

## Piney Z History

**Indian times** – Lake Lafayette was home to a large indigenous Indian community thousands of years before Europeans. According to the late Calvin Jones, FSU and state archaeologist, the Lake Lafayette Basin is one of the premier archaeological sites in the state. The lake is surrounded by nearly 40 Native American mounds, several of which have been excavated. One of these is on display at the Florida Museum of Natural History. Of special interest are the large midden (human debris) mounds on Lake Piney Z and the Temple Mounds at Fallschase. Native American settlements are common in the Lafayette Basin. Some significant archaeological sites on Lake Lafayette, Lake Jackson, the Swift Creek Village and the DeSoto Camp (near Myers Park where the first Christmas was celebrated in the New World), have been excavated.



Lake Jackson Mounds – 1000-1500 A.D.

Jones and his students excavated the Block-Sterns archaeological site in the mid-1970s, and more work was done in 1994. It consists of four earthen mounds, probably used as burial mounds, and an extensive associated village area. The site was occupied from at least ca. 7000 B.C.-A.D. 1600. Artifacts representing ca. 10,000-7000 B.C. and later Leon-Jefferson and Territorial periods have also been found in the general area. The mounds are similar to mounds found at Lake Jackson and Letchworth-Love Mounds State Park.

The Apalachee tribe was indigenous to the Piney Z area when the Europeans arrived with the Spanish in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The area was called Apalache and their capital was *Anhaica*, a village within today's Tallahassee city limits. The Apalachee were part of an extensive trade

network that extended north to the Great Lakes and west to present day Oklahoma. The Florida tribe would trade shells, shark's teeth, and smoked fish for copper, mica, and other minerals not found in their native land.

The first contact that the Apalachee had with Europeans came on July 15, 1528, when Spanish conquistador Pánfilo Narváez and his men attempted to overpower the Florida natives. That attack was successfully repelled. In 1539, Hernando de Soto and his men landed on the Gulf Coast of Florida and traveled through the center of the state, looking for gold and cruelly killing any natives they encountered along the way. Hearing that the Apalachee might have gold, the expedition traveled west to *Anhaica*. This time, the Spanish were able to capture the Apalachee capital. They over-wintered near today's Myers Park. No gold was found, so the Spanish moved on in 1540. But they were to return.

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**The Spanish Era and the Missions of North Florida** - The first Spanish Franciscan missionaries arrived in Apalache in 1633, almost 100 years after Hernando de Soto had over-wintered there. By 1655 there were 16 missions established between St. Augustine and Apalache. By 1675 there were 24 missions in existence. The largest one was Mission *San Luis*, which is now a museum on west Tennessee Street. Closest to our Piney Z location was Mission *San Pedro y San Pablo de Patali* at the crest of the hill on Buck Lake Road. There exists some evidence of a small Spanish mission (Mission *Santa Cruz*?) on the hill where the ruins of the Benjamin Chaires antebellum plantation "Verdura" are today, west of Williams Road and northeast of Southwood subdivision. Other probable locations of missions include near Rickards High School, off Aspalaga Road and off Armstrong Road, both near Wacissa. Apalache was the breadbasket for the Spanish in St. Augustine – the mission system was connected by a road over which goods traveled to the Atlantic coast.



**The English take control** – There is almost nothing left of the once extensive Spanish mission system in Florida. This was due entirely to the raids conducted by the English ex-governor of the Carolina colony James Moore and his Creek tribe Indian allies on the Spanish system of missions and the Apalachee in Florida in 1704. The English and Creeks brutally killed and tortured many of the Spanish and Apalachee, including crucifixions and burnings at the stake.

Raids continued in 1705 and by 1706 the Spanish presence in Florida had been reduced to Pensacola and St. Augustine, and the Apalachee had either been killed, enslaved, left with the Spanish or exiled westward to Louisiana.

In 1763, the English gained control of Florida after the signing of the Treaty of Paris ended the French and Indian Wars. In the years after that until American independence in 1776, the southeastern colonies were hideouts for runaway slaves, renegade Indians (known as “Seminoles”, which were mainly Creeks that moved into Florida in the 18<sup>th</sup> century), as well as new colonists seeking their fortunes. Border disputes were common after 1776 as well.

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**The second Spanish period and sale of La Florida to the United States** – After 20 years of English rule, Florida was returned to the Spanish in 1783 as part of the second Treaty of Paris which finally ended the American Revolution. Spain was by then a much weakened European power, and did not have the resources to defend Florida from continued infiltration from the newly formed United States. The First Seminole War 1817-1818 was proof of Spain’s weakness. The Adams-Onís Treaty in 1819 ceded Florida to the United States in exchange for settling the boundary dispute along the Sabine River in Spanish Texas. Formal U.S. occupation began in 1821, and General Andrew Jackson, the hero of the War of 1812, was appointed military governor. Florida was organized as a U.S. territory in 1822 and was admitted into the Union as a slave state in 1845.



Florida’s first Capitol building, 1824, replica

Of course, once a new territory, there was a need to find a centrally located place for a capital (recall that the peninsula of Florida was only sparsely settled). The two largest cities at the time, St. Augustine on the Atlantic Seaboard, and Pensacola on the Gulf Coast, were given the task of locating a place that would be equidistant from each other to eliminate having to alternate

meetings between their locations. William Simmons of St. Augustine and John Lee Williams of Pensacola set out from each location and met near the destroyed Mission San Luis, close to the old capital of *Anhaica*, renamed *Tallahassee Talofa* by the Seminoles but burned by Andrew Jackson in March 1818. The name means 'old fields'. The site selected was near a beautiful waterfall (now Cascades Park), and the new town became the territorial capital in 1824.

**Lafayette Land Grant** – For services rendered to the United States during the Revolutionary War, Congress authorized \$200,000 and a complete township of land to the Marquis de Lafayette. Lafayette requested the township be in Florida since he was great friends with future Gov. Richard Keith Call. Lafayette's representative arrived in Tallahassee in 1825 and selected the first township North in Range 1 East from the prime meridian. This land grant included much of the current city of Tallahassee and Piney Z.

Lafayette was a staunch abolitionist and was disturbed at the plantation-slavery system developing in Florida. He strongly desired a free system of agriculture to be established on his lands. In March 1831 a colony of 50 to 60 Norman peasants led by three of Lafayette's friends arrived and located on a bluff overlooking Lake Lafayette. (This bluff could be right where Piney Z is located or it could be the north shore of the lake near Swift Creek Elementary School.) They planted a number of fruit trees and grew crops, including mulberry trees (there are several large mulberry trees in Lafayette Trail Park, I like to think they came from the colony). Problems with health and disease, the climate, and legal entitlement to the land quickly caused the community to fail and break up. But some of the Frenchmen did remain in the area and we have Frenchtown in Tallahassee as a legacy.

After the failure of the free colony, much of the land grant was sold off in the early 1830s, including section 35 which is where Piney Z is located. The Nuttall, Braden and Craig firm purchased a great deal of it before going bankrupt with the old Union Bank (building still on Apalachee Parkway). By 1855, the last of the lands originally owned by the Lafayette family were sold.

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**Antebellum Florida and Francis Eppes** – In 1826 Thomas Jefferson, the grandfather of Francis Eppes, passed away. This event, coupled with the death of his father three years earlier, spurred Eppes to seek a new life in the Florida wilderness. He purchased land along Black Creek (near today's Proctor Road) in Leon County and slowly he and his wife Mary Randolph built his first plantation *L'eau Noir*. After several children and the rigors of frontier life, Mary died in 1835 and Francis sold *L'eau Noir* and moved to a house in Tallahassee where it was safer from the Indians. By 1836 he had purchased more land in the old Lafayette land grant, on the north and south sides of Lake Lafayette including our Piney Z subdivision. Even though there is no evidence of a house or plantation style buildings at Lake Lafayette during this time (Eppes continued to live in his house at the southwest corner of North Monroe and Brevard Streets in Tallahassee), the land owned by Eppes was undoubtedly farmed using the enslaved persons he owned at that time. Census figures show that Eppes owned 70 slaves in 1860.





Francis Wayles Eppes III, planter and several times Intendant of Tallahassee with a map of his second plantation

Eppes was a conflicted and colorful figure of that era in Tallahassee history. He was a devout Episcopalian and one of the founders of St. John's Episcopal Church. He was several times the Intendant (Mayor) of Tallahassee before and after the Civil War, known especially for bringing law, order and security to a lawless city famous for its bloody duels in the public streets. He helped start and fund the Seminary West of the Suwannee River which, over time, became today's Florida State University. However, he was a confirmed Confederate – and he sold his Lake Lafayette lands for Confederate money shortly before the war ended in 1865. That money became worthless in short order, and Eppes lost everything. He sold his house and most of his belongings to satisfy his debts and moved to Orange County (Orlando) to a log cabin and started a citrus farm. He died there in 1881.

There is one more tragic but interesting story about the frontier and antebellum period of Leon County and Lake Lafayette's history – the Chaires Massacre. This was also during the Second Seminole War 1835-1842. On a Saturday July 13, 1839, Seminole Indians attacked the plantation home of Green Hill Chaires on the north shore of Lake Lafayette, presumably after a social slight (slap?) by Mr. Chaires against the Seminole Indian chief Tiger Tail or perhaps one of his men – accounts differ. The Indians attacked when the men were out on a hunting trip, one shot killed Mrs. Chaires (Hannah Hathaway Averitt Chaires) and set the house afire, two Chaires children were killed in the fire. The story says the children's tutor barely escaped the attack. The victims of this attack are buried in the Green Hill Chaires cemetery off Old Dirt Road on the north shore of Lake Lafayette.

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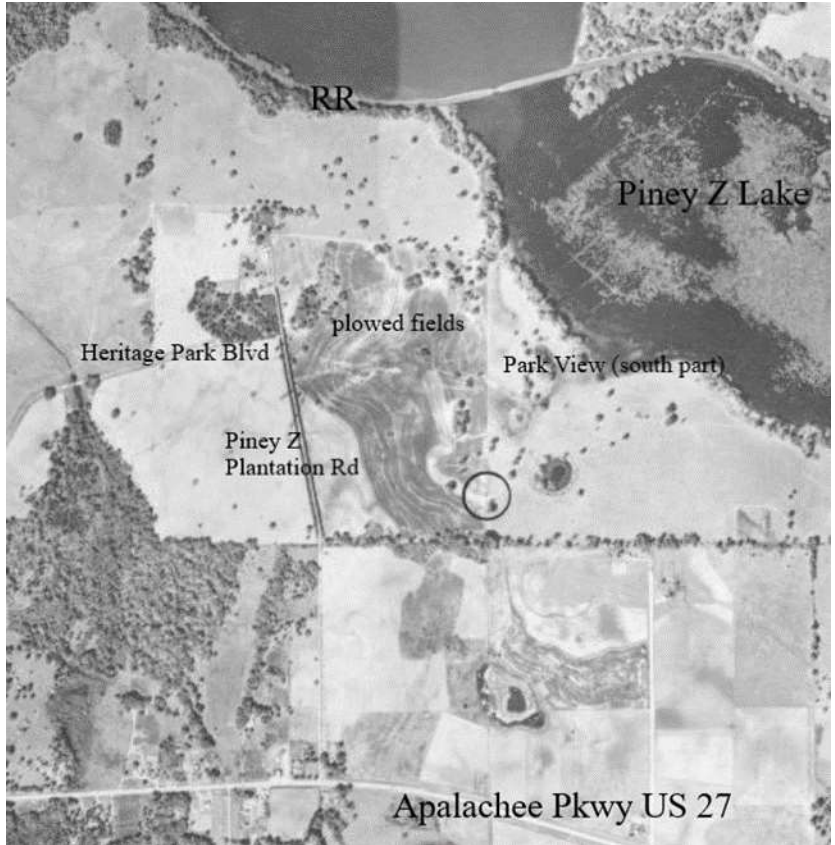
**Post Civil War and Reconstruction into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century** – Lake Lafayette was commonly called “Prairie Lake” in the years after the Civil War because in dry periods it would become a mud flat and it was the fastest way from the Chaires communities to Tallahassee. The Jacksonville, Pensacola and Mobile Railroad was chartered in 1869 and maps show it running a course identical to where it is today along Lake Lafayette’s shores.



A tax cadastral map (showing parcel boundaries) for 1883 shows the Piney Z lands owned by a partnership “Chamberlain and Isaacs”. Investigation by the Tallahassee Historical Society shows that Francis Eppes apparently sold his Lake Lafayette lands to C.V. Chamberlain of New York around 1865 before he left for central Florida. Chamberlain died in 1866 and the lands passed to his wife but also to George N. Miller (also a New Yorker) in settlement of debts. Alexander Isaacs was an agent of Miller, and he collected rents on the property in addition to other properties in Charleston, S.C. When Isaacs died in 1882, a firm called Hastie & Son took possession of the properties as agent of Miller but legal actions between Chamberlain’s wife, Isaacs’ heirs and Miller continued well into the 1890s, ending up in the South Carolina Supreme Court in 1897. At any rate, the lands around Lake Lafayette went up for sale around 1900.

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**20<sup>th</sup> century and Piney Z Plantation** – The plantation/farm where Piney Z subdivision now is passed through several hands in the years after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Newspaper accounts of a large “swinery” owned by George W. Saxon (1848-1935) on Lake Lafayette and the railroad show that hogs and pigs were raised here from around 1910-1920. Saxon was a member of the local militia that fought at Natural Bridge and later became a noted entrepreneur and banker (Capital City National Bank) in Tallahassee. Saxon put the swinery up for sale in 1919.



Piney Z in 1949

Sometime before World War II the farm where Piney Z is now was sold to Mr. Ralph H. “Hutch” Gibson and his wife Thelma. They raised cattle and farmed pine trees – hence the name “Piney Z”. Mr. Gibson died in September 1973, leaving the Piney Z farm to his daughter-in-law Grace Gibson (her husband state senator Pete Gibson died in 1971). Grace married Sherrill Dansby in 1978 and is still a well known businesswoman and philanthropist in the Tallahassee community. In December 1995 the land for today’s Lafayette Trail Park was purchased by the City of Tallahassee with a grant from the state of Florida and a donation by Grace Dansby. Then in 1996, Mark Conner and J.T. Williams, Jr., developers, worked with Grace Dansby to develop Piney Z Farm into the subdivision we know today. Sherrill Dansby died in 2012.



Sherrill and Grace Dansby

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## Environmental

In 1948 the owners of Piney Z Plantation constructed dikes to hold the water in the central part of the lake, severely impacting the hydrology and water quality of the area. Upper Lake Lafayette, which drains parts of Tallahassee through Weems Pond, is drained quickly through a sinkhole just south of Fallschase shopping center and is often completely dry, and is now isolated from the rest of the drainage basin. Piney Z Lake, the middle portion, is managed by the City of Tallahassee and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission. Lower Lake Lafayette is the only part of the lake still connected to the St. Marks River. Fertilizer and pesticide runoff from development all around the lake system has severely polluted its waters and caused dramatic algae growth in the warm season.



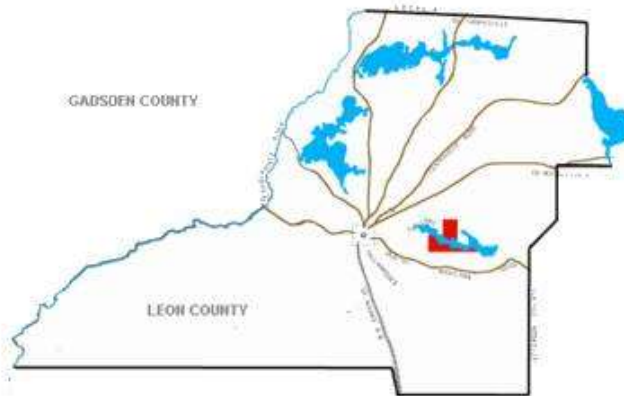
Earliest known picture of Lake Lafayette ca. 1839 from lithograph at Florida Memory (pictures)



**ADDENDUM – not to be printed in newsletter**

**HISTORICAL MAPS**

The first map shows Eppes' second plantation in red. Francis Eppes only farmed his second plantation, he actually lived in Tallahassee in a house on the SW corner of Monroe and Brevard. This is the same Francis Eppes who has a statue at FSU, was mayor of Tallahassee several times.



The second map shows the tax cadastral map for 1883. The Jacksonville, Pensacola and Mobile railroad is plainly visible.



The third map shows an aerial picture of the Lake Lafayette area in 1931. Modern roads and landmarks are drawn in.



The fourth map shows an aerial picture of Lake Lafayette in 1949. Modern roads and landmarks are drawn in.

