



*Historic*  
**TWENTY MILE**

Northeast Florida's Gateway to the Past

**NOCATEE**

PONTE VEDRA • FLORIDA



# IF ONLY THESE TREES COULD TALK.

*Historic*  
**TWENTY MILE**

GAZING AT THE THICK TREE HAMMOCKS AND WETLANDS OF TWENTY MILE — AN AREA 20 MILES NORTH OF ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA, AND HALFWAY TO ST. JOHNS BLUFF AND FORT CAROLINE — IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE THE HISTORIC EVENTS THAT OCCURRED ON THIS LAND OVER THE LAST 500 YEARS.

..... ◆ .....

What is now a nature preserve and timberland farm was once a well-traveled path for explorers, missionaries, settlers, slaves, messengers, dragoons and farmers—all key players in the patchwork that makes up Northeast Florida's history.

In this e-book, we take you on a journey that begins with undisturbed Native American lands and ends with the Northeast Florida we know and love today. What happens along the way is a series of twists and turns in ownership and culture of the area, with Twenty Mile at the center of it all.

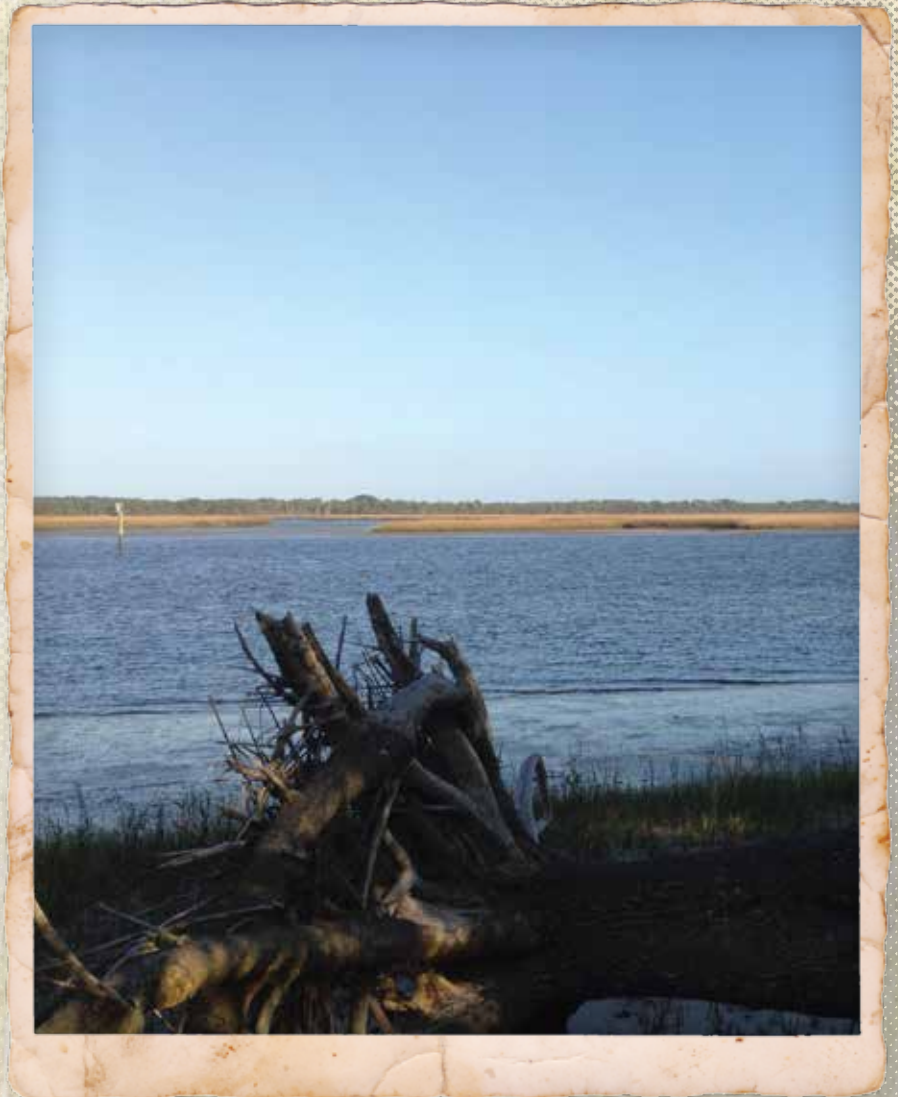


**TWENTY MILE ROAD STRETCHED FROM ST. AUGUSTINE TO NOCATEE  
TO THE WEST OF CROSSWATER PARKWAY.**



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# SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN NORTHEAST FLORIDA HISTORY

STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA



**1513** Juan Ponce de León discovers Florida on April 2 and claims all of North America for Spain.

**1564** The French build Fort Caroline on St. Johns Bluff. Now largely a residential area, St. Johns Bluff was once a vital military position. As one of the highest points in Jacksonville, Confederate engineers used the bluff to defend the St. Johns River, building fortifications there.

**1562** France's Jean Ribault arrives at the St. Johns River and claims the land for his country.

**1565** Pedro Menéndez de Aviles captures Fort Caroline and founds St. Augustine.



STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA

**1763-1784** The year the original Twenty Mile House was built is unknown, but it is believed to be during the British Period.

**1763** Spain trades Florida to England in exchange for the Cuban city of Havana.

**1743** Oglethorpe destroys Fort San Diego a second time.

**1740** British General James Oglethorpe crosses Georgia to invade Florida and attack St. Augustine, using Fort San Diego as his operational base.

**1702** Governor Moore of the British colony of South Carolina destroys the Florida missions and unsuccessfully attacks St. Augustine.

**1703** Fort Picolata is built at San Pablo as part of a defense system for Spanish Florida.



STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA

**1783** England returns East and West Florida to Spain to prevent them from falling into the newly formed United States' hands.



STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA

BEACHES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



**1917** Congress passes the Prohibition Amendment, leading to bootlegging.

**1910** The East Coast Intracoastal Waterway is completed, connecting North River (now called Tolomato River) and San Pablo River.

**1873** Oesterreicher homestead, a Cracker house still standing today, is built off Twenty Mile Road.



**2014** The Dee-Dot Ranch includes more than 20,000 acres of timberlands, wetlands and hammocks, most of which are still preserved for hunting and conservation purposes.

**1821** Florida is ceded to the United States.

**1845** Florida becomes the 27th state of the United States of America.

**1861** Florida becomes the third state to declare secession from the United States as the Civil War begins.

**1933** Prohibition comes to an end when the Volstead Act is repealed.

**1942** James R. Stockton, Sr. builds a gentleman's hideaway called "The Haunt of the Hermit" in the area northwest of Palm Valley and Twenty Mile.

**1942** J.E. Davis purchases "The Haunt of the Hermit" from James Stockton, Sr., naming it Fort Davis. Later, Dee-Dot Ranch is built on the site.



# WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

## TIMUCUAN TRAILS

LONG BEFORE THE SPANIARDS, BRITISH AND FRENCH ARRIVED IN FLORIDA, THE TIMUCUA INDIANS CALLED THE LANDS ALONG THE ST. JOHNS RIVER HOME FOR CENTURIES.

There were 30 villages in the area between the future sites of St. Augustine and Fort Caroline, all led by Chief Saturiba. The residents lived quietly off the land, growing fruits, roots, corn and berries.



INDIAN CHIEF RECEIVING FRENCH

STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA

When French Huguenot Jean Ribault arrived along the St. Johns River in 1562, he was welcomed by the tribe, donned in deerskins, shell necklaces and Spanish moss. It wouldn't be long before St. Augustine and Fort Caroline—and the halfway point between them known as Twenty Mile—would play an integral role in Northeast Florida's rich history.

## LAND WORTH FIGHTING FOR

THE LOVE AFFAIR WITH THE LAND ALONG THE SAN PABLO, ST. JOHNS AND NORTH RIVERS (NOW CALLED THE TOLOMATO RIVER) HAS BEEN ONE WROUGHT WITH VIOLENCE SINCE THE 16TH CENTURY.

At the time, all of Florida was already claimed by Ponce de León, and the Spaniards didn't take too kindly to the French encroaching on their territory.

STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA

In 1565 French Huguenot René Goulaine de Laudonnière established Fort Caroline, the first French colony in the present-day United States, located on the banks of the St. Johns River on a high steep bank later called St. Johns Bluff, in what is now Jacksonville.



THE FRENCH LANDED ON THE ST. JOHNS RIVER AND CLAIMED IT FOR FRANCE

To reclaim the land from the French, the Spanish ordered admiral Pedro Menéndez de Aviles to root out Ribault and his men. He founded St. Augustine, then quickly moved north in pursuit of reclaiming Fort Caroline.



# TWENTY MILE ROAD

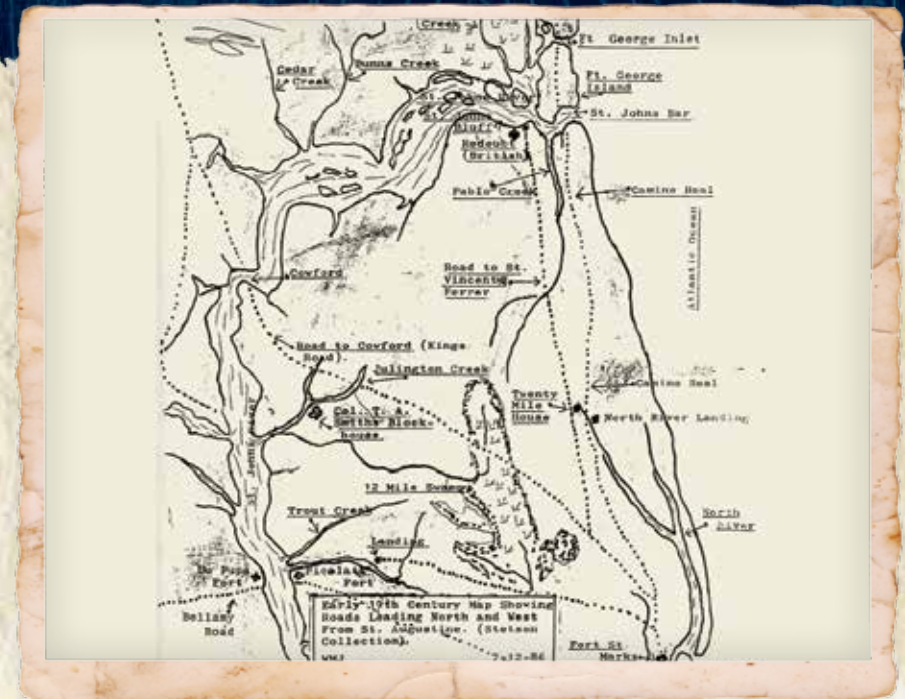
## THE 40-MILE PATH TO VICTORY

MENÉNDEZ AND HIS 400 MEN FOLLOWED OVERGROWN INDIAN TRAILS AS THEY TRAVELED THE 40 MILES FROM ST. AUGUSTINE TO FORT CAROLINE.

With the help of an Indian guide and a captured Frenchman, they traversed the land thick with woods and swamp, burning trees behind them to help guide their return route. This path, blazed by Menéndez on his way to defeating the French, would eventually be called the Road to St. Vincente Ferrer (Fort Caroline), and later, Twenty Mile Road. And Florida would remain under Spanish control for nearly 200 years.

## ONE STATE, MANY RULERS

NATIVE AMERICANS .....	3000 BC-1513
SPANISH RULE.....	1513-1763
BRITISH RULE.....	1763-1783
SPANISH RULE.....	1783-1821
U.S. TERRITORIAL PERIOD .....	1821-1845
STATEHOOD .....	1845-PRESENT



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**THERE WERE ONLY A HANDFUL OF SIGNIFICANT ROADS IN THE AREA FROM THE 16TH TO THE 19TH CENTURIES:**

**ROAD TO ST. VINCENTE FERRER:** this 40-mile stretch connected St. Johns Bluff and St. Augustine and was key during land conflicts, eventually becoming known as Twenty Mile Road.

**CAMINO REAL:** this road was used to connect missions from the Guana Peninsula to South Carolina.

**EL CAMINO REAL:** established so Spaniards could acquire beef and firewood, this major road originated in St. Augustine and is still celebrated with the Zero Mile Marker in the city today.

**ROAD TO COWFORD:** also known as Kings Road, this road was used during the American Revolution, as British loyalists fled to Florida. Cowford is now known as Jacksonville.



# TWENTY MILE HOUSE

## THE HALFWAY POINT FOR STAKING CLAIMS

THE JOURNEY BETWEEN ST. AUGUSTINE AND FORT CAROLINE WAS BOTH BEAUTIFUL AND TREACHEROUS FOR THOSE CROSSING THE SWAMPY AREAS. WHEN MENÉNDEZ AND HIS MEN TRAVELED FROM ST. AUGUSTINE AND FORT CAROLINE IN 1565, IT TOOK FOUR LONG DAYS.

Because the trip was such an exhausting endeavor, the halfway point between the two destinations became a resting place for soldiers and travelers. Called Twenty Mile House, it served as a Spanish military outpost and way station as the Spanish and British fought over the highly desirable land throughout the 1700s.

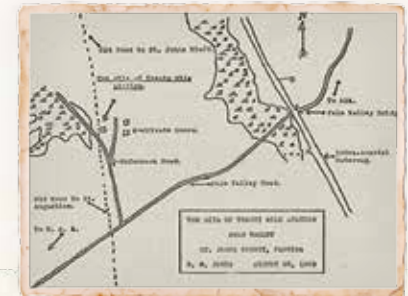
Twenty Mile House also served as a communications lifeline integral to the province's defense, as the route along the San Pablo and North Rivers was used to deliver urgent messages from St. Augustine to Fort Caroline and St. Johns Bluff.

Over the next several hundred years, the power struggles between Brits, Spaniards and Americans would rage on, while Twenty Mile and surrounding lands remained a beautiful backdrop to Florida's unique history.

## TWO SIGNIFICANT LANDMARKS THAT WENT BY MANY NAMES:

### TWENTY MILE HOUSE

- ◆ Twenty Mile Station
- ◆ Twenty Mile Settlement
- ◆ Twenty Mile Post
- ◆ Halfway House
- ◆ Veinte Millas House
- ◆ La Casa De Los Dragones



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### FORT CAROLINE

- ◆ San Matteo
- ◆ St. Johns Town
- ◆ St. Johns Bluff
- ◆ San Vincente Ferrer





# A HUB OF COMMUNICATION & COMMERCE

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**NO MATTER WHO CONTROLLED THE LAND TO THE NORTH AND SOUTH, TWENTY MILE HOUSE REMAINED AT THE CENTER. NESTLED BETWEEN THE TWO POPULATION HUBS FROM THE 16TH TO 19TH CENTURIES, ST. AUGUSTINE AND FORT CAROLINE, TWENTY MILE HOUSE WAS THE HALFWAY POINT IN THIS HIGHLY TRAVELED ROUTE OF TRADE AND COMMERCE.**

..... ◆ .....  
In Spanish Florida, people and goods were required to enter either St. Augustine or St. Johns Bluff for immigration purposes. The road between them? The 40-mile stretch known as Twenty Mile Road.

In 1763, after nearly 200 years of rule, Spain peacefully swapped Florida to England in exchange for the city of Havana. Florida was split into two colonies—East and West Florida. As the capital of East Florida, St. Augustine served as a critical shipping hub, with goods traveling via the waterways from north to south. Travelers floated up the North River and climbed up either Twenty Mile Road or Camino Real before reaching the San Pablo River and eventually the St. Johns.

Twenty Mile and surrounding lands remained a beautiful backdrop to Florida's unique history.





# A STATION WELL-TRAVELED

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## REBUILDING TWENTY MILE

ALTHOUGH IT'S UNKNOWN WHEN THE FIRST SPANISH HOUSE WAS BUILT AT TWENTY MILE, THE STATION NEEDED TO BE COMPLETELY REBUILT IN 1787. SPANISH ENGINEER MARIANO DE LA ROCQUE WROTE A SERIES OF LETTERS TO THE GOVERNOR OF EAST FLORIDA, VICENTE MANUEL DE CÉSPEDES, REQUESTING THE TWENTY MILE HOUSE BE REBUILT.

The resulting new house at Twenty Mile was 22 feet long and nearly 16 feet wide. A new stable contained two rooms—one for horses and another for caretakers.

A testament to the importance of the military outpost and the lands that sustained it, in his letters Céspedes acknowledged that Twenty Mile House was where dragoons, or mounted infantry, were assigned to carry communications to the more advanced posts of St. Johns and St. Marys.

By 1800, dragoons still patrolled the area. In the fields next to a Spanish Inn called La Posada Media just north of Palm Valley Road, soldiers became farmers out of necessity, growing food and corralling horses for the men stationed at Twenty Mile House.






# THE BOUNTY OF THE LAND

..... ✦ .....

THROUGHOUT FLORIDA'S HISTORY, THE TWENTY MILE AREA HAS PROVIDED ITS INHABITANTS WITH A VARIETY OF FLORA AND FAUNA. LOCATED IN A VALLEY BETWEEN TWO RIVERS, THE SWAMPS AND TIMBERLANDS HAVE LONG BEEN HOME TO ALLIGATOR, DEER, BEAR, BUFFALO, FOX, OTTER, BOBCAT, OPOSSUM, TURKEY, EGRET, GOPHER, WEASEL, COON AND A WIDE VARIETY OF BIRDS.

THE ACRES ALONG THE RIVER HAVE BEEN HIGHLY PRODUCTIVE, HOME TO PLANTATIONS, FARMS AND SAWMILLS PRODUCING LUMBER, COTTON, BEANS AND GRASS FOR CATTLE. TODAY, THE TWENTY MILE LANDS YIELD PINE TREES AND WILD GAME.

..... ✦ .....





# TALES OF WOODLAND BEAUTY DRIVE SETTLEMENTS

BRITISH RULE IN THE LATE 1700S BROUGHT A LITTLE PEACE AND PROSPERITY. TO ENTICE THE BRITISH TO SETTLE IN EAST FLORIDA, GOVERNOR GRANT HANDED OUT FREE LAND FOR COLONISTS.

.....◆.....  
In addition, an advertising campaign of sorts was launched. Royal botanist John Bartram and his son William both explored the St. Johns via canoe and documented the wildlife, culture and soil quality. Their journals were published in London in the 1760s and ultimately fueled the land rush on East Florida.

Plantations began to pop up across the area. Established in 1782 by William Watson, Three Runs Plantation was located just north of Twenty Mile. This 500-acre compound included a house, two small sheds used to store grain, a carpenter shop and 20 slave houses. Here, 30 acres were planted and 3,000 pine trees boxed for turpentine. Other plantations nearby produced rice as well as indigo to meet England's high demand for dye. Today, wild indigo is still found at Twenty Mile, a silent remnant of this beautiful stretch of land's past.



**WILD INDIGO**



**BARTRAM'S MARSH BIRD**



# THE PATH TO FREEDOM

LONG BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR AND UNDERGROUND RAILROAD, RUNAWAY SLAVES AND NATIVE AMERICANS TRAVELED TWENTY MILE ROAD SEEKING REFUGE. STILL OWNED BY SPAIN IN THE 1700S, FLORIDA GRANTED FREEDOM TO SLAVES IN RETURN FOR THEIR CONVERSION TO CATHOLICISM AND FOUR YEARS OF SERVICE (FOR MEN) IN THE SPANISH ARMY.

## A HIDING PLACE FOR ESCAPEES & DESERTERS

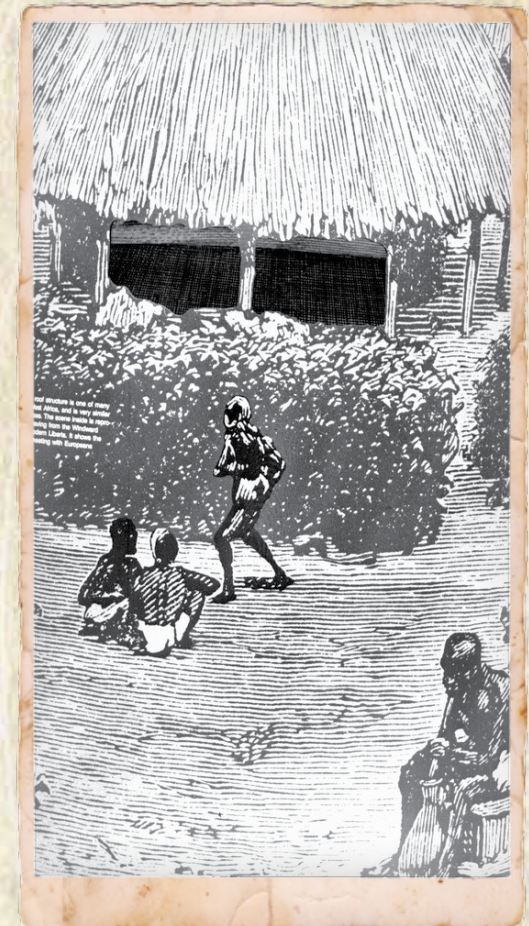
Over 100 years later, power struggles were still taking place, this time between the Union and the Confederacy. During the Civil War, the lands surrounding Twenty Mile Road provided more than a route from St. Augustine to St. Johns Bluff. While Union gunboats stationed at Mayport patrolled the river, both deserters and runaway slaves sought refuge in the wooded areas surrounding Twenty Mile House, which was located west of the Intracoastal Waterway and North of Palm Valley Road, which runs through Nocatee today. Many of the escaped slaves eventually found Union men along the St. Johns and enlisted in the Union army, enraging slave owners.

Twenty Mile's role was greatly diminished after Florida was reclaimed by the Union and the Civil War finally came to an end 1865.

IN 1693, KING CHARLES II FORMALIZED A COMMUNITY TWO MILES NORTH OF ST. AUGUSTINE AS A LEGAL SANCTUARY FOR FREE BLACKS. HOME TO ABOUT 100 RESIDENTS, GRACIA REAL DE SANTA TERESA DE MOSE (FORT MOSE), OR FUERTE NEGRO, IS KNOWN AS THE FIRST FREE AFRICAN-AMERICAN SETTLEMENT IN TODAY'S UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



THE TWENTY MILE AREA TODAY



DRAWING OF DWELLINGS LIKE THOSE AT FORT MOSE

STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA



# FROM HOMESTEADING TO HOMEGROWN

AFTER THE CIVIL WAR, SOUTH CAROLINIAN TOM OESTERREICHER MOVED TO TWENTY MILE, CLAIMING 37 ACRES TWO MILES NORTH OF ST. AUGUSTINE IN DIEGO PLAINS (WHAT IS NOW CALLED PALM VALLEY).

..... ♦ .....  
He built the Oesterreicher homestead in 1873, a Cracker-style home with no indoor plumbing, electricity or window screens until 1942.

Over the years that followed, the Oestrreicher family expanded that 37 acres into several thousand acres, and eventually sold most of the land to the prominent Davis family, the founders of the Jacksonville-headquartered Winn-Dixie grocery store chain and long-time North Florida philanthropists.

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AN ABUNDANCE OF SABAL PALM TREES IN DIEGO PLAINS, THE CATTLE TOWN NORTHEAST OF TWENTY MILE AND HOME OF DON DIEGO ESPINOZA'S FALLEN SPANISH FORT, LED TO A NAME CHANGE: PALM VALLEY. IN THE 1940S, THE SALE OF PALMS WAS BIG BUSINESS. AT LEAST 400,000 PALMS WERE CUT AND GATHERED EACH YEAR, THEN SHIPPED TO VARIOUS PARTS OF THE U.S.

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BEACHES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



ONE OF THE OLDEST STRUCTURES IN THE AREA, THE ORIGINAL OESTERREICHER HOME STILL STANDS TODAY, SERVING AS A KEY FLORIDA LANDMARK.





# “RUNNING COPPER” TO FEED THE FAMILY

IN THE LATE 1920S AND EARLY 1930S, TIMES WERE TOUGH ALONG THE ST. JOHNS (AND EVERYWHERE ELSE). AND WHEN JOBS LIKE MAKING CROSSTIES FOR THE RAILROAD DIDN'T PAY ENOUGH TO KEEP FOOD ON THE TABLE, THE LANDS ALONG TWENTY MILE PROVIDED AN ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF INCOME.

.....◆.....

Making moonshine, or “running a little copper,” was a profitable venture. The thick woods and swampy marshes of Twenty Mile provided an abundant water supply and many places to hide illegal operations.

In fact, when Tom Oesterreicher's son and daughter-in-law, Hugie and Oleta Oesterreicher, got into the bootlegging business in the summer of 1932, there were so many competitors in the area they could only sell their whiskey for 50 cents a gallon.

The industry in the area thrived long after the Volstead Act was repealed in 1933. It was the rising cost of sugar, a key ingredient to 'shine, that ultimately dried up the industry in the region.





# STEWARDSHIP OF THE LAND

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TWENTY MILE

## A FAMILY AFFAIR

WHEN JAMES ELLSWORTH “J.E.” DAVIS, ONE OF THE FOUR BROTHERS WHO FOUNDED THE WINN-DIXIE GROCERY CHAIN, BOUGHT THE GENTLEMEN’S HIDEAWAY “THE HAUNT OF THE HERMIT” FROM JAMES STOCKTON IN 1954, DEE-DOT RANCH WAS BORN.

..... ◆ .....

Named after his children, Dano and Dorothy, Dee-Dot Ranch comprised 51,000 acres in southeastern Duval County and northeastern St. Johns County. The ranch’s southernmost tip was the site of Twenty Mile House.

Now called Fort Davis, the house today is nearly double the size of the original Haunt of the Hermit, featuring additions made of cypress logs chinked with concrete.

Dee-Dot is now managed as a timber operation, Dee-Dot Timberlands. In keeping with the Davis family’s long tradition of preserving Florida’s natural beauty, timber is harvested using sustainable forestry practices.





# A RETURN TO NATURE

TODAY, THE ORIGINAL TWENTY MILE HOUSE IS LONG GONE, WITH ONLY A FEW SHARDS OF SPANISH OIL JARS AND ENGLISH COOKWARE REMAINING AS EVIDENCE OF THE HALFWAY HOUSE AMONG THE TREES. NOW ONLY THE RUINS OF ONE SMALL HOUSE BUILT BY ROBERT MIER AFTER 1900 STILL STAND ON THE SITE NEAR THE SOUTH TIP OF DEE-DOT.

..... ♦ .....

Although the area is mostly traveled by wildlife today, its beauty and significance are no less diminished. Now much of the land is part of Nocatee, and in keeping with the community's commitment to protect and sustain natural beauty, over 8,000 acres of undisturbed old Florida flora and fauna will be preserved so future generations can enjoy the rich land that is ripe with history.



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*ABOUT NOCATEE*

**NOCATEE IS A MASTER-PLANNED COMMUNITY IN NORTHEAST FLORIDA THAT BLENDS  
A VARIETY OF NEIGHBORHOODS WITH SCHOOLS, PARKS, RECREATION, OFFICES,  
SHOPPING, RESTAURANTS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION.**

..... ◆ .....  
The Twenty Mile neighborhoods back up to thousands of acres of preserved forest and wetlands that will enrich the lives of those who work and play among this rustic area rich with history.

Ranked the third best-selling master-planned community in America by RCLCO, Nocatee offers several neighborhoods with homes priced from the \$200s to more than \$1 million.

**LOCATED IN PONTE VEDRA, FLORIDA, NOCATEE IS JUST A FEW MINUTES AWAY FROM  
PRISTINE BEACHES, GOLF COURSES, BUSINESS PARKS AND SHOPPING DESTINATIONS.**

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE NOCATEE LIFESTYLE, CALL 1-800-NOCATEE OR VISIT NOCATEE.COM.**