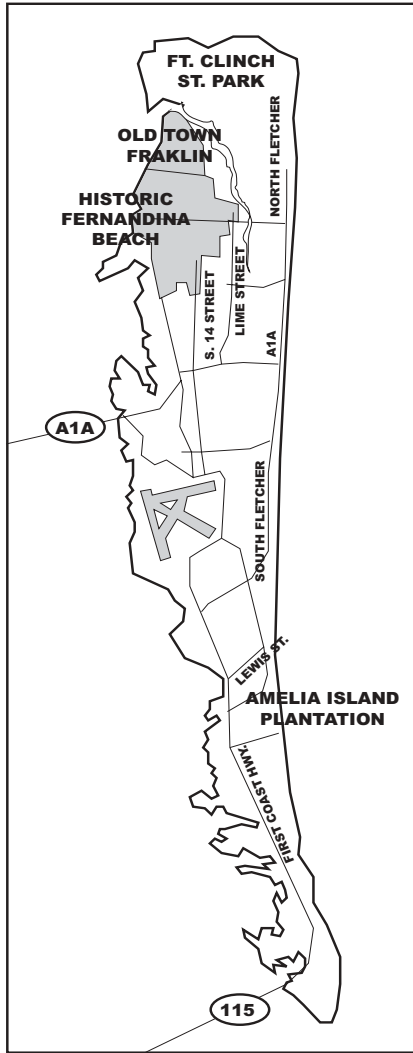


Florida's Historic Places: Fernandina & Amelia Island



Map of Amelia Island.

Native Americans associated with the Timucuan mound-building culture settled on Amelia Island about 1000. They called the island Napoyca. They would remain on Napoyca until the early 1700s.

The written history of Fernandina on Amelia Island has unfolded under eight flags. The French flag was the first flag to fly over the island. Jean Ribault, French explorer, landed in 1562. He named the island Isle de Mar. Spanish forces led by Pedro Menendez de Aviles drove out the French in 1565. They killed Ribault and 350 French colonists.

The Spanish flag was the second flag. In 1573, Spanish Franciscans established the Santa Maria mission on the island. They renamed the island Isla de Santa Maria. Fernandina was settled in 1685. It was located in the area now called "Old Town." British raiders destroyed the town in 1702. The area was deserted for many years.

James Oglethorpe, the founder of Georgia, scouted the area. He found peach trees, orange groves, and deserted fields. He renamed the island "Amelia Island" in honor of princess Amelia, the daughter of King George II of England. Florida and Fernandina came under British rule. The English flag was raised as the third flag in 1763. During the American Revolution, Fernandina became home for English Loyalists fleeing the colonies.

In 1783, Spain again controlled Florida. A land grant became a plantation on the site of present-day Fernandina. The Spanish harbor of Fernandina became the nation's center for smuggling slaves, liquor, and foreign luxury goods. During the second period of Spanish occupation, the Patriot Flag of the Republic of Florida appeared as the fourth flag. The flag only flew for one day. The Patriots of Amelia Island attempted to transfer Amelia Island to the control of the United States. Their plan failed and Spain regained control.

In 1817, the Scotsman Sir Gregor MacGregor and 55 men captured the island from its Spanish defenders. They raised their own Green Cross of Florida flag, which became the fifth flag. Smuggling and slave trading were still thriving.

That same year after MacGregor had already gone, pirate Luis Aury sailed with his armada of three ships into the harbor. Three days later he hoisted the Republic of Mexico flag, the sixth flag. He declared himself ruler of the island. Fernandina became a pirate haven and location for buried treasure. Aury was run out of Fernandina by a United States navel force.

In 1821, the United States took control of the territory from Spain. The American flag, the seventh flag, was raised. Because of its excellent harbor, Fernandina became a prosperous and important city. The building of Fort Clinch was begun. U.S. Senator David Yulee built Florida's first cross-state railroad. It connected Fernandina on the Atlantic with Cedar Key on the Gulf of Mexico. Trade grew and flourished during Florida's period as a U.S. territory and the early years of statehood.

The Confederate flag, the eighth flag to fly over Fernandina, appeared with the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Confederate troops occupied Fort Clinch. A year later, a Union force restored Federal control of the island.

After the Civil War, Fernandina became a bustling and thriving seaport town. It relied on the shipping industry, shrimping, and the tourist trade.

Thousands of Northerners voyaged to Fernandina on the Mallory Steamship Line from New York. Fernandina was hailed as “The Queen of Summer Resorts” by an 1896 edition of American Resorts magazine. Golden Age prosperity prompted a building boom. This attracted visitors such as the Vanderbilts, DuPonts, and Carnegies. Fernandina was home to the First Customs House in the United States. The oldest newspaper in Florida was started in Fernandina.

During the Spanish-American War (the Cuban war for independence from Spain) Amelia Island played another historic role. Soldiers were again housed at Fort Clinch. Freedom fighter Jose Marti was overheard plotting strategies in the Florida House Inn (Florida’s oldest surviving hotel) in Fernandina. This helped lead to the end of the war.

Today, an original 1899 railroad depot and a 1920s-era railroad sleeper car serve as the Visitor Center on Amelia Island. The area is the home of an early plantation, an international port, a Civil War fort, a turn-of-the-century playground for rich tourists, Florida’s first cross-state railroad, and world headquarters of the shrimping industry.

The Historic District of Fernandina reflects the city’s long history. Centre Street has Florida’s oldest tavern, The Palace Saloon (1878). The state museum at nearby Fort Clinch State Park adds to the history visitors can relive when visiting Fernandina and Amelia Island.

Fort Clinch

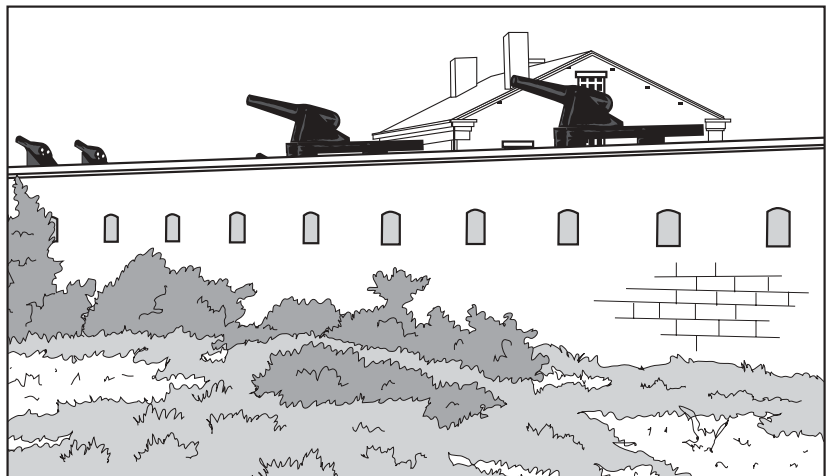
Fort Clinch was named for General Duncan Lamont Clinch, a veteran of the Seminole and Mexican wars. Construction of the fort on Amelia Island began in 1847. By 1861, the fort still was not finished. Although incomplete, Fort Clinch was occupied in the summer of 1861 by Confederate troops. By December, 1,524 troops were stationed there.

The Union military command realized the importance of Fernandina to the Confederacy as a supply base. The Confederacy did not think they could defend the fort. In 1862, Robert E. Lee ordered Fernandina and Fort Clinch evacuated.

A Union flotilla of 28 gunboats appeared as the last Confederate train was leaving. Fort Clinch became the first Union fortress restored to Federal control. In 1869, all troops left Fort Clinch.

In 1898, Fort Clinch was again used at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. Volunteer soldiers were camped at Fort Clinch.

Though occupied, the fort was never completed. In 1935, it became part of the Florida Park System. It is one of the oldest parks in the system. It has sandy white beaches, campsites, nature trails, a fishing pier, and a state museum.



A view of the canons from outside the walls of Fort Clinch.