

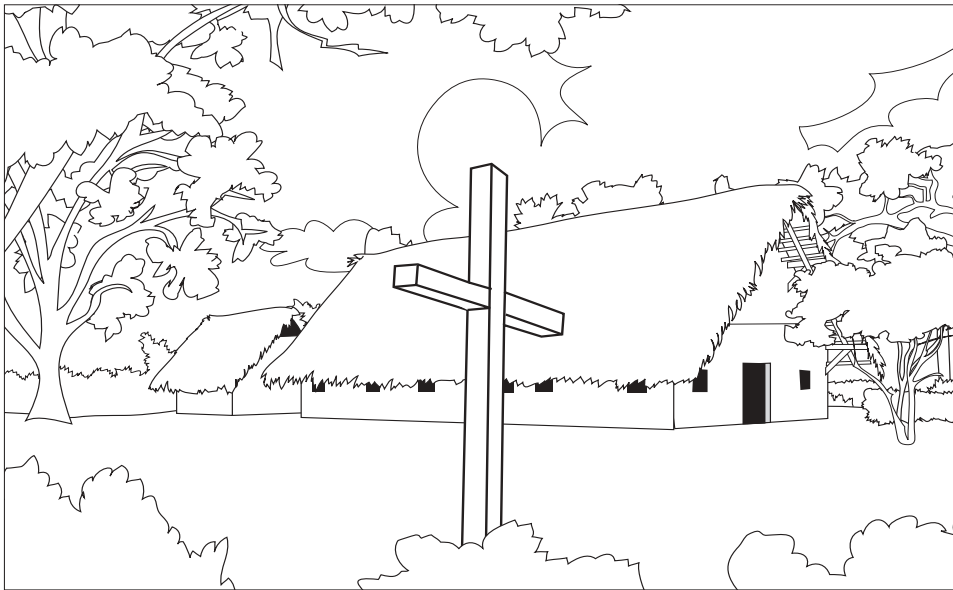
Florida's Historic Places: Tallahassee

Tallahassee is the Capital City of Florida. It is located among the hills, moss-draped oaks, and stately pines of Florida's panhandle.

People have occupied the land where the city now stands for more than 10,000 years. The Lake Jackson mounds in the Tallahassee area served as a major ceremonial center for Native Americans from 1000-1650. The region's rich, red clay soils enabled these inhabitants to grow bountiful crops. They built a large village, a plaza, and impressive mounds. This site was one of the most magnificent ceremonial centers in the Southeast.

Panfilo de Navarez, the one-eyed Spaniard, and his followers first passed through the area in 1528. In 1539, Hernando de Soto stayed five months at the Apalachee Indian stronghold of Anhaica. He had priests with him and it is thought that the first Christmas in the New World was celebrated in the woods near the present capitol building.

As more Spanish colonists arrived, they brought disease and fighting. This reduced the population of the Apalachee tribe who left the area. "Tallahassee" is an Apalachee Indian word meaning "old town" or "abandoned fields." The area became an abandoned Apalachee village.



Mission San Luis has been reconstructed on the original site.

In 1656, a Spanish deputy governor and his crew settled in the Apalachee town that they called San Luis in west Tallahassee. With a population of more than 1400, the Spanish established one of several Franciscan missions there. While there, the Spaniards lived off the generosity of the Apalachee. At the same time, they tried to convert the Apalachee to the Catholic faith.

In 1702, the English and their allies began systematically attacking the missions. In 1704, a band of Creek Indians permanently destroyed and banished the residents from San Luis. More Creek Indians, who later became Seminole Indians, came in the 1730s. They developed villages called "fowl towns" because they raised chickens.

By 1763, the British ruled Florida and divided it into East and West Florida, separated by the Apalachicola River. St. Augustine was the capital of East Florida. Pensacola was the capital of West Florida. Twenty years later, after the American Revolution, Florida returned to Spanish control.

In 1821, Florida became a territory of the United States. Both St. Augustine and Pensacola competed to become the capital city. Legislators alternated sessions. Travel was hazardous and took almost twenty days. The governor appointed two commissioners to find a suitable new location. One rode on horseback from St. Augustine and the other sailed by boat from Pensacola. They met at the port of St. Marks about 20 miles south of Tallahassee, halfway between St. Augustine and Pensacola.

They discovered a place north of St. Marks. They reported, “A more beautiful country can scarcely be managed; it is high, rolling, and well watered, the richness of the soil renders it perfectly adapted to farming.”

At that time, about 500 Indians led by Chief Neamathla lived in the area. The chief and his men confronted the two white men but did not attack them. Instead they entertained them with food and dance. They soon worked out a deal for the land. In 1824, Tallahassee was established as the capital city. Three log cabins were built as the first capitol buildings.



Tallahassee is located in the center of Leon county.

Tallahassee soon earned a reputation as an outlaw frontier town. Men carried guns and knives. Duels, brawls and knife fights were common. Ralph Waldo Emerson called Tallahassee “a grotesque place...rapidly settled by public officers, land speculators, and desperadoes.” Over 150 years ago, Tallahassee’s Police Department was formed to end this lawlessness.

The land around Tallahassee was good for agriculture. Several large plantations were built. Crops were planted including cotton, corn, and sweet potatoes. By 1840, more than 11,000 people lived in the area. There were setbacks during the Second Seminole War, a yellow fever epidemic, and a great fire. Still, the place continued to grow.

Because of the Marquis de Lafayette’s efforts in the Revolutionary War, the U.S. Congress awarded him a township (36 square miles) in the Tallahassee area. He never visited himself. However, he tried, without the use of slaves, to grow limes and olives and to produce silk made by moths in mulberry trees in the area. His colony failed. Most of his people moved to New Orleans or back to France. The few that remained lived in an area that later became an African-American neighborhood still called Frenchtown.

Prince Murat, a nephew of Napoleon, moved to a Tallahassee plantation after the battle of Waterloo. He married a great-grand niece of George Washington. Murat described Tallahassee's social scene as bustling with elaborate parties where its ladies were as beautiful and well dressed as any in New York. The prince liked to cook and prepared items such as cow's ear stew, alligator steaks, and roasted crow. He slept on a moss mattress and spoke seven languages.

During the Civil War, a small battle was fought at Natural Bridge, just south of Tallahassee. An army of old men and students from the West Florida Seminary (now Florida State University) fought off an attack by Union troops. Tallahassee was the only Confederate capital east of the Mississippi that was not captured.

After the Civil War, many of the large plantations were turned into hunting lodges for wealthy winter residents from the North. They would come together to hunt quail and socialize. However, times were tough for most people in the area, with more laborers than jobs. The farmers were caught in the never-ending cycle of sharecropping.

Tallahassee has become a community where tradition and family are important. The largest numbers of people work for the government. Services and retail trade also employ many people in the area. Two state universities are located in Tallahassee, Florida State University and Florida A & M. Today, Tallahassee is a focal point for government and higher education in the state.

Mission San Luis de Apalachee
Mission San Luis de Apalachee was the western capital of the mission system in La Florida from 1656 to 1704. Over 1400 Apalachee Indians lived there. A lieutenant governor, military garrison and their families, friars, and civilians were also in residence. It had the appearance of a small Spanish city. A few Spanish cattle ranchers were scattered nearby.

This was one of colonial Florida's prized places. Corn, wheat, hides, tallow and other agricultural products were shipped from San Luis to St. Augustine and Havana, Cuba. However, raids by the British and their Creek Indian allies caused the evacuation of San Luis in 1704.

San Luis remained in the minds of the local Tallahassee residents. It has been purchased by the state. There has been extensive excavation in the Franciscan church complex, Apalachee council house, the Spanish fort, and Spanish and Indian residential areas. It is now open to the public for visits.