

English Land Grants

About 1765, the Marquis of Hastings secured a British grant on the north side of the St. Johns comprising 20,000 acres along the river from Trout Creek to the mouth of Maxtons (McGirts) Creek, including the present site of Jacksonville. There is no record of a settlement on this land during the English occupation. The Marquis of Waterford secured a grant, also of 20,000 acres, on the opposite side of the river between Pottsburg Creek and Julington Creek, including the site of South Jacksonville.^a This tract was developed in the vicinity of the ford. Bartram visited the Cow Ford in 1774, and he noted in his book that a ferry for crossing the river was in operation (for travelers) and near it was an indigo plantation from which he procured a sailboat for a trip up the river.

The St. Johns country was highly advertised in England for a time, stress being placed on the profitable cultivation of the indigo plant here. There were several English plantations along the river above the Cow Ford. What we now call Ortega was settled by Abraham Jones under an English patent of January 12, 1770, granting him 2,000 acres of land "in our province of East Florida, situation the neck or point of land between St. Johns River and Maxtons Creek, known by the name of Maxtons Creek Island. Bounded South and Southeast by vacant lands; West and Northwest by Maxtons Creek, and Eastwardly by St. Johns River." Jones built his house half a mile above where Maxtons Creek emptied into the river. About the year 1780, Colonel Daniel McGirts was living on this tract, which was then called McGirts Place and Maxtons Creek was called McGirts Creek.^c

Kings Road

The English had not been long in Florida when they set to work making a highway out of the old trail leading to the St. Marys River. They started at New Smyrna; thence to St. Augustine; to the Cow Ford; to the St. Marys at Colerain, and on into Georgia. All land travel between the northern Colonies and East Florida came down over this route and consequently through the sites of Jacksonville and South Jacksonville. Kings Road today follows the original route.