

2.0 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Preface

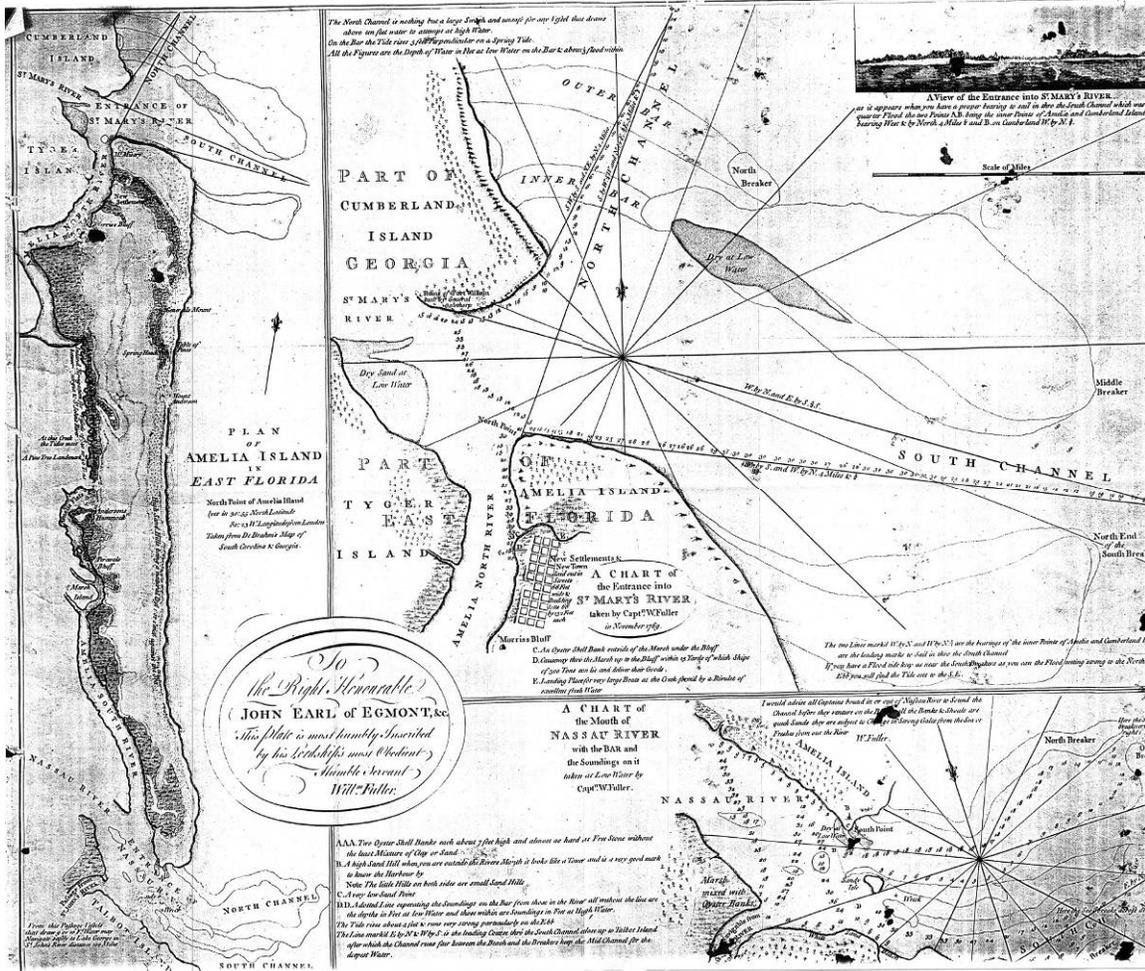
This brief historical summary is intended to underscore the importance of water-dependent uses in Fernandina's economic and cultural development and provide an historical context for CRADG decisions. Although a thorough history of the waterfront is beyond the scope of this document, the intent of this summary is to present key dates, events, maps, drawings and photographs that assist users of this document in placing design decisions within Fernandina's historical context. Particular emphasis has been placed on the effect historical and cultural events have had on the physical form of the city and its changing relationship to the waterfront. Architecturally, only a handful of buildings remain in this area, but a number of historic photographs are included to establish a visual record of the structures present in the most active years of the waterfront. This summary is offered in the spirit of the recommendation offered by Blanding and Associates (2007: 5-17) that the city work with the Amelia Island History Museum to develop more detailed historical monographs which can be offered to the public to make Fernandina's waterfront history come alive.



(fig. 2.1) Train arrival at Front and Centre Streets (circa 1890).

Introduction

The modern city of Fernandina was founded and incorporated in 1824, making it one of the oldest cities in Florida after the United States took possession from the Spanish in 1821 (third behind St. Augustine and Pensacola- both incorporated in 1822 after the change in government). Archeological surveys of Amelia Island indicate indigenous occupation throughout the island, and particularly around the current sites of Oldtown and the City of Fernandina, for over 3000 years. Native inhabitants were drawn to the abundance of fish, shell fish, birds, and sources of fresh water. As a barrier island with the western side fronting the Amelia River, Amelia Island offered easy access to nearby fishing areas, rookeries and other coastal communities while affording protection from the destructive power of Atlantic storms (fig. 2.2).



(fig. 2.2) A Chart of the Entrance into the St. Mary's prepared for Lord Egmont, 1770.

The earliest formal mention of these coastal settlements is found in William Bartram (Bartram 1791: 42-43, 349-350) (fig. 2.3) when he notes the existence of earthen mounds outside Oldtown in the 18th century: "On Egmont estate, are several very large Indian tumuli, which are called Ogeeche mounts, so named from that nation of Indians, who took shelter here, after being driven from their native settlements on the main near Ogeeche river". Bartram's account also notes the "very extensive capacious harbours, from three to five and six to eight miles over, and communicate with each other by parallel salt rivers, or passes, that flow into the sound", and he anticipates the activity of the next century: "they afford an extensive and secure inland navigation for most craft, such as large schooners, sloops, pettiaguers, boats, and canoes". 20th century

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excavations date occupation of the island to around 1000 BCE. (Bullen, Griffin 1952: 37; Smith and Bullen 1971; Griffin and Steinbach 1991: 21-24; Smith et al. 1998).

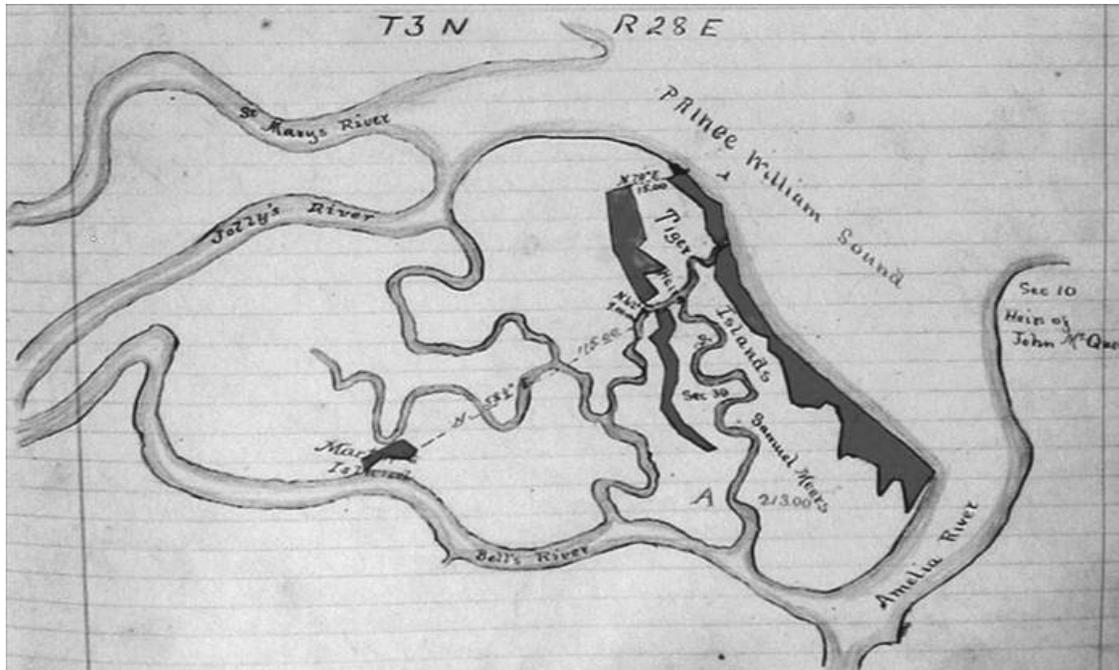


(fig. 2.3) State Historical marker in the CRA on Bartram's travels.

Accounts by Spanish, French, and English settlers confirm the practical value of Amelia's geography as they competed for control of the island and its strategic advantages. Timber was plentiful and easy to extract and ship to distant ports. Inland roadways such as the King's Highway were connected by a system of ferries and small ports that allowed for an efficient communication of goods and services along the St. Johns, St. Mary's, and Amelia Rivers. Due to its prime location, a diversity of products such as Sea Island cotton, rice, sugarcane, cattle and food crops demonstrated that: "Fernandina on Amelia Island was a better representative than St. Augustine of the new economic order" (Tebeau 1971: 102).

While the harbor at St. Augustine was in need of continuous dredging, the waterways along Amelia were more accessible and protected from Atlantic storms. Lieutenant Grenier, a Spanish Officer stationed on the St. Mary's, remarked in 1784 that "The St. Marys Bar generally so called, though its real name is Amelia Bar, is considered as one of the Best and lest dangerous in North America. Ships of five hundred tons burden can enter it." (Johnston, Bland 2007: 3.6; Lockey 1949:307) (fig. 2.4)

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(fig. 2.4) Field survey showing river confluences at Tiger Island, west of Fernandina.

In 1807, a series of laws generally called the Embargo Acts led to severe restrictions on vessels trading with England. Although intended to punish England, it had the opposite affect. American vessels were prohibited from landing in any foreign port unless specifically authorized by the President. The entire series of events was lampooned in the press as “Dambargo”, “Mob-Rage”, “Go-bar-'em” or “O-grab-me” (embargo spelled backward) (fig. 2.5). In addition, trading vessels were required to post a bond of guarantee equal to the value of both the ship itself and its cargo, in order to insure compliance with the law. Although the law was generally despised and roundly ignored, Fernandina emerged as the only “free” port along the eastern shore. It was during the period between 1807 and 1817 that it gained its reputation as a place populated with filibusters, free-booters, pirates, confidence men and smugglers- an image that is still promoted in tourist advertisements. Some accounts indicated upwards of 150 vessels of varying sizes and colors anchored off the shore of Fernandina (known today as Oldtown) trading all manner of regular and contraband goods. In addition to the Embargo, importing slaves into the US became illegal after 1808, and Fernandina became a major transport site for slave traders operating in the region (Landers 1999: 238, Cusick 2007: 107).



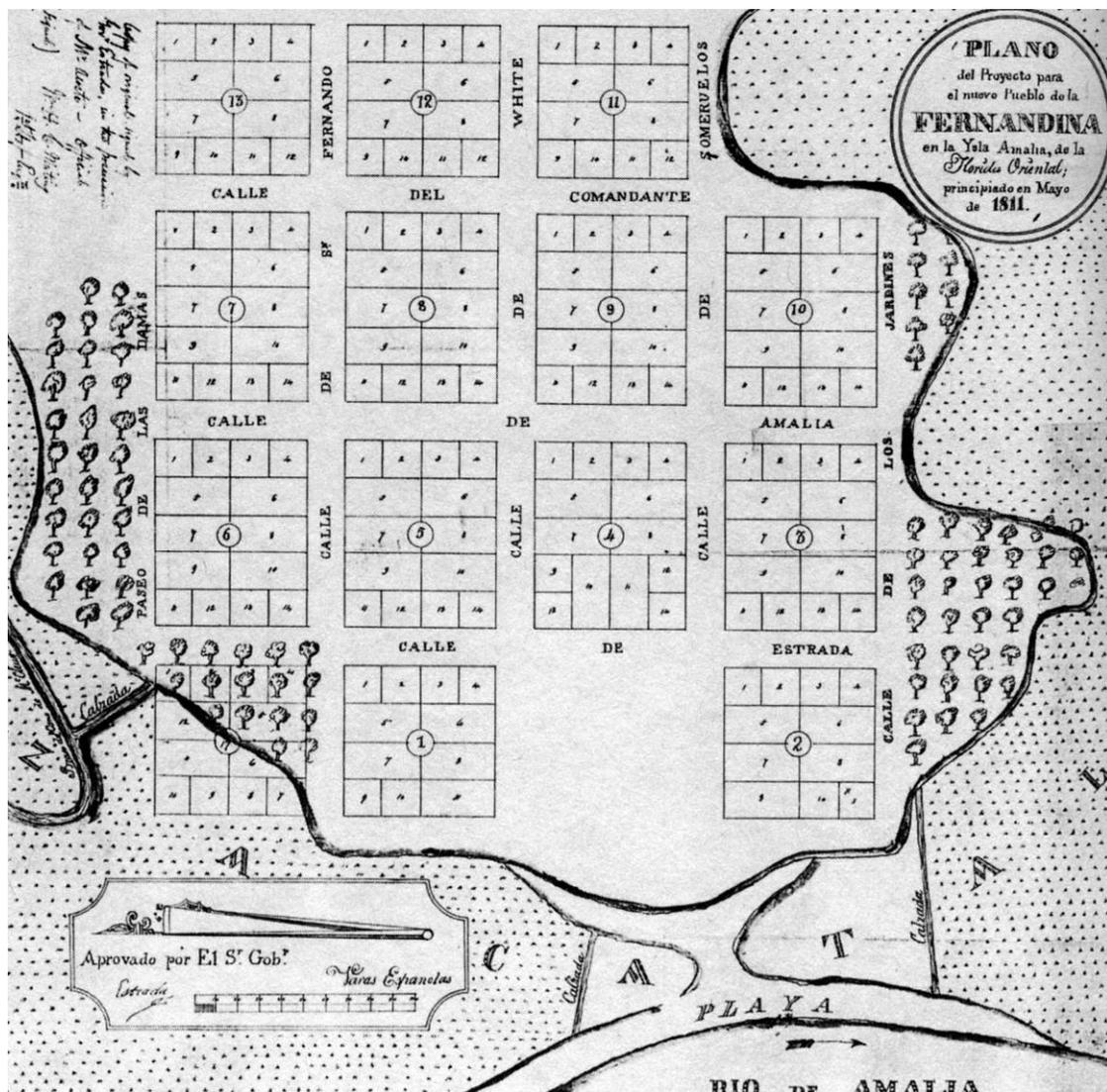
(fig. 2.5) Period cartoon depicting the 1807 Embargo.

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The formal town plan of Fernandina, drafted by George J. F. Clarke in 1811, is a text book diagram of the 1573 Laws of the Indies. Section 111 and 112 of these Laws state:

“Having chosen a place where the town is to be made, which as above, must be located in an elevated place, where are to be found health, strength, fertility, and abundance of land for farming and pasturage, fuel and wood for building, materials, freshwater, a native people, commodiousness, supplies, entrance and departure to the north wind. If the site lies along the coast, let it be had to the port and that the sea not be situated to the south or to the west...” and “The main plaza, whence a beginning is to be made, should be made at the landing place of the port” (Nutall 1921: 751).

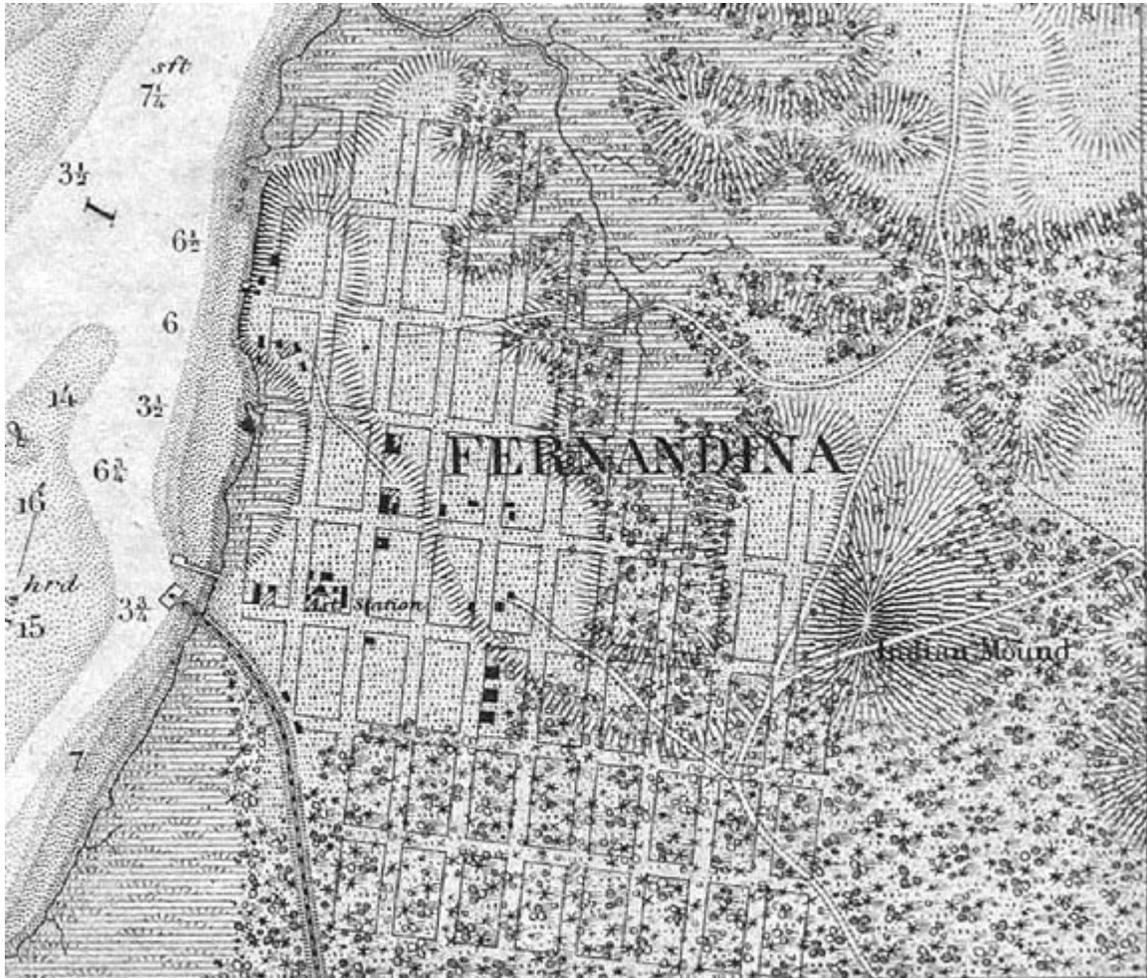
Clarke’s plan illustrates these principles, clearly establishing an orientation to the Amelia River with its west facing plaza and water lots set to either side to preserve a frontal view of the water from the fortifications of the city (fig. 2.6).



(fig. 2.6) Diagram of the 1811 town plan of Fernandina (now Oldtown).

2.1 THE RAILROAD AND THE PORT

David Levy Yulee, a prominent planter and one of Florida's most influential politicians, helped develop the Internal Improvement Act of 1854, which made it possible for railroads to receive land grants and defray construction costs. Yulee's own proposal for a rail line connecting Fernandina with the port of Cedar Key on the West coast of Florida was incorporated in 1853 as the Florida Railroad Company, with construction beginning in 1856 at Fernandina and reaching Cedar Key by 1861. A map drawn by A.D. Bache in early late 1856 shows the railroad pier at the river's edge of Centre Street, which is not labeled, but runs left to right ending in the "Indian Mound" at the eastern edge of the city grid (below right in fig. 2.7).



(fig. 2.7) An 1856 survey of Fernandina showing the new railroad wharf at the base of Centre Street.

The idealized Town Plan of Fernandina produced in 1857 by Seibert was commissioned by Yulee and the Florida Railroad Company to “promote sales and provide potential investors with a visual reference of the new town” (Johnston, Bland 2007: 3-21) (fig. 2.8).

In Seibert's plan, we can see that the existing dock system is already extensive, its growth accelerated by the terminus of the rail line at the base of Centre Street. It is also interesting to note the shoreline which extends almost to Second Street between Center and Broome Streets. The Florida Railroad Company essentially “owned the town of Fernandina which had a terminal ready to accommodate ocean-going vessels” and by 1860, “large quantities of lumber were pouring out through that port, and thousands of tourists were spending their winters in Florida.”

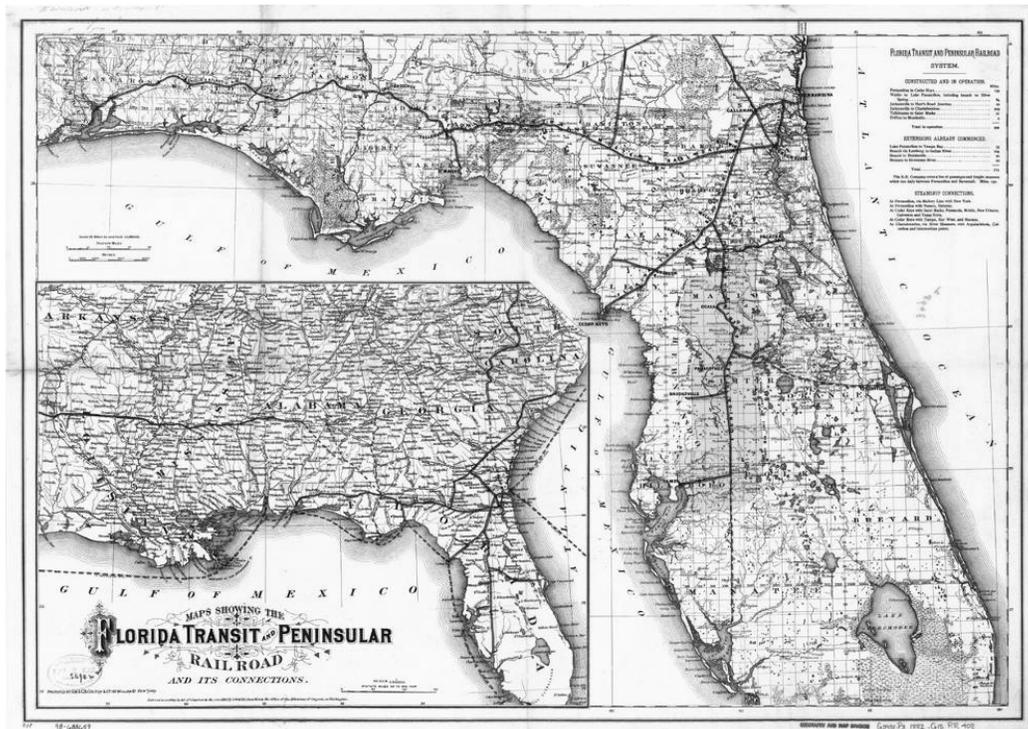
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(Clarke 1953: 182). Water lots are clearly distinct in configuration from the strict rectilinear form of the grid plan lots and oriented exclusively towards commercial use. In this time period, little regard was given to the development of public space along the river that connected it to the rest of the city plan.



(fig. 2.8) A fully active waterfront shown in this 1857 map promoting the future of Fernandina.

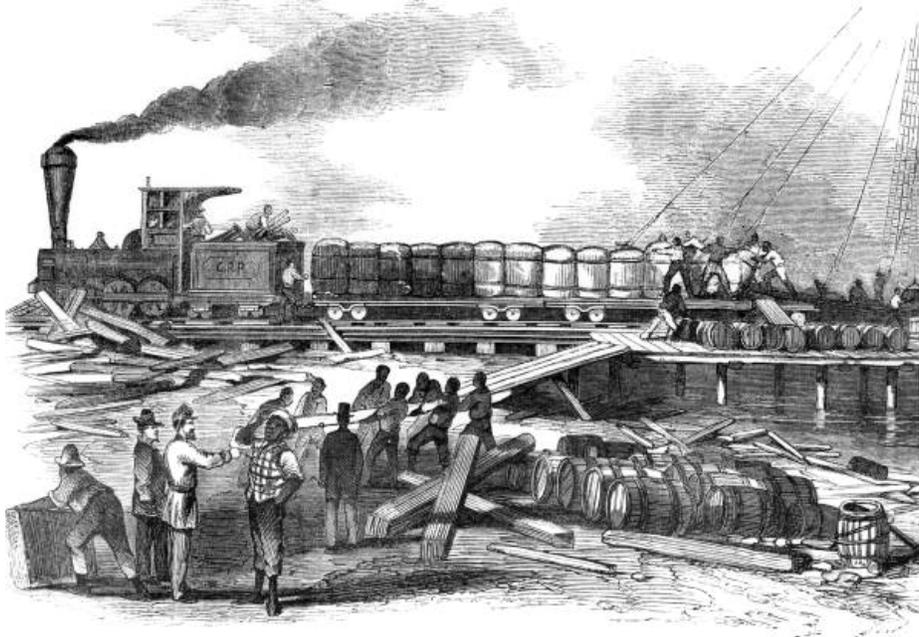
Yulee's efforts to link the Port of Fernandina with the Port of Cedar Key were designed to avoid the difficult journey through the Straits of Florida and tap into the lucrative markets between New Orleans and New York City. This connection increased Fernandina's status as a major port on the eastern seaboard (fig. 2.9).



(fig. 2.9) Map from 1882 showing Florida Railroad system.

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The rapidly expanding activities of the port were interrupted by the beginning of the Civil War. A naval blockade of southern ports was ordered in 1861, which devastated the port operations. In 1862, Fernandina was occupied by the Union troops leading to a mass exodus of both confederate and union supporters (fig. 2.10).



(fig. 2.10) *Civil War activity at the Fernandina waterfront from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1862.*



(fig. 2.11) *Riverfront skirmish during the Civil War.*

After the cessation of hostilities, Fernandina again began to prosper between 1865 and 1876 with increased shipments of lumber. Almost immediately, the city entered another period of decline due to the fire of 1876 which destroyed many facilities along the port. The Yellow Fever epidemic of 1877, which quarantined all travelers from Fernandina, along with the emergence of Jacksonville as a rival port facility, slowed Fernandina's growth during this period.

2.2 THE EMERGENCE OF TOURISM

With the opening of Yulee’s Egmont Hotel in 1878, Fernandina rebounded after these events as one of the first communities in Florida to attract the well-heeled Gilded Age traveler. Although the Egmont coaches were “at every Boat and Train” the hotel was located, like many hotels of the period, inland at Beech and 7th Streets (figs. 2.12, 2.13) where a more “respectable environs” could be maintained. The waterfront figured as a practical connection to the town for tourists, but the Island’s natural surroundings are advertised as the main attractions: “Rowing, Sailing, Fishing and Hunting in the Inlets, Sounds and on the Isles of the Sea. Sportsman’s Paradise. First class Livery. Twenty-four miles of the Finest Beach in the World. Bowling Alley, Shooting Gallery, Billiard Room. &c., connected with the House”.

“The Egmont”

FERNANDINA, FLA.,
THE LEADING HOTEL OF THE SOUTH.

And the most Elegant in all its Appointments.
Heated by Steam, Lighted by Gas, Hot and Cold
Baths, Oral Anunciator, Fire-place in every Room,
&c., &c. PRACTICALLY FIRE-PROOF. Fire Hose on
every floor, and special accommodations for Fami-
lies and Large Parties.

Reduced Rates

For parties remaining a week or longer.

EGMONT COACHES at every Boat and Train.
Rowing, Sailing, Fishing and Hunting in the Inlets,
Sounds and on the Isles of the Sea. Sportsman’s
Paradise. First-class Livery. Twenty-four miles of
the Finest Beach in the World. Bowling Alley,
Shooting Gallery, Billiard Room, &c., connected
with the House. B. H. SKINNER,
1-6m Manager.

(fig. 2.12) Period ad touting the virtues of the Egmont Hotel and Fernandina.

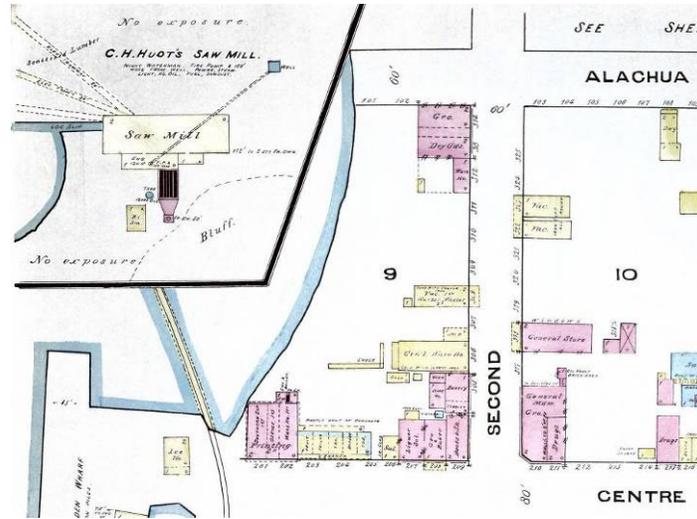


(fig. 2.13) Hotel card showing guests the local attractions (which exclude the riverfront).

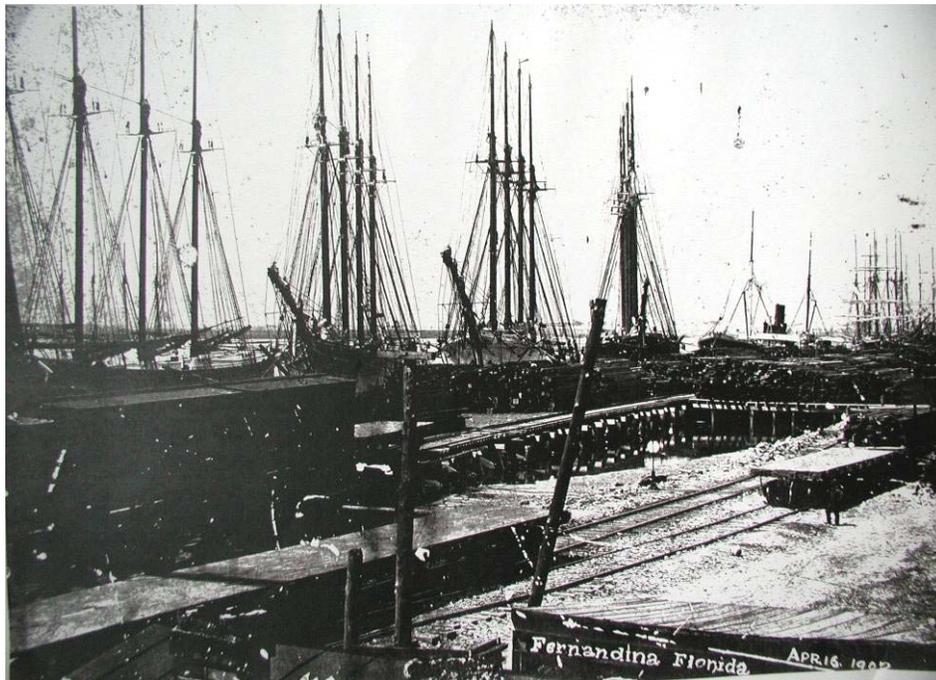
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finest in the South, and the Mansion and Riddell Houses are spacious and well kept, all being crowded during the season". (Barbour 1884: 100).

Fernandina's traditional industries of turpentine, lumber, naval stores, and fishing regained their importance as a major component of the economy during this era. Sanborn maps from 1884-1926 demonstrate the significance of these industries along the waterfront. For example, W.B.C. Duryees's saw mill at First Street (Front Street) and C.H. Huot's saw mill, complemented larger operations in the region (fig. 2.15). Lumber yards, sawmills, and storage facilities dominated the docks and the view down the principle streets of the city. As seen in the image below, First Street (later Front Street) and Alachua was completely filled with lumber, carts and sheds (fig. 2.16).



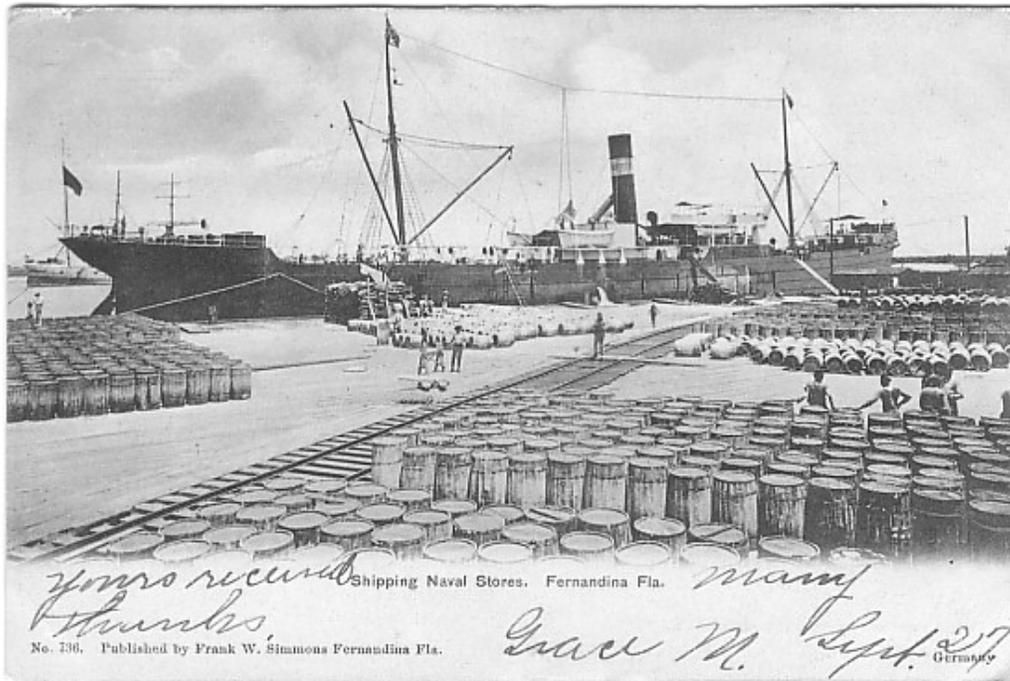
(fig. 2.15) Detail of Sanborn Insurance map from 1884.



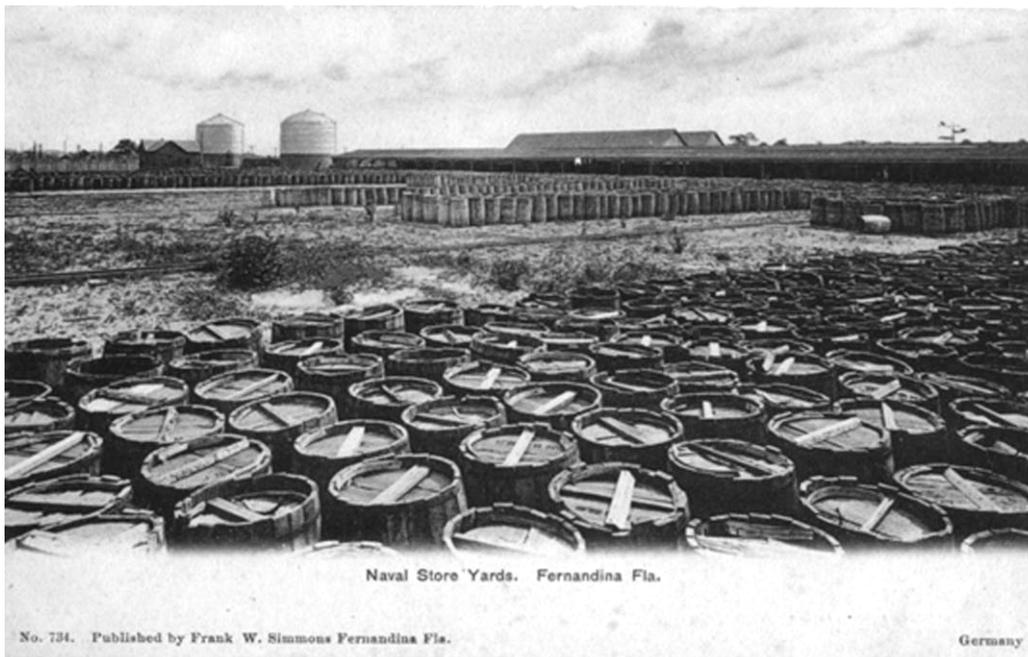
(fig. 2.16) Constant activity at the dock effectively created a wall between the city and the river.

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Turpentine and pitch production and storage facilities were also located along Fernandina's docks (fig. 2.17). Another postcard from the era also indicates that some of these yards may have been located inland around the north side of the Fernandina Middle School Service drive; the foundations there maybe the ruins of the round towers in the background (fig. 2.18).



(fig. 2.17) Acres of storage were necessary along Front Street for the distribution of goods.



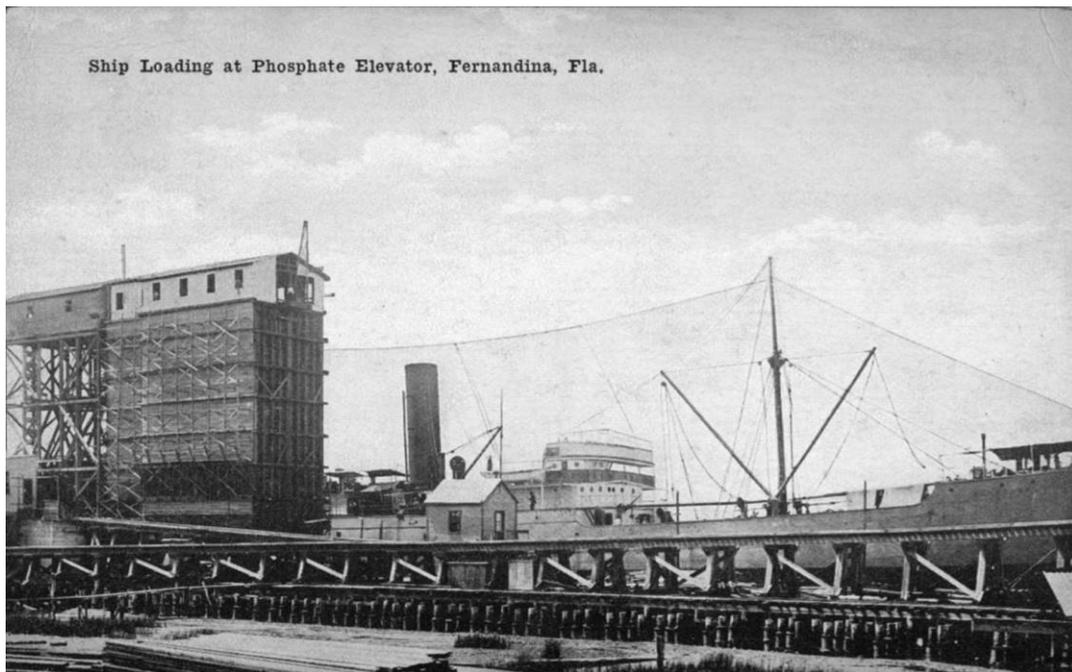
(fig. 2.18) Storage areas required using land over a mile from the waterfront.

2.3 PHOSPHATE

The discovery of phosphate in Florida by Albertus Vogt in 1889 jump-started the state's industry. Fernandina became a favored port for the industry, which received shipments by rail from the Peace River mines on the east coast of Florida (fig. 2.19). Several plants eventually dominated the Amelia River shoreline. Eventually, the Port of Tampa emerged as a competitor during this time period with its advantage of geographic proximity to the Peace River facilities. Devastating fires destroyed one of the major Fernandina phosphate elevators in 1907, and a few years later, World War I curtailed much of demand for phosphate. After the war, the demand increased, leading to the construction of more extensive facilities such as the Florida Terminal Company plant located along the waterfront between Fir and Cedar. However, phosphate would disappear as a major industry in Fernandina by the end of the decade (fig. 2.20).



(fig. 2.19) Excavating phosphate in the Peace River area.



(fig. 2.20) Phosphate elevator flanked by railroad distribution tracks at the waterfront.

2.4 FISHING AND SHRIMPING

Although fishing and shrimping had been conducted in the area for at least a thousand years, techniques that created the modern industry were not introduced until the late 19th century. Several plants to extract fish oil from menhaden (a corruption of the Indian “Munnawhatteaug”-Goode 1878: 736) or “pogys” (also known as ‘fat-backs’ in some parts of the south) were established on the north shore of Egan’s Creek and the Amelia River in the middle 19th century. These plants produced fish meal for fertilizer and animal food, and fish oil, which was used in the manufacture of soap, linoleum, water proof fabrics, and certain types of paints (fig. 2.21). At the time of this writing, however, only the Nassau Fertilizer Company, which was started by the Corbett family in 1911, remains.



(fig. 2.21) Pogy plant at the confluence of the Amelia River and Egan’s Creek.

Most sources consider Fernandina to be the birthplace of the modern shrimping industry due to several innovations which improved the efficiency of shrimping operations. In 1902, Sollecito Salvador attached an outboard motor power to his rowboat and was able to pull a seine line faster and more efficiently. Later innovations included a change in location from inshore to offshore, and a change in method from castnets, haul seines, and bar nets to the modern otter trawl. The increase in size and number of boats also led to an increase of dock frontage and supportive industries such as net manufacturing, repair shipbuilding, ice houses, and marine supply (fig. 2.22).



(fig. 2.22) Shrimping facilities along the waterfront, circa 1930’s.

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A newspaper article in the "Evening Gazette" of Nassau County indicated that the "The fishing industry promises to add to the wealth of Fernandina. In the first three months of 1913 one million pounds of bluefish worth over \$100,000 was shipped from the city. It is safe to say that by the next winter, the industry will have grown to 50 smacks and 150 launches, shipping from 10 to 20 cars a day of fish and employing 1,000 men". (fig. 2.23)



(fig. 2.23) Shrimp fleet moored between Centre and Alachua (structure in background still exists).

The first power driven boat to drag the trawl net successfully in deep water was manned by Fernandina pilot Capt. William Jones Davis. In 1922, David Cook (whose family still operates shrimp boats and maintains property on the waterfront) and Emmett Freeman refined the local trawl by adding corners and wings for better operation. Many Fernandina families were industry pioneers, such as Hardee, Cook, Lucas, Brazzell, Little, Freeman, Wilder, Evatt, Bennett, Burbank, Garenflo, Smith, Merrow, Davenport, Brooks, Fisher, Kelly, Clark, Goffin, Morse, and others (fig. 2.24).



(fig. 2.24) Shrimp fleet and dock facilities in the 1950's.

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Outstanding among these were the Hardee brothers, who from 1900 operated a ship's chandlery which evolved into Standard Marine Supply Corp (fig. 2.25). Today, through affiliated companies, Standard Marine provides shrimping gear all over the world but, ironically, has closed its operations on the Fernandina Waterfront. The structure still stands and is planned to become a landmark element in a new mixed use development along Second Street.



(fig. 2.25) Standard Marine Supply Corp circa 1986.

Due to changes in fishing areas, shrimp populations, and shifting economies, the main arena for shrimping moved from Fernandina to St. Augustine, Louisiana, Texas and Mexico in the 1940's, signaling the decline of its importance to the city's economy. By 1953, the nine major fishing areas of Florida were: Pensacola, Apalachicola and vicinity, Cedar Key, Tampa and its tributaries, Key West, Biscayne Bay, Lake Worth, Indian River and the northeast coast, which included Fernandina. A Nassau County Economic Development Board report confirms this trend: the yearly catch figures declined from 8,577,459 pounds in 1986 to 1,521,987 in 1999.

2.5 THE PAPER INDUSTRY

Although Fernandina's status as a major lumber shipping port has virtually disappeared, the paper industry continues to be a major contributor to the economy and influences the planning of the waterfront. The Kraft Paper Company, now operated by Smurfit-Stone Container Enterprises Inc., established the first mill in Fernandina in 1937 to produce kraft linerboard. The placement of the mill between Escambia and Garden Streets increased activity at the port, but further isolated Old Town from the rest of Fernandina (fig. 2.26).



(fig. 2.26) Aerial view from 1942 looking northeast. Note that Beech Street extends to the waterfront.

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Rayonier began operation with the construction of a facility south of central Fernandina in 1939, and in 1940, turned out its first batch of pulp using the process developed by industrial chemist Charles Holmes Herty to make newsprint from southern pine. A report from Time Magazine in January of 1940 stated that: "today Fernandina is the only producer of bleached sulfite pulp from southern pine. This means that Rayonier's total production from Fernandina and its four Pacific Coast plants will shortly reach something over 300,000 tons a year, about 16% of the world's estimated output" (<http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/press/2003/04292003.html>). Although the paper industry is undergoing a transition within fluid global markets, the two plants bracketing the CRA continue to contribute to the local economy and are a major visual symbol of Fernandina's industrial history (fig. 2.27).



(fig. 2.27) Rayonier facilities, 1945.

2.6 RECREATION

Like many communities with a significant working waterfront, the large scale of the aforementioned operations, coupled with their environmental consequences, further separated the waterfront from the social centers of the city (fig. 2.28). Significantly, the waterfront areas of many smaller seacoast communities were not conceived of in recreational terms until after World War II when returning GIs and their families enjoyed greater economic prosperity coupled with increasing amounts of leisure time. Florida's growth rate was unprecedented in the US and its principle attractions were its miles of beaches, lakes, and waterways. It was not until the early 1960's, however, that waterfronts would be reconceived nationwide as attractive public spaces.



(fig. 2.28) Panorama of Fernandina, 1884. Population was 3,500.

The use of the Amelia River waterfront for recreational uses formally begins with the creation of the Marina State Welcome Station inaugurated in 1963. The construction of the Welcome Station, known simply as the “teepee” (fig. 2.29), symbolized the emergence of recreational water-related uses as a major cultural and economic trend. Note the distinct public area flanked to the north and east in this view looking towards the northeast. The yearly Shrimp Festival was also first held in 1963 to celebrate the traditional blessing of the shrimp fleet (fig. 2.30). Note that architect Louis C. Holloway’s vision of the town indicates the era’s emphasis on automobile access and simple building forms which emerged from a tree covered landscape. In Holloway’s vision, existing historic context of the downtown is all but invisible (fig. 2.31).

The Teepee and marina layout remained until 1986 when the station was razed and the marina expanded. Since that time, the marina has been plagued by silting problems, recreational water uses have escalated beyond prediction, competition by nearby facilities has reduced boat traffic, and a weakened economy has curtailed modernization. The UF Conservation Clinic task force states that: “For the last few years the rapid loss of recreational and working waterfronts that have historically formed part of the culture of many Florida towns and cities on the coast has prompted efforts to protect such waterfronts. In both 2005 and 2006 the Florida Legislature acknowledged this problem and sought to address it,” in part by requiring coastal communities to integrate strategies and incentives for waterfront preservation and access to waterways within certain elements of their comprehensive plans.

(<http://www.law.ufl.edu/conservation/waterways/waterfronts/index.htm>).

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(fig. 2.29) Aerial view of the Welcome Station at the base of Centre Street.



(fig. 2.30) Blessing of the fleet at the inauguration of the Florida Marine Welcome Station, 1963.

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(fig. 2.31) Rendering of the proposed welcome station and city marina by Holloway, Register and Cummings, 1962.



(fig. 2.32) Visitors receive information inside the Welcome Station.

2.7 CURRENT STATUS

The Fernandina waterfront still retains a mixture of water-dependent uses such as commercial shipping, fishing and related uses, and water-related uses such as a marina, boat ramp, retail, and commercial facilities. Maintaining this mixture will require diligence, creative thinking, and collaboration by all involved parties. Shrimping activity remains in the town despite its decline as a major economic contributor. The shrimping industry's legacy is perpetuated by the Shrimp Festival, which is visited by over 150,000 people annually (fig. 2.33). An ironic suggestion was made in a 2006 public meeting concerning waterfront park amenities: "a children's playground should be established on the waterfront that features "faux-shrimp boats" when the real boats are in plain site in the background. The modern shrimping industry began in Fernandina Beach, but today's shrimp boats unfortunately add more to the town's scenic waterfront than to its overall economy.



(fig. 2.33) Shrimp Festival looking west along Centre Street towards Welcome Station.

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The Shrimp Festival, and other seasonal events, demonstrate the potential and limitations of the current conditions within the CRA, and particularly the waterfront area, to support the expansion of public events as well as improved daily use. The railroad continues to serve Rayonier and the Port of Fernandina despite changes in the paper and shipping industries. The railroad is still seen as an important economic element and an historic component, but at the same time is also viewed as an impediment to the transformation of the waterfront. New recreational uses such as small scale cruise ships (fig. 2.34), gambling boats, charter fishing, fishing tournaments, and island tours have added additional activities to the waterfront, but have also increased the demand for vehicle and boat parking which compete for the limited and valuable public space along the water. In 2004, a public boat ramp and access point was added to the North Amelia Island Park on Intracoastal at N. 14th St. adjacent to Fort Clinch State Park property which has served to ameliorate waterfront access.



(fig. 2.34) Cruise ship berthed at the city docks.

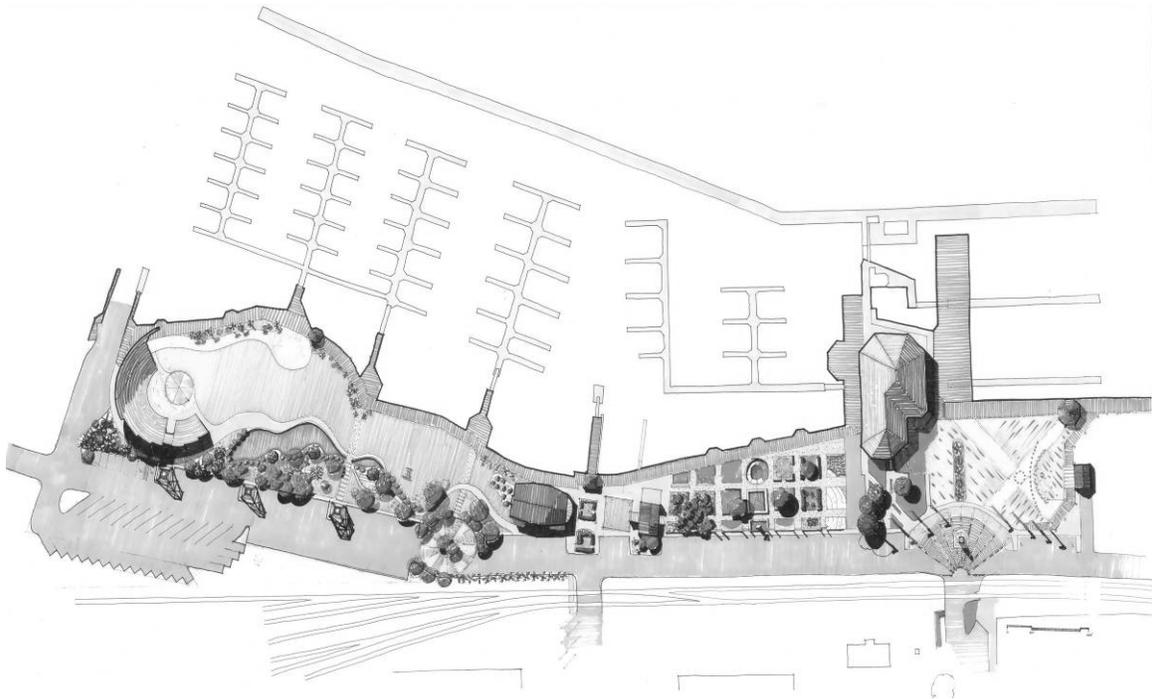


(fig. 2.35) Pocket size promotional brochure produced by the Chamber of Commerce.

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A waterfront park master plan has been proposed by the Waterfronts Florida Fernandina Committee and the Parks and Recreation Committee and was discussed in public meetings in 2006 and 2007. A literal centerpiece of this plan is a new Visitor's Center which is currently in the planning stages. This project is the first community based proposal for an organized public space along the river since 1963 (fig. 2.36). The Visitor's Center will most likely be the first public building constructed in the town since 1978 (when the Nassau County Library was built) and the first construction to be developed under the new CRADG.

Florida is growing at a rate of over 1000 new residents per day and is projected to overtake New York as the Nation's third most populous state before 2015. (From: "Interim State Population Projections", U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, 2005). Tourism and sport fishing has displaced commercial fishing as a predominate industry, but the fishing industry continues to be a cultural and economic asset. Fernandina's nautical heritage may be changing, but new water-dependent industries such as boat brokering, boat building, and boat repair are emerging as new economic opportunities. The Community Redevelopment Area and its companion Design Guidelines are two complementary planning tools to manage appropriate growth and development along the Fernandina waterfront.



(fig. 2.36) Conceptual plan of a waterfront park developed by the Waterfronts Florida and Parks and Recreation Committees.