



QR Digital Tour

Introduction

Welcome to Cracker Country, a rural Florida living history museum. Please wander through our grounds and search for the QR codes that will direct you on our digital tour.

We hope this tour will better help you enjoy and understand the architectural and cultural history of rural Florida. Nearly all of the buildings you will see at Cracker Country were original structures that were moved here from their former locations and preserved for future generations to enjoy. These structures each have a unique story to tell about Florida's history, since most of them are over 100 years old. They were built during a time when the state was just starting to be widely settled. And those early hearty settlers, we call Florida Crackers, were establishing rural Florida homesteads with their families.

Everything inside of Cracker Country is set in the late 19th century. As you continue on your tour, think about what life would have been like during this time period.

Smith House

Welcome to our Smith House. This home was built by the friends and neighbors of Daniel H. Smith and Elizabeth Geiger in 1894, the year in which they were married. Reportedly it took 3 days to build at a cost of \$15.00 for blacksmithing materials.

As you walk up to the house, you may notice that it is surrounded by sand. In rural Florida, this sand would extend a considerable distance from the main home. It would have been one of the Smith boys' chores to sweep the yard, keeping it free of leaves and debris. The main purpose of this sand barrier was to help protect the house from wilderness fires.

There are two main rooms located in this house, the bedroom for the parents and the living space. On the original site of this building, near Zypherhills, Florida, there was a separate kitchen attached to the back porch. The family also added a second bedroom on the back porch behind the main bedroom. As families grew in size, they built additional rooms to accommodate more people.

On the mantle in the living space you will see a portrait of the Smith Family. The Smith's had four boys, three surviving to adulthood. Hanging from the ceiling in the living space you can see a quilting frame. This frame was lowered from the ceiling to complete quilting work, and then raised back up so there would be room for other activities.

Terry Store

Welcome to our Terry Store, named after Jack Roundtree Terry and his wife Maude Sparkman Terry who purchased this store in 1920 from the Chiles. The store was originally built in the late 1800s in the community of Fort White, Florida by Governor Lawton Chiles' grandfather.

Rural Florida settlers produced much of what they ate and used themselves, and some items that they could not produce themselves they could purchase from the general store. The general store sold a little bit of everything; such as clothing, farming tools, food items, and cookware. Some of the items that were in the Terry Store when it was donated are still on display. Among the most interesting are the large safe, steel cash register, wood burning and 1890s glass display cases.

On the back wall of the store you can see all the canned goods and produce that a similar store in the late 19th century would have sold. A store clerk purchased canned goods from a wholesale market and bartered with his customers for produce. Customers often came to the general store to trade items they produced for other goods they could not make themselves.

Stores offered more than goods; they were places where local residents gathered to discuss the weather, crop production, or even politics. They provided a social gathering place and were often at the center of what was happening in the town.

Schoolhouse

Welcome to our Schoolhouse built in 1912 in Castalia, Florida which is now Hardee County. This is a classic example of a one-room schoolhouse built in rural Florida.

There are two entrances into our schoolhouse. The door on the left was for girls; the one on the right was for boys. Similarly, inside of our schoolhouse girls sat on the left and boys on the right. Boys and girls were separated this way during school and did not work together on their lessons, but they could socialize during recess if they chose.

A school in rural Florida in 1898 would be open from three to six months a year depending on the weather and the growing season. This classroom would hold all students from grades one to eight. The teacher was someone who may or may not have progressed beyond eighth grade.

The antiques in this building come from several counties in Florida. Notice the small holes in each of the desks. These were used to hold inkwells. Typically students completed their class work on slates with slate pencils. However, when practicing penmanship or doing other lessons, they wrote with ink on paper.

Carlton House

Welcome to the Carlton House, built in 1885 by Albert and Martha Carlton. This is a two story double-pen house built with a division through the middle of the first floor called a dog trot. The parents' bedroom, parlor, dining room and kitchen are on the first floor, while the children's bedrooms are upstairs. The bedrooms on the second floor were not connected. The stairs on the front porch led up to the boys' bedroom, while an inner staircase accessed the daughter's bedroom.

The Carlton's had ten children: one daughter, Ella, and nine sons. The mother, Martha, planned the household chores of cooking, laundering, cleaning & sewing. She managed and participated in the work and most likely managed the household finances, as well. Ella, as the oldest child and only daughter, played an integral role in the household chores. Much of Ella's work would have involved the care of her nine younger brothers. Doyle Elam Carlton, the eighth child of the family and the first born in this house, served as Governor of Florida from 1929-1933.

As you walk through the house, you will see pictures of the family in the breezeway. Also notice the picture safe located in the parlor. This safe was used to protect and hide important documents such as a wedding license.

Albert Carlton was a citrus farmer and a cattle rancher. Over the years he accumulated a large number of cattle and expanded his land holdings to 340 acres. In 1902, he opened a hardware store with his son Charles Jesse in Wauchula. Two years later in 1904, he opened a bank known as the Carlton & Carlton Bank. The Carlton's acreage was divided among the

Carlton siblings, each receiving 40 acres. There are still Carlton's working in citrus and cattle today.

Church

Welcome to our church, built in the early 1900s in Gretna, Florida. It was first an African American schoolhouse, but it became a church in 1946 after Gretna's Holy Ghost Church was destroyed. The pews are original to the building, which is made from heart pine. The turn-of-the-century reed organ was built by the Packard Organ Company and used by the Bourneville Presbyterian Church in Bourneville, Ohio until that church closed its doors in 2002.

On Sundays, rural Floridians put aside their work—except for daily chores—and attended church. Most services were conducted by a local community member; once a month, a circuit-riding preacher did the honors. It wasn't uncommon for sermons to last several hours. The congregation sang hymns from hymnals or from memory, with or without musical accompaniment. After the service, there was a lunch or “dinner” as it was called then. Church dinners were the perfect opportunity to socialize, and children often met their future spouses at such functions. The church was more than just a religious hub; as a schoolhouse, town hall, and venue for gatherings, it was the social heart of the community.

Post Office

Welcome to our post office. It was built in the early 1900s by the Cummer Sons Cypress Company to support logging operations in the Green Swamp. The service window is not original to the building but dates from 1889. It was used in the Knights Post Office near Plant City.

Post offices weren't always stand-alone structures; many were located inside general stores, train depots, and homes. Often, postmasters (and postmistresses) held second jobs. They owned general stores, worked at the train depot, farmed, or ran households.

In the late 19th century, it cost one cent to send a card and two cents per ounce for letters. Rural Free Delivery to Florida homes began in 1896, making new and improved roads, bridges, rail lines, and ferry crossings a must. Mail carriers in rural Florida traveled approximately 60 miles a week by foot, horse, or wagon across dangerous terrain. On average, these men and women earned \$30 per month.

Community members pitched in by delivering mail to their neighbors when they were heading their way. Everyone appreciated the importance of mail. It was the best way to communicate with family and friends and to receive goods ordered from a catalog.

Farm Site (Hands-on Farm)

Welcome to our hands-on farm. Farming played a pivotal role on Florida's frontier, and most families cultivated food in one way or another, whether by farming, raising livestock, or both. With mule-powered plows, hoes, rakes, seeding sticks, and cultivators, they grew crops for clothing, food—for themselves and their animals—and sometimes additional income. Each farmer had his own specialty, such as citrus, sweet potatoes, corn, or beef.

Every family member played an important role in farming. The father and older brothers planted, weeded, watered, and harvested crops. They also fed, cleaned, and watched over the unpenned livestock. The mother and younger children milked the cows, cared for the chickens, and tended the vegetables in the kitchen garden.

On the lower part of our farm, we have a water pump. Late 19th-century farmers had no running water or hoses; they relied on pumped water, local streams, and rain to nourish their crops. In the center of our farm are the cane mill and syrup kettle, which were used to convert sugarcane into syrup, the settlers' main sweetener.

Blacksmith Shop

Welcome to our blacksmith shop, built here at Cracker Country in 1978. It was constructed to resemble smithies of the late 19th century. "Smith" is an Old English word for one who works with metals; smiths who forged iron (a black metal) became known as blacksmiths. They learned their trade as apprentices, typically between the ages of 13 and 17. In general, boys served apprenticeships for three to five years, reporting for work at dawn each morning.

First, the blacksmith or his apprentice built a fire in the forge, a furnace whose temperature was controlled with a bellows that blew oxygen directly to the base of the fire. Iron was heated to between 1300 and 2400 degrees Fahrenheit. An experienced blacksmith could determine the temperature by color: black was cool; red was hot, and white was hottest. With a hammer and anvil, he shaped and reshaped the iron, which was heated and cooled repeatedly throughout the process.

The blacksmith shod horses and forged everything from farm tools to cooking utensils. In addition, he was the community's principle repairman, fixing wagons, horse tack, and even weaponry.

Cane Mill

Welcome to our cane mill, which was used in late 19th-century rural Florida to grind sugarcane into syrup. Although steam-powered mills produced more juice, this mill—like most in Florida—was powered by a work animal such as a mule or an ox. The animal pulled the mill’s sweep arm, which turned the drum. Cane stalks that were fed into the revolving drum were crushed to a pulp. The resulting juice was then boiled in a kettle for six to eight hours for preservation and for a thicker consistency. From 60 gallons of extracted juice, a farmer received about six gallons of syrup.

Sugar was much harder to come by in Florida, so sugarcane syrup was the settlers’ primary sweetener. An average-sized family consumed around 50 gallons a year. Consequently, many Floridians grew their own sugarcane and hosted “cane grinding” parties, during which neighboring families helped to grind the stalks and boil the juice into syrup. These parties made the work go faster and created much needed social opportunities with music, fun, and lots of good food. If a family produced more cane syrup than was needed, the surplus was sold, bartered, or shared with neighbors.

Caboose

Welcome to our caboose. Built in 1917, it was one of the last wooden cabooses used in Florida. Traditionally, there were five crew members on the train: the engineer, fireman, brakeman, flagman, and conductor (who was in charge of the train). Trains could run for up to 16 hours, and when this occurred, the crew was required to take 8 hours of rest. Equipped with bunk beds, tables, and a washbasin, the caboose was used as the conductor's home away from home. On average, wooden coaches cost between \$4000-\$5000 each and provided little protection in the event of derailment or collision.

In the early 1970s, the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad began retiring their wooden cabooses in favor of steel ones. Dr. James R. West—physician and mayor of Lakeland, Florida—agreed to continue giving railroad physicals in return for a wooden caboose to use as his examining office. In 1971 he renovated the caboose to include a commode, examining table, cabinets, a bookcase, table, chair and phone. However, Dr. West did not use the caboose as a traveling examination office, as evidenced by the high center of gravity. Typically, chairs and tables were kept low to ensure greater balance and safety during transportation.

Kitchen Garden

Welcome to our kitchen garden, a rural family's source of fresh vegetables. The garden was named for its proximity to a family's home, which made it easier to tend and gather herbs and vegetables for daily consumption. Cracker Country's kitchen garden is a smaller version of those maintained by Florida settlers more than 100 years ago. On average, a half-acre garden fed a family of six.

In the kitchen, the mother butchered meat, preserved fruits and vegetables, and cooked all of the meals. In the garden, she grew vegetables such as corn, beans, peas, summer squash, okra, sweet potatoes, mustard greens, cabbages, turnips, and onions.

The vegetables varied with the season. At Cracker Country only heirloom plants are grown in the kitchen garden. These plants are the same varieties that were grown in the late 1890s. Each year, the seeds are carefully collected and saved for planting the next crop, there by preserving these rare varieties for the future.

Smokehouse

Welcome to our Smokehouse, which was built in Sumter County in the early 1900s. There were no refrigerators at that time, so meats and other foods were difficult to preserve. The solution was to can fruits and vegetables, and to cure and smoke meat in a smokehouse.

Traditionally, there were general smokehouses that smoked and stored meats for the whole community. Some families, however, had their own.

First, the meat was salted for several weeks to remove all the moisture. Next, it was hung in the smokehouse and smoked by fire—for two weeks or longer—to enhance the flavor and keep insects away. Warm, dry air from a slow-burning fire ensured the meat was properly preserved. Naturally, families took precautions to prevent their wooden smokehouses from catching fire. After the smoking process, the meat was hung further away from the fire for up to two years, to release additional moisture and absorb additional smoke.

Rainey Building

Welcome to the Rainey Building, constructed in the late 1800s in Ona, Florida. The building was home to the Rainey family and also served as the area's general store and post office. The family lived in the north side of the building and on the second floor. The central space was the general store, which sold items such as hardware, dishes, tea, coffee, canned goods, spices, and produce.

Communities tended to grow around general stores, which attracted business from up to a 70 mile radius. As a central location for the surrounding farms, the general store often served as a post office.

Today, the Rainey Building is home to our General Store and the Carlton-Woodbury Exhibit Gallery.

Murphy Kitchen

Welcome to the Murphy Kitchen, which served as a detached kitchen in the 1800s. Originally located in DeSoto County, it was part of the childhood home of Henry Murphy. He was the Florida senator known for the Murphy Act, which returned tax-liened land to the private sector during the Great Depression.

Today, the Murphy Kitchen is home to Cracker Country's early 20th-century printing presses. The largest press was made by the Chandler and Price Company around 1910 and was often referred to as a 12" x 18" because of the size of its printing surface.

Rural Floridians of the late 1800s encountered the printed word daily in books, bulletins, newspapers, song books, and catalogs. A printing press required a town if the town was large enough to support the business. Once established, it produced a local newspaper and advertisements on a hand-operated press.

Okahumpka Depot

Welcome to the Okahumpka Depot. During the railroad boom of the late 19th century, Okahumpka was a burgeoning town in Lake County, Florida. The depot was built in 1898 to function as a major railhead for the Plant system, a network of railroads and steamboats founded by Henry B. Plant.

Like William D. Chipley and Henry M. Flagler, Plant was a tycoon who built, purchased, and connected railroad lines to move agricultural products between cities and rural areas. His system linked central Florida with Savannah, Georgia. Later, the Okahumpka Depot became a stop of the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad.

On one end of the building are two waiting rooms, one for white passengers and one for African-Americans. A doorway connects the waiting rooms to the station master's office. The next room was a storage room that held baggage and freight. Today, this room is home to our 500-square-foot model train display of Central Florida at the turn of the century. The open freight platform at the far end of the depot was the busiest area, where freight was loaded on and off of the trains. The boarding platform runs across the entire front side of the building.

Governors Inn

Welcome to the Governors Inn, built in 1912 in Lilly, Florida. It originally functioned as the community post office and general store. Today, it houses a complete collection of Florida governors' portraits dating from 1821 to the present.

Andrew Jackson was Florida's only military Governor. With the support of others who believed in manifest destiny, he invaded Florida, which was a Spanish territory. Following the invasion, President Adams signed the *Adams-Onis Treaty*, by which Spain granted Florida to the United States. Consequently, in 1821, Jackson became the first territorial governor of Florida. Later, he was President of the United States.

On March 3, 1845, Florida became the 27th state of the United States of America.