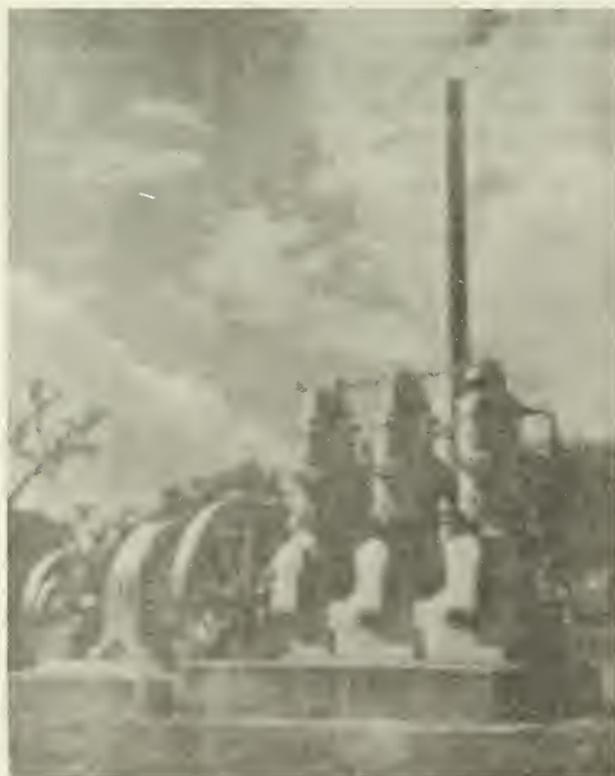
John Mercer: Native of North Carolina, bachelor, shoemaker.

Jacob Fowler: Native of Scotland, bachelor, his trade, cooper.

Jacob Wallace: Native of Scotland, married, five children, owns 2775 acres on banks of the St. Mary's River, is Captain of a ship, owns a sloop.

Thomas Allen: Native of Scotland, occupation is Mariner, married.

William Sims: Native of Scotland, silversmith, married, one son.



Williston's old diesel electric plant, first used about 70 years ago.



Turpentine Still at Ellzey.



Old House in Williston or Montbrook.

Don Joseph Pevit [Prevatt]: Native of England, Married, farmer, owns 2000 acres.

Benjamin Lord: Native of England, married, five children, owns 1000 acres, was Land Surveyor General of the Province, has migrated to the British Dominion.

Susana Henderson: Native of South Carolina, widow, one daughter, dressmaker.

Roderick McLeod: Native of Scotland, bachelor, hide trader.

John Watkins: Native of England, bachelor, hide trader.

Ana Smith: Native of South Carolina, widow, three children, owns 1000 acres.

Thomas Thompson: Native of Scotland, bachelor, carpenter.

William Green: Native of South Carolina, ship carpenter.

John Roland: Native of South Carolina, Married, four children, Carpenter.

Henry Payne: Native of England, lives in the house of John Macfarland.

Alexander Davidson: Native of Scotland, married, pilot of the bar.

Charles Brown: Native of Scotland, married, two children, Captain of a sloop.

Alexander Martin: Native of Scotland, operates a rum shop.

The Spanish Census of 1783 also has a list of "decent persons", meaning individuals with a Spanish title of some distinction.

Don Joseph Robinson: Native of Virginia, Catholic, married, three children, has been a Lt. Colonel in a Battalion of Militia.

Don John Martin: Native of Virginia, married, one son, intends to transport himself to the British Dominion.

Francisco Sanches: Native of East Florida, Catholic, declares himself joyfully under the dominion of his natural and legitimate King, bachelor with seven children(!), farmer, 1000 acres of land.

William MacHenry: Native of Ireland, Catholic, Widower, dealer in rum and beer.

John Hudson: Native of Ireland, Catholic, came here from Havana.

Juan Gonzales: Native of Minorca, Catholic, Fisherman.



Otter Creek Lumber Company.

All persons not of the Catholic faith had to agree to leave the Province. The Catholic Irish were declared to be Natives of Minorca.

The first census of Florida as an American Territory was in 1830. The names of significance in Levy County history from that census are herein listed:

William Barton	Willis Medlin
Simon Beckham	Benjamin Ogilby
Sylvester Bryant	Elias Osteen
Wiley Brooks	Isaac Osteen
James Burnett	John D. Osteen
Ranson Cason	James Osteen
James Cason	Shadrack Osteen
Charles H. B. Collins	Arthur Pinner
Hope Colson	John M. Prevatt
Abraham Colson, Sr.	Morgan Prevatt
Abraham Colson, Jr.	Thomas J. Prevatt
William Colson	Eleanor Raulerson
George B. Collins	Fanny Raulerson
Thomas B. Collins	William Raulerson
James Coulter	Cotton Rawls
Levi Collier	John M. Sanchez
James Crosby	Francis R. Sanchez
William Crosby	Joshua Sharp
Alexander Crews	Thomas Smith
James Cannon	Levi Sparkman
John Cannon	Stephen Sparkman
Enoch Daniel, Sr.	William Sparkman
Enoch Daniel, Jr.	James Sparkman
Bartholomew Daniels	Alexander Stapleton
Edward Dixon	Jesse Stanley
John Dixon	John Stanley
Mary Hall	John M. Stafford
Abraham Daniels	Maria Stafford
Samuel Geiger	Joshua Stafford
David Higginbotham	William A. Summerall
William Hogans	Jacob Summerall
Archibald Hogans	Joseph Tillis
James Hudson	James Turner
John Lewis	Aaron Vickers
James Long	William H. Ward
James T. Mattair	James H. Ward
William Markham	Theophilus Weeks, Jr.
Edward Johnson	Silas Weeks
Michael Johnson	Ezekiel Weeks
Robert Johnson	Lewellen Williams
Simpson Johnson	Theophilus H. Williams
John Kidd	William Wilkerson

Hardy Lanler	William Wilkerson, Jr.
Joseph B. Lancaster	William W. Wilkerson
James Lanler	Elvin Weeks
David Levy	Robert S. Wilkerson

Most of the pioneer settlers of Levy County are found in that 1830 list. The name David Levy was that of Florida's first U. S. Senator, David Yulee Levy, before he had his name changed back to its original form, David Levy Yulee. Levy County was named for him (1845) before the name change. Except for a matter of timing, this would have been Yulee County.



Fannin Springs Ferry on The Suwannee, 1923.

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA



3 1262 09770 9959