

To Dave
June Chule

Cattle Raising in Spanish Florida, 1513-1763*

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The documentary discovery that cattle ranches existed in Florida in the seventeenth century revolutionizes the accepted concepts of Spanish Florida history. These concepts can be summarized quickly. Florida was discovered in 1513, although unknown Europeans had visited the peninsula's shores before that date. Most of the Indian population was of a fairly low-level culture that had not yet managed basic agricultural techniques. They were mostly food-gathering, fishing-and-hunting Indians. These Indians did not receive the Spanish well and delayed actual occupation for about a half century. Meanwhile, exploration was continued by Narvaez, De Soto, and other well-known figures, culminating in 1565 with the founding of St. Augustine, capital of Spanish Florida and most important Spanish outpost in North America east of the Mississippi.

Dreams and plans to make St. Augustine the thriving metropolis of a proud Spanish colony stretching from the icy waters of Hudson Bay to the tropical Florida Keys, and from the Atlantic Ocean to New Mexico never materialized. The actual area of Spanish occupation was St. Augustine, center of a narrow beachhead that extended in a strip northward along the shoreline, including the south Georgia and north Florida coastal islands. St. Augustine was strictly a military town whose purpose was to protect the vital homebound route for the Spanish fleet which sailed along the Florida coast, then turned northeast toward Bermuda.

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By the mid-seventeenth century the Spaniards were able to establish a second area of actual occupation and exploitation with modern Tallahassee, then called San Luis, as its center and the tiny port of St. Marks as its sea door. The Franciscans established some missions, converting the somewhat more sedentary Apalache Indians. A narrow and fragile trail connected St. Augustine and San Luis. Even with this moderate expansion Florida still remained a military outpost in a hostile geographical setting.

To the three greatest obstacles, the elements of nature, Indians, and the Spanish settlers' demoralization, a fourth powerful enemy was added after 1670 when England began to press southward toward the Spanish lands. The immediate result was the construction of a powerful Spanish fort in 1672, which became one of the strongest fortifications in North and Central America, including the Caribbean islands. Florida, with St. Augustine as the nerve center, became a military garrison *per se*, and everything was geared to armed defense. In 1702 the first real armed attack occurred, but the English failed to occupy the massive fort. In subsequent years the missions were all destroyed, reducing Florida to an even narrower beachhead than in the early seventeenth century. In 1763 Spain gave Florida to England in return for English Havana, captured during the Seven Years War. English occupation of Florida lasted only twenty years, producing a moderate geographical expansion of actual occupation. Spain regained Florida in 1783 but lost it to the new, energetic United States in 1821. This second Spanish occupation was a period of confusion, chaos, and intense frontier struggle among Spaniards, Indians, English, and the United States. The real consolidation of Florida as an actual occupied area began with the American period.

The military nature of Spanish Florida had important influences on the life of the people. It is hard to estimate the number of inhabitants to Florida living under actual or partial Spanish rule during the seventeenth

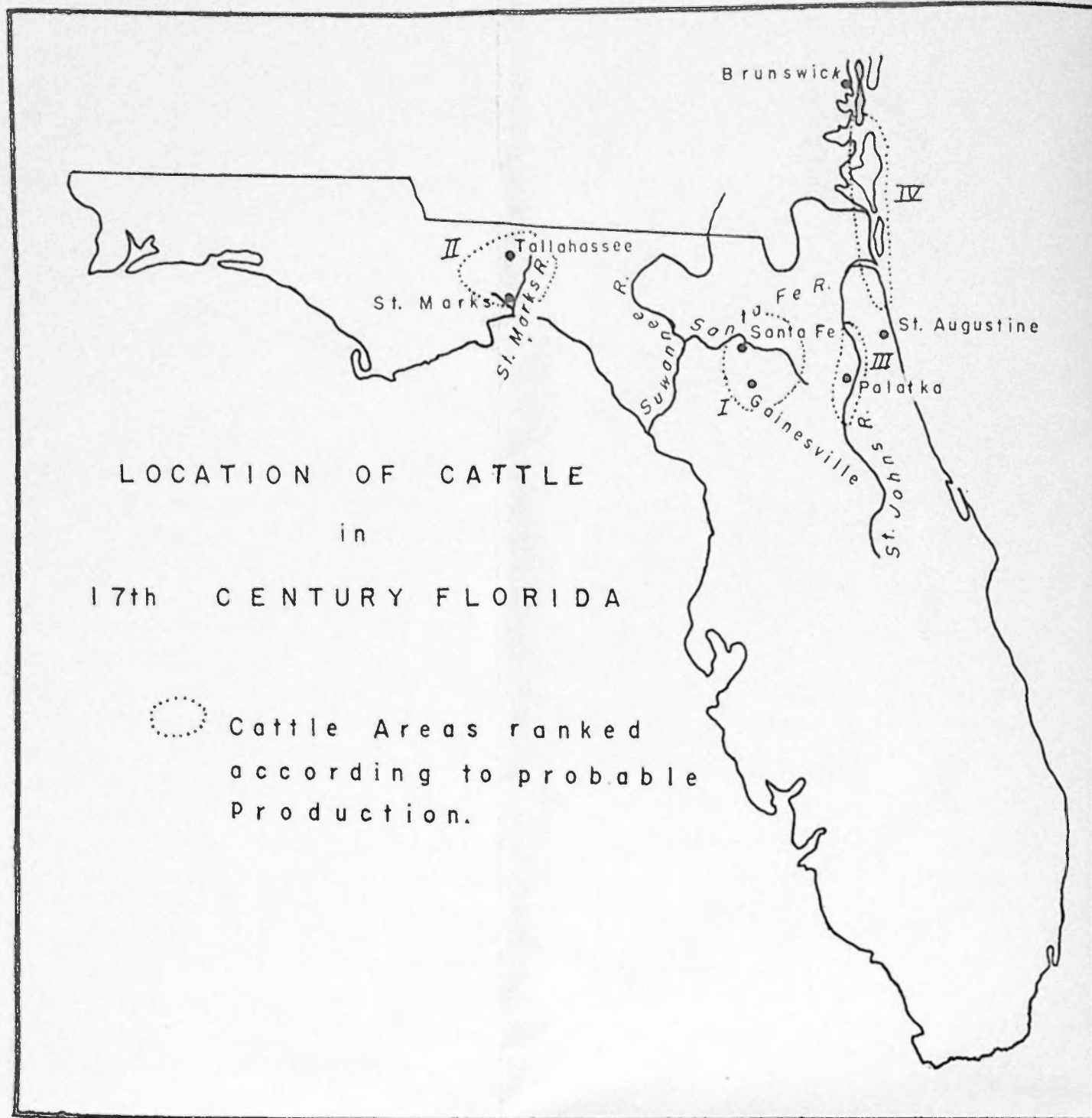


Fig. 2. Location of cattle ranches in Spanish Florida.

Florida) in which the natives slew Spaniards in charge of the cattle ranches. Beginning with 1680 we find more and more references to cattle ranches in the documents. By 1700 there were names of cattle ranches, their tax payments, and regulations for a slaughter house. In 1702, when the English invaded Florida and laid siege to the fort, cattle from the ranches were driven into the fort moat and were helpful in weathering the long siege. In the next years the English destroyed everything that the Spaniards had established in Florida with the exception of St. Augustine. Consequently the cattle ranches disappeared.

The era of the cattle ranches can therefore be delimited from 1655 to 1702. Its emergence may go back from about 1605, but probably a date closer to 1655. The real cattle boom took place about 1680 to 1702. This coincides with the golden age of Spanish Florida, which up to now remains neglected and ignored by historians and archaeologists.

Apparently this progressive age was the consequence of an aggressive local citizenry in St. Augustine, proud of their city, province, and local heritage. Many of them were descendants of the old pioneer settlers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Whereas in the sixteenth century people of

St. Augustine felt frustrated and took advantage of the slightest reason to leave, in the new century a *criollo* local tradition had developed. But these St. Augustinian families now demanded more than the sole security of a military job. They wanted land to free themselves from total dependency on the administrative apparatus. And they wanted to become a landed *criollo* aristocracy to assure security, status, and local tenure for their descendants. Over a dozen families began to dominate the local scene.

The traditional Spanish policy of avoiding the appointment of executive positions to local American-born men made the governorship of Florida beyond the reach of these families. But they occupied all other important administrative, military, and ecclesiastic jobs in the province. A continual conflict between the governor and the local men developed. Apparently the Spanish governors who looked with disdain on the local population were reluctant to hand out land to the St. Augustinians, afraid that this might relax the mili-

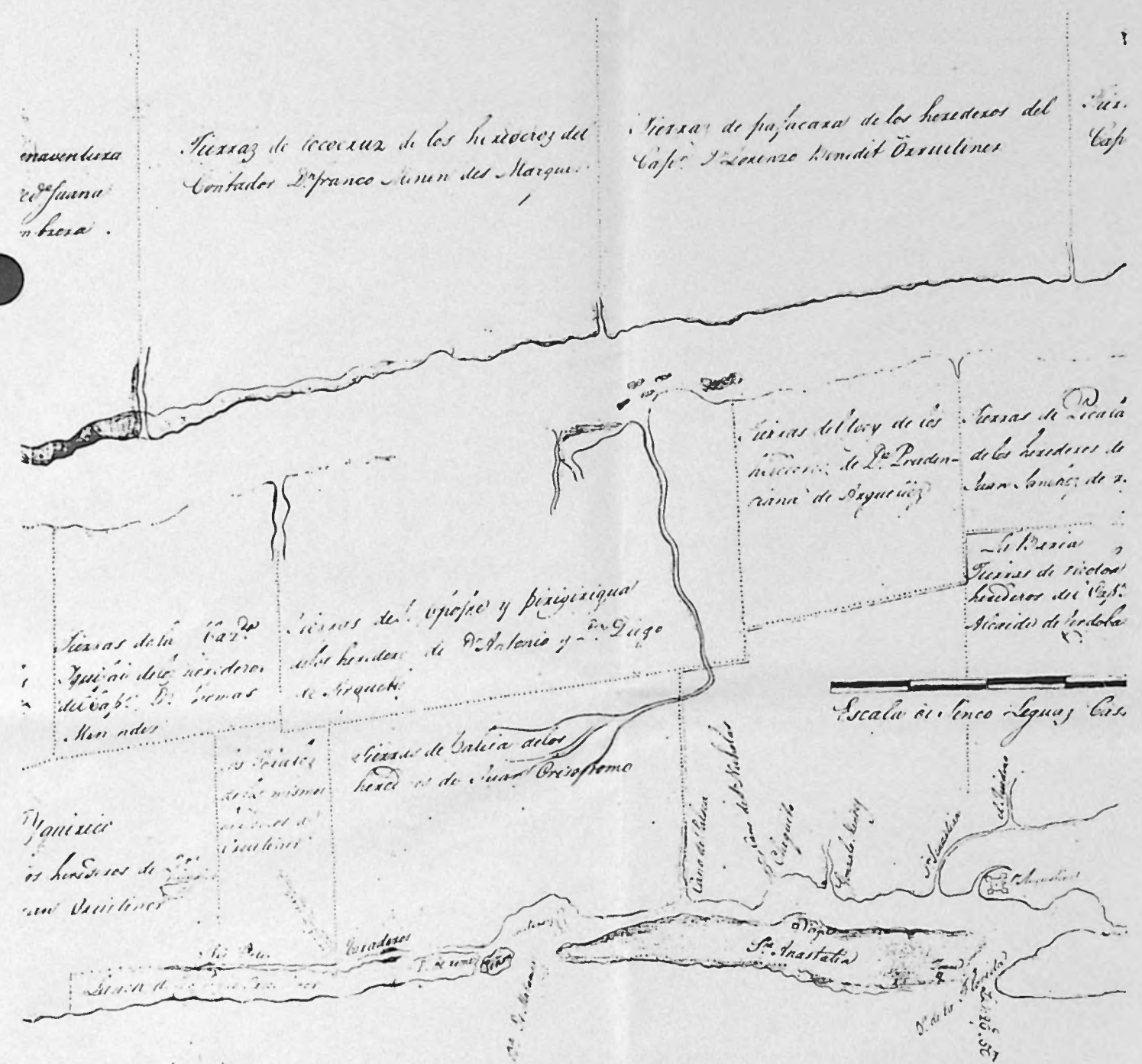


Fig. 3. Land grants to the *criollo* military aristocrats in the St. Augustine vicinity. Most of these grantees had cattle grazing on their ranches. The fort is depicted lower right. The large river is the St. Johns. Photographed from Map No. 127, Crown Collection, undated, but probably late 17th century.

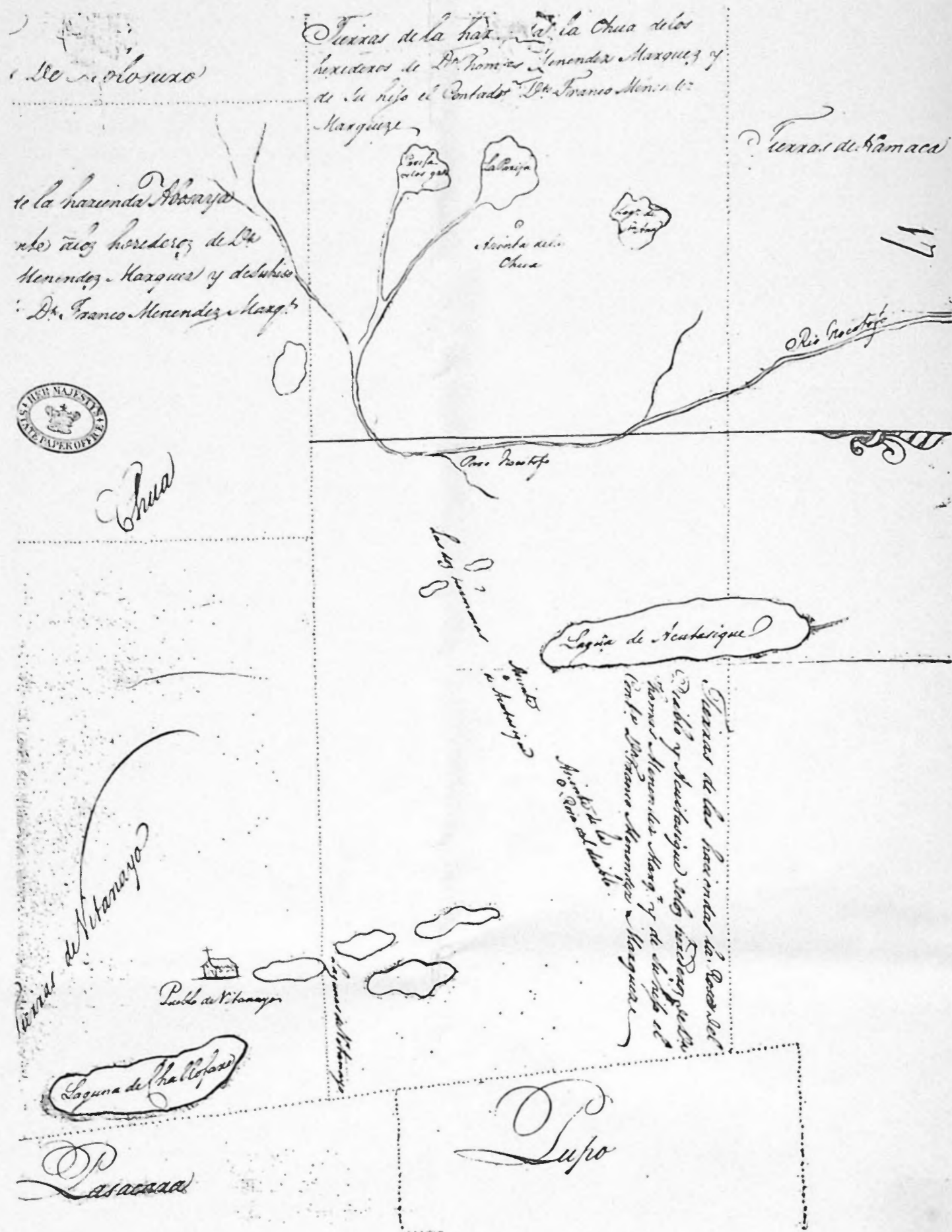


Fig. 4. Spanish ranches in the present-day Gainesville-Santa Fe area. The ranch of Rosa del Diablo and a portion of the large la Chua grant are among those depicted. Photographed from Map No. 130 of the Crown Collection.

tary discipline of the garrison. Most of the governors considered their position in Florida undesirable and were anxious to be transferred. For yet unknown reasons two remained. Luis Horruytiner (1633-1638) and Pablo de Hita y Salazar (1675-1680) settled

down in Florida after their tenure of office. They and their descendants became leading local families. It is conceivable but not yet historically proven that the first big land grab that led to cattle ranches occurred under the governorship of Luis Horruytiner.

The Horruytiner family became very prominent in St. Augustine and owned more than one cattle ranch along the St. Johns River. In 1685 one of the Horruytiners, Lorenzo, an officer of the garrison, demanded more land for cattle raising purposes, but his petition was turned down by the Crown. His land grabbing desires were shared with Pablo de Hita y Salazar.

The story of Hita y Salazar is interwoven with cattle ranches, and there is a similarity to the Horruytiner case. Salazar came to St. Augustine in 1675 as governor of Florida. He remained in this position for five years until he was dismissed. In contrast to other governors, from the beginning he collaborated with the local families, becoming one of them. There are hints that he had some distant relatives in St. Augustine. Hita y Salazar during his term of office distributed land to his *criollo* friends, for which he was severely reprimanded by the Spanish Crown. The governor was ordered to return the land to the royal patrimony or to the Indian chieftains. We have no documentary proof that he obeyed the instructions. After leaving the governorship he remained in Florida with plenty of acres. Together with Lorenzo Horruytiner the ex-governor complained in 1689 of heavy taxes levied on cattle by the new governor, Juan Marqués Cabrera.

Marqués Cabrera, successor to Salazar, governor from 1680 to 1687, was of a different timber than his predecessor. He had a haughty disdain for the local families and was determined to introduce a strict rule of law. The cattle ranches were already there when he arrived and he used them for the benefit of the garrison. Marqués Cabrera apparently discovered that the cattle owners, officers of the garrison, smuggled cattle via the Suwanee River into the Mexican Gulf to Cuba instead of selling them to the St. Augustine military authorities. He ordered that all cattle must be brought to St. Augustine to be processed in a slaughterhouse built by him.

Each cattle owner would be paid a fixed price per head minus a tax levied on the cattle. Salazar, Horruytiner, and other ranchers complained, condemning the governor viciously. Whereas the cattle ranches had previously served for speculative and prestige purposes, they were now completely integrated into the ever-faltering military economy of Florida.

Furthermore, Marqués Cabrera was convinced that the garrison was too inbred, with too much nepotism. Therefore he began discharging soldiers, sending them to the ranches to produce more cattle. This stern man intended to use the cattle ranches not only to better the supply to the garrison but also to produce a social change in the static St. Augustine society. How he actually proceeded in this and how successful he was is yet unknown. But it can be stated that during his term of office cattle in Spanish Florida were considered vital for the continual well-being of the military garrison of St. Augustine.

Not until 1700 are we able to find enough documentary evidence to calculate the approximate number of cattle in existence. By then one of Florida's most capable governors was living in the rustic governor's mansion at St. Augustine. Joseph de Zúñiga y Zerda was as stern as Cabrera, but with a more pleasing personality. He too was anxious to cultivate cattle for supplying the garrison. He inaugurated a system by which each ranch owner was assigned certain days in the year on which he was required to bring cattle to the slaughterhouse. Zúñiga also demanded a strict payment of taxes, apparently a flat 10 per cent, payable in cattle. The tax roll for the years 1698 and 1699 has been located. It shows twenty-five cattle ranch owners for the St. Augustine, St. Johns, Palatka, and Gainesville areas who paid to the government during these two years a total of 162 head of cattle. Of these the *la Chua* ranch was the largest contributor with 77 head, while the second largest ranch paid only 13, and the third nine. There were nine Spanish ranches in Apalache, supplying 60 head of cattle in tax payments. The largest ranch, no name cited, paid 15 head, followed by two other ranches with 13 and 10 respectively. The total tax figure comes to 223.

If multiplied by ten we get 2,230 head of cattle. The exact figure remains in doubt since we do not know if taxes were collected on a two-year basis, as this particular account book indicates, or were payable for a twelve-month period. Furthermore, it is no secret that many defaulted taxes or at least never paid the required 10 per cent, but rather much less.

In any event, by 1700 a substantial cattle industry had come into existence only to be destroyed in the next five years by English raids. Cattle raising in Florida did not again acquire this over-all importance until the twentieth century. In the 1730's and 1740's the presence of ranches is again a possibility with the increase in the Spanish garrison of Florida. With the emergence of the Seminoles—runaway Indians from the North—during the very late first Spanish period and the subsequent English period (1763-1783) cattle raising again gained momentum. But this is a better known story in the annals of history.

* This article is the first result of the research in cattle history being financed by the St. Augustine Historical Society of St. Augustine, Florida. It is not a definitive product since references to cattle have to be extracted from a massive quantity of original source materials. No single document dealing exclusively with cattle has been found. The information concerning cattle is widely dispersed among other topics in many documents. For the above-mentioned reasons, the task of reconstructing the cattle industry of Spanish Florida is a most difficult research problem. Yet the evidence points to the fact that considerable cattle were in existence; consequently, an attempt must be made to reconstruct the history. This article represents a sweeping summary after a first reading of about fifty thousand original Spanish documents. I have intentionally avoided the standard use of footnotes in this preliminary work in view of my hope of completing a more comprehensive scholarly product in the future. Attached is a bibliography of sources used in this study, all of which contain references to cattle or associated problems. I invite interested readers to supply me with further leads, suggestions, and criticisms. I wish to express thanks to Professors Charles Varney, John Goggin, Williams Sears, and William Massey of the University of Florida. Also, thanks are due to Mr. John Griffin, Luis Arana, and Albert Manucy of the United States Park Service. Dr. Mark Boyd of Tallahassee, Mr. David True of Miami, and Miss Dena Snodgrass of Jacksonville were extremely helpful in the preparation of this article; however, the present author assumes full responsibility for its content.

**It is not beyond the realm of possibility that the actual campus of the University of Florida with its excellent Department of Animal Husbandry was the site of a large Spanish cattle ranch.

† *Chua* is a Timucuan word meaning hole [*hoyo*]. It is from *la Chua* that the modern word Alachua is derived.

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The following documents are photocopies from the Archive of the Indies in Seville, Spain. They are all in the Stetson Collection located in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Some documents were also taken from the North Carolina Spanish Records Collection located at Raleigh, N. C., microfilm copies of which are also available at the P. K. Yonge Library. Documents in the Stetson Collection will be identified with an S, and documents of the North Carolina Spanish Records Collection will be identified as NC. They are listed in chronological order.

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