

HISTORIC OVERVIEW

NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE HISTORY

The prehistory of the Pensacola Bay/Choctawhatchee Bay region and Eglin AFB has been well synthesized by Thomas and Campbell (1993:489-637) with periodic updates presented in various reports since that time. **Table 1** is the most recent update of the region's cultural chronology and is reproduced from Morehead et al. (2011:Figure 4). The following prehistoric overview highlights the distinct cultural and technological characteristics of each period.

Paleoindian Period (10,000 – 8000 BC)

The most widely accepted model for the peopling of the New World argues that Asian populations migrated to North America over the Bering land bridge that linked Siberia and Alaska, some 14,000 years ago. Research at the Page-Ladson site suggests that Florida was inhabited by humans by at least 12,000 years ago (10,000 BC) (Dunbar 2006), while radiocarbon dates from the Sloth Hole site in Jefferson County (Hemmings 2004) indicate that Paleoindian people were in Florida by at least 9000 BC. These early Native Americans may have been nomadic hunter-gatherers who relied on Pleistocene megafauna and wild plant foods for their subsistence (Clayton 1983; Dunbar 2006; Webb et al. 1984). However, big-game hunting may not have been as common in Florida as in other portions of North America, because a rich and diverse habitat during the Pleistocene-Holocene transition favored a generalized subsistence strategy (e.g., Dunbar et al. 2005). The Paleoindian tool assemblage contains lanceolate projectile points, blades, bola stones, carinate scrapers, drills, end scrapers, thumbnail scrapers, gouges, and Edgefield scrapers, reflecting a reliance on hunting and butchering of animals as well as the use of well-made scraping tools for woodworking, hide scraping, and other tasks. Large, lanceolate Clovis points and Cumberland, Redstone, Suwannee, and Simpson points are typical diagnostic artifacts of the period (Anderson 1990; Dunbar 2006).

Because the climate during the Paleoindian period was cooler and drier than at present, with coastal sea levels and the inland water table much lower (Carbone 1983; Watts and Hansen 1988; Watts et al. 1996), potable water sources appear to have played an important role in the distribution of Paleoindian groups across the landscape. Paleoindians frequented sinkholes and springs to collect water and exploit the flora and fauna that were also attracted to these locations (Dunbar 1991). Many of these freshwater sources were located in areas of exposed Tertiary-age limestone that had become silicified, providing Paleoindians a raw material source (chert) for tool manufacture. It is thought that permanent freshwater sources (sinkholes, springs) along with outcrops of high-quality chert were primary factors influencing Paleoindian settlement patterns in Florida. The area of west-central Florida from Tampa Bay to the Big Bend is rich in freshwater sources and chert outcrops, and evidence of Paleoindian occupations in this region is extensive (Dunbar and Waller 1983). However, very few sites of this period have been identified in the panhandle region west of the Apalachicola River, presumably due to the absence of limestone and karst topography. Many, if not most, Paleoindian sites probably

Table 1. Native American Cultural Sequence in the Eglin AFB Region (after Morehead et al. 2011: Figure 4).

Stage	Calendar Years	Period	Culture	Phase/Complex
Historic	AD 1800— AD 1700— AD 1600—	Historic		
Mississippian	AD 1500— AD 1400— AD 1300— AD 1200—	Late Mississippian	Fort Walton/ Pensacola	Four Mile Point Indian Bayou
	AD 1100— AD 1000—	Middle Mississippian		
		Early Mississippian		
Woodland	AD 900— AD 800— AD 700— AD 600— AD 500— AD 400— AD 300— AD 200— AD 100—	Late Woodland	Weeden Island	Wakulla (late)
	100 BC — 200 BC — 300 BC — 400 BC — 500 BC —	Middle Woodland	Santa Rosa/ Swift Creek	Horseshoe Bayou Lassiter
	600 BC — 700 BC — 800 BC — 900 BC — 1000 BC — 2000 BC — 3000 BC — 4000 BC — 5000 BC — 6000 BC — 7000 BC — 8000 BC —	Early Woodland	Deptford	Okaloosa Alligator Lake
	9000 BC — 10,000 BC —	Gulf Formational (Late Archaic)	Elliott’s Point/ Norwood	Elliott’s Point
Archaic		Middle Archaic		
		Early Archaic		
		Paleoindian		
Lithic				

are submerged in offshore locations, drowned by rising sea levels since the late Pleistocene (Faught 2004).

Archaic Period (8000 – 500 BC)

Around 8000 BC the environment and landscape of Florida underwent pronounced changes. These changes were interconnected and included a gradual warming trend, a rise in sea level, a reduction in the width of peninsular Florida, and the spread of oak-dominated forests and hammocks throughout much of the state (Milanich 1994; Smith 1986). Concomitant with these

environmental changes was the extinction of Pleistocene megafauna. Native subsistence strategies became more diverse due to the emergence of new plant, animal, and aquatic species. Also occurring at this time was a significant increase in population numbers and density, with native groups developing regional habitat-specific adaptations and material assemblages (Milanich 1994; Smith 1986:10). As conditions became wetter, specific coastal, riparian, and lacustrine adaptations became increasingly common.

The Archaic period is typically divided into Early, Middle, and Late subperiods. The Early Archaic subperiod (8000–6500 BC) is marked by small side- and corner-notched projectile points that signal the invention of the spear thrower or atlatl. During this period, subsistence strategies became more diverse with the inclusion of new plant, animal, and aquatic species. This increase in subsistence adaptations was due in large part to the physiographic and climatic changes occurring during this period. Early Archaic sites generally are of two types. These include base camps and smaller extractive stations. The Early Archaic settlement pattern involved seasonal movements of small family-based groups that occupied small short-term camps for part of the year. During autumn, when food was more plentiful, these small groups may have gathered at larger base camps (Bense 1994). The best documented Early Archaic site in the panhandle region is the Page-Ladson site in Jefferson County. The site is submerged within the Aucilla River, and the Early Archaic component, marked by Bolen projectile points, has been radiocarbon dated to ca. 8000–7500 BC (Carter and Dunbar 2006).

The Middle Archaic period (6500–3000 BC) coincided with the climatic episode known as the Hypsithermal, a period in which temperatures peaked and rainfall diminished. In northwest Florida, there was a shift to a system of more nucleated floodplain base camps with numerous, smaller satellite camps. Subsistence strategies involved hunting, fishing, and gathering. Middle Archaic sites in northwest Florida are relatively rare. Artifacts associated with this period include broad-bladed, stemmed projectile points; specialized tools such as microliths, burins, and large chopping implements; and an array of expedient tools. Tesar (1980) has suggested that Middle Archaic sites tend to be located on terraces and ridges overlooking lakes, ponds, or wetlands.

During the Late Archaic period (3000–500 BC), the trend toward more sedentary occupations and more circumscribed territories continued as the climate became wetter and conditions became increasingly more similar to the modern environment (Bense 1994). Coastal shell middens began to appear, reflecting a greater reliance on marine resources. The projectile point styles that mark the Late Archaic include broad-bladed, stemmed bifaces that are similar to those of the preceding Middle Archaic period. Ground and polished stone tools and ornaments were developed during this period, as were steatite cooking vessels. Toward the end of the Late Archaic, around 1000 BC, the first ceramic vessels appeared. This pottery, which was tempered with plant fibers, is referred to as Norwood in northwest Florida (Milanich 1994). It is usually undecorated or stick-impressed. This pottery was later replaced by a sand-tempered ware, some of which also has stick-impressed designs that were likely derived from the earlier Norwood style (Milanich 1994).

A coastal variant of the Late Archaic period centered on Choctawhatchee Bay is referred to as Elliott's Point and appeared ca. 2500 BC. It is characterized by the presence of artifacts similar to those found at Poverty Point in Louisiana. These include fired clay balls, stone microliths, and exotic materials suggesting interaction with the Lower Mississippi Valley (Thomas and Campbell 1993). The Norwood ceramic assemblage was added to the Elliott's Point complex around 1000 BC.

Woodland and Mississippian Periods (500 BC – ca. AD 1550)

Deptford (ca. 500 BC – AD 200)

Milanich and Fairbanks (1980:66) describe the Deptford people as primarily a "coastal dwelling culture" that relied heavily on maritime subsistence strategies. Tesar (1994) suggests that Deptford groups forged a transition between the Late Archaic hunter-gatherers and the more complex Swift Creek societies. Coastal Deptford villages are usually found in conjunction with live oak, magnolia, and palm hammocks located near salt marshes. Interior Deptford sites are found along lakes and streams generally where hickory and oak are present. In addition to villages and campsites, Deptford sites can include burial mounds and cemeteries. Deptford culture flourished in northwest Florida between about 500 BC and AD 200.

Deptford ceramics are marked by a change from fiber tempering to sand and grit tempering. The wares are often plain or can have checked patterns stamped on the exterior of the pot (Milanich 1994). These exterior patterns were produced by impressing or stamping the vessel with carved wooden paddles before firing. In addition, surface treatments can be cord-wrapped, brushed, punctated, or malleated, and many vessel forms have distinctive podal supports (Milanich 1994).

Excavations at two Deptford sites in northwest Florida, Hawkshaw (8ES1287) and Pirate's Bay (8OK183), have produced valuable information about Deptford subsistence and settlement (Bense 1985; Thomas and Campbell 1984). Both are coastal sites with evidence for exploitation of a wide range of local marine and terrestrial food resources. In addition, trade items from the Lower Mississippi Valley and southern Georgia were recovered from both sites, providing evidence of participation in long distance exchange networks.

Santa Rosa–Swift Creek (ca. AD 200 – 600)

The Santa Rosa–Swift Creek culture followed Deptford throughout northwest Florida, beginning about AD 200. The replacement of Deptford ceramics by Santa Rosa–Swift Creek wares in the Florida panhandle took place over several centuries. Swift Creek pottery exhibits complicated-stamped designs consisting of scrolls, concentric circles, teardrops, and spirals, in addition to check-stamped designs. It seems that Swift Creek ceramic designs originated in southern Georgia and were subsequently adopted by Deptford people in Florida. Typical Swift Creek vessel forms include squat bowls and deep cylindrical pots. Santa Rosa ceramics exhibit incised, punctated, and rocker-stamped designs and appear to be a continuation of ceramic traditions that originated in the Lower Mississippi Valley.

Santa Rosa–Swift Creek villages were located on the coast and in the interior forests and river valleys throughout the panhandle. Excavations at the Bernath Place midden (8SR986) in Santa Rosa County have provided information about Santa Rosa–Swift Creek subsistence, settlement, and sociopolitical and religious organization (Bense 1992; Phillips 1992). Radiocarbon dates ranging between AD 350 and 670 have been obtained from six sealed Santa Rosa–Swift Creek features (Ruhl 2000). The socio-religious aspect of this culture has been defined as the Green Point complex (Sears 1962), which had associations with the Hopewell interaction sphere. Through this exchange network, Santa Rosa–Swift Creek people gained access to exotic items such as copper, mica, ear spools, and fine ceramics (Bense 1989; Milanich 1994). Socio-religious specialists began to emerge, and sacred paraphernalia was interred with high-status individuals. Burial mounds are common features at Santa Rosa–Swift Creek sites (Milanich 1994).

Weeden Island (ca. AD 600 – 1000)

The emergence of Weeden Island cultural attributes in the panhandle of Florida began at about AD 600. Currently, archaeologists define Weeden Island as a religious-ceremonial complex that was adopted regionally by local groups in southern Georgia and Alabama and along the west coast of Florida (Milanich 1994, 2002). Research by Thomas and Campbell (1993) indicates that the early Weeden Island period lasted until approximately AD 800 in extreme northwest Florida. Early Weeden Island is characterized by the appearance of complicated-stamped pottery along with the characteristic Weeden Island pottery decorated with incised and punctated lines. There appears to be some continuity between Santa Rosa–Swift Creek and Weeden Island occupations (Mikell et al. 1989:218). Not only are both cultural expressions found in the same coastal environmental settings, but these cultures exploited similar marine resources.

Late Weeden Island (AD 800–1000) is identified by the presence of check-stamped and cob-marked pottery and is referred to as Wakulla Weeden Island in this region (Milanich 1994). Wakulla sites are located on the coast and in the interior of the panhandle and in southwest Georgia and southeast Alabama. Maize agriculture was adopted in the panhandle during the Late Weeden Island period (Milanich 1994). These sites are located on soils not previously preferred by Early Weeden Island groups. Tesar (1980) suggests that Wakulla people selected settlement locations based on soils more suitable for agriculture. The higher frequency of sites and the use of previously uninhabited environments suggest a larger population during this time. The nucleated villages and mound centers that characterize Late Weeden Island were absent during the Early Weeden Island period.

Fort Walton and Pensacola (ca. AD 1000 – 1550)

Fort Walton and Pensacola are both Mississippian-period cultures. Pensacola ceramics consist of plain and decorated shell-tempered pottery, while Fort Walton pottery consists of sand- and grit-tempered wares. These two ceramic types are consistently mixed in assemblages from both Fort Walton and Pensacola sites in the western panhandle region (Harris 2012:279). Fort Walton was first defined for the Florida panhandle by Willey and Woodbury (1942), and

Pensacola was defined soon after by Willey (1949). Pensacola sites are generally found in the extreme western reaches of the Fort Walton culture (Harris 2012).

Fort Walton sites are characterized by mound building, agriculture, and hierarchical settlements, with settlements located both inland and on the coast throughout the panhandle, although the mound sites are more common in the interior. This may be because the inland Fort Walton peoples were intensive maize agriculturalists, and the coastal soils did not support such practices. Fort Walton groups supplemented their diets with hunted, fished, and gathered foods, including wild plants such as hickory, acorn, maypop, persimmon, and saw palmetto seeds (Alexander 1984). The Fort Walton culture was composed of numerous regional chiefdoms with a social and political system of elites and commoners. Evidence of trade between inland and coastal peoples suggests that the control and redistribution of goods and resources was a primary function of the Fort Walton chiefs (Milanich 1994).

The Pensacola variant of the Fort Walton culture evolved in place from the preceding Wakulla Weeden Island culture and was influenced by cultural developments in Alabama (Milanich 1994). Despite northern influences, the coastal Pensacola culture basically mirrored the earlier Weeden Island settlement pattern and subsistence system, but the Pensacola culture's political system was not as complex (Payne 1991; Scarry 1989). Settlements were located in coastal hammocks with smaller satellite camps in both coastal and upland environments. Hunting, gathering, and fishing were the primary sources of subsistence, and agriculture may not have been as important as during the earlier Weeden Island period. There also appear to be fewer ceremonial sites with mounds in the coastal zone occupied by the Pensacola culture. This lack of mounds may reflect the lower agricultural production potential of the coastal soils; greater dependence on hunting, gathering, and fishing; lower population densities; and consequently, lesser support of a chiefly ruling class.

Ethnohistoric Tribes (ca. AD 1550 – 1821)

When Europeans arrived in Florida, the Fort Walton culture was flourishing around Choctawhatchee and Pensacola Bays. Historical references of Choctawhatchee Bay indicate that it served as the boundary land between the Panzacola tribe located farther west and the Chatot tribe to the east. Sometime before 1639, the Chicas (also called the Yuchi) also settled in the area from the northeast (Hann 1988). Records indicate that these tribes lived in the western-central panhandle until the early eighteenth century, when many groups migrated westward following the destruction of Spanish missions in Florida (Campbell et al. 2009). It appears that largely prehistoric Mississippian lifeways continued well into the historic period in this region, with the only material difference being the addition of European artifacts (Thomas and Campbell 1993).

During the Mission period of northwest Florida (AD 1633–1705), the shallow, narrow entrance of Choctawhatchee Bay limited European incursions in the area. Explorers noted the location of the bay but chose deeper bays with wider entrances for more extended investigations. Neither the Choctawhatchee nor the Yellow River was illustrated on early maps (Thomas and

Campbell 1993). Pensacola was the center of local Spanish settlement, and the Spanish mission system never got any closer than the Chipola River to the east.

In the early eighteenth century when the majority of the Chatots and Panzacolas relocated to Mobile Bay and Creek groups moved into their vacated territories and intermingled with remaining populations. Sand- and grog-tempered Leon-Jefferson wares usually associated with Spanish mission sites, Lamar and Ocmulgee Fields ceramics from the northeast, and Chattahoochee Brushed wares common at Creek sites have all been found in the same contexts as Fort Walton ceramics and reflect the cultural mixing that typified this period in this region (Thomas and Campbell 1993). A letter dating to 1804 references the Choctawhatchee Bay as Lower Creek territory (Coker 1979); Yuchi and Seminole settlements also are mentioned. Archaeological evidence for such settlements is sparse, however, and historic records provide little information regarding the number and location of native settlement during the historic period.

NON-NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE HISTORY, OKALOOSA COUNTY

European Explorations and Settlement

The first Europeans to enter the region now encompassing Okaloosa County were Spanish explorers who came to Pensacola Bay in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their entrance on the scene left a devastating impact on the native population due to introduced diseases and often brutal interactions. In the course of their explorations of the New World, the Spanish attempted to gain knowledge about the geography of northwest Florida. Captain Andrés de Pez, an Admiral of the Spanish Navy, and Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, a noted Mexican scholar, led a scientific expedition to the Pensacola Bay region in 1693, exploring the two large bays to the east of Eglin AFB – East Bay and Escambia Bay. Traveling in a launch, Sigüenza mapped East Bay and Escambia Bay. The Spanish on this expedition journeyed down some of present-day Santa Rosa County's rivers, including the East Bay River and the Blackwater River, but there is little indication they explored areas further inland such as today's Okaloosa County. Spain ultimately chose to focus their settlement on Pensacola Bay (Weddle 1991:107-108).

In 1769, the Spanish created a new map of Pensacola Bay and the surrounding region that included portions of what is now Okaloosa County. The map, which is one of the earliest maps of Okaloosa County, is presented in **Figure 6**. The map depicted the Choctawhatchee Bay and Santa Rosa Sound areas. The map identified Santa Rosa Sound as *Canal de Santa Rosa*. Choctawhatchee Bay is named *Bahia de Santa Rosa*. The map exhibits knowledge of the various rivers, creeks, and bayous of the region, however, it does not name them. British surveyor Bernard Romans surveyed the coastal area of the region in the 1770s. The resultant map (Romans 1781) depicted Choctawhatchee Bay, which Romans identified as Santa Rosa Bay. The map illustrated the larger bayous along the bay that later would become important settlement sites.

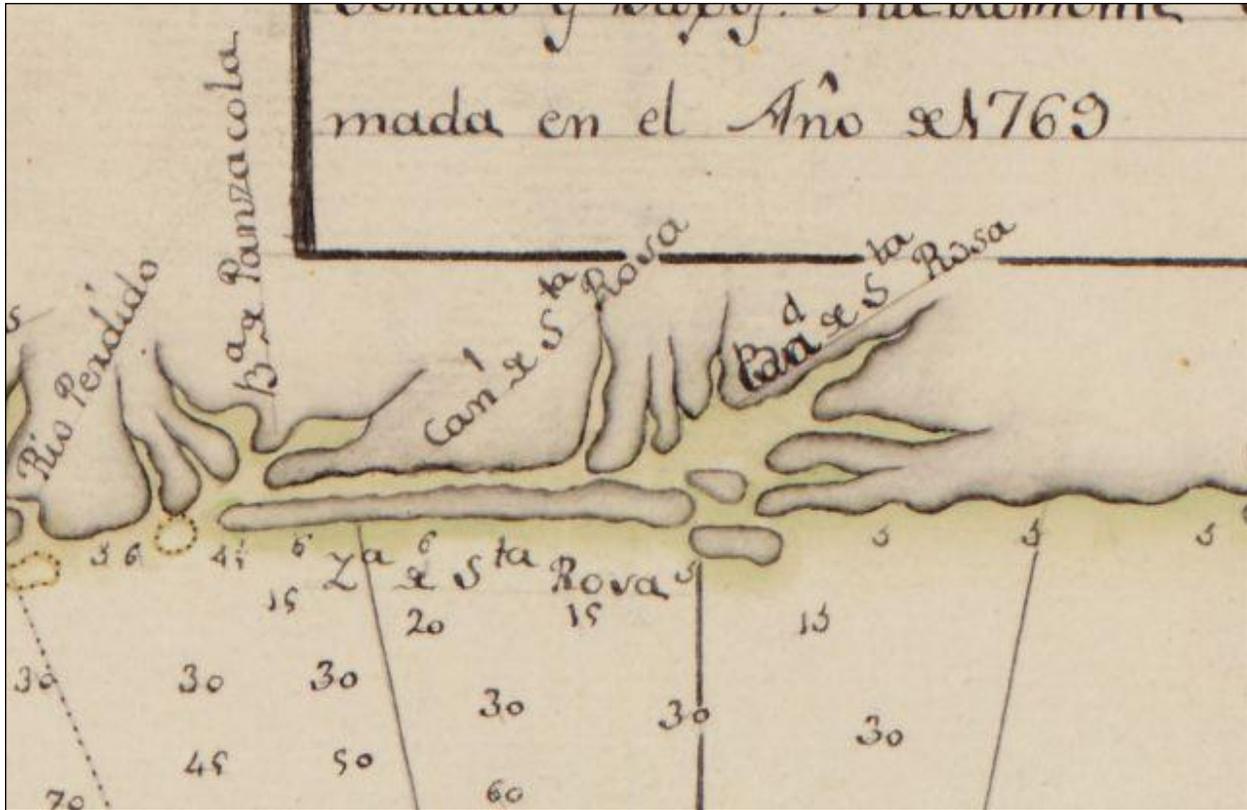


Figure 6. Inset of Spanish map (1769) depicting the area from Pensacola Bay (*Bahia de Panzacola*) eastward to Choctawhatchee Bay, then known as *Bahia de Santa Rosa*. Santa Rosa Sound is identified as *Canal de Santa Rosa*. Source: Library of Congress.

Due to the focus on fortifying and settling Pensacola, the Spanish generally were incapable of supporting frontier settlements elsewhere in the region, and thus present-day Okaloosa County was not extensively settled by Europeans. In comparison to the Spanish, the British put more energy into establishing trade links with the interior Native American tribes. The British also awarded land grants to encourage settlement of frontier areas and sponsored surveying expeditions. Through these contacts, they became more familiar with the interior of what is now Okaloosa County. Details of their observations are not abundant, however, it appears they made very few settlements (Fabel 1996).

By the late eighteenth century, the newly formed United States was pressuring Spain to vacate Florida. American settlers in the southern United States were covetous of the opportunities of the West Florida region. They also despised sharing a border with a foreign nation that had different policies toward the Native Americans and one that was often unable to control the entry of runaway slaves into its territory. In an act that would set a precedent for later conflict with the Native Americans of the region, Andrew Jackson invaded Spanish Florida in 1818. Meeting little resistance at Pensacola, he captured the city and established a military government. After several years of diplomatic wrangling, Spain ceded Florida to the United States in 1821. This acquisition opened West Florida to new American settlers. Many came from adjacent southern states and territories such as Alabama and Georgia. Also in 1821,

Escambia County was created as one of Florida's two original counties (St. Johns County was the other) (Coker 1999). Santa Rosa County (formed in 1842) and Walton County (formed in 1824), the parent counties of Okaloosa, were carved from Escambia County.

The waterways of the region inclusive of today's Okaloosa County attracted settlers and provided a means of transportation. Along the rivers, creeks, and bays, settlers established lumber and grist mills. They used the power of the water to convey timber and other products to Pensacola markets and beyond. Several rivers in the region were historically navigable (Webb 1885:100): the Blackwater River which runs along Santa Rosa County's western border into East Bay and, ultimately, Pensacola Bay; the Yellow River which runs roughly eastward through the middle part of Santa Rosa County and through present-day Okaloosa County; the East Bay River which is located in the southern part of Santa Rosa County; and the Choctawhatchee River which flows into Choctawhatchee Bay. Other large, navigable bodies of water that pass through the region are Santa Rosa Sound, located in the extreme south of Santa Rosa and Okaloosa Counties; East Bay, located in the southeastern area of Santa Rosa County; and Escambia Bay, located on the eastern side of Santa Rosa County. A number of smaller creeks of the region were utilized for floating cut timber and other products (Hill 1916; Wells 1976[2006]).

The Shoal River, located in Okaloosa County, was a focus of early white settlement. One of the earliest mentions of the river appears in John Lee Williams' 1827 study of West Florida. On the Shoal River, he wrote, "there is very good land in small bodies, some of which is settled" (Williams 1827:26). The specific location of these settlements is not known. The Shoal River area is mentioned in McKinnon's 1911 history of neighboring Walton County as a place where antebellum settlers ranged their cattle. The settlers apparently did not live in the area but preferred the range that the edges of the Shoal River afforded (McKinnon 1911).

As new settlers arrived in the region, friction arose between them and the Native Americans of the region. The majority of the Native Americans were disparate Creek groups, some of whom became known as the Seminole. Conflicts between whites and Native Americans were common in the region by the 1830s, at which point President Andrew Jackson sanctioned the removal of all Native Americans from Florida. The Second Seminole War (1835-1842) erupted and many white settlers retreated to the safety of adjacent states and some served in local militias. As the war drifted to the southern part of Florida, a new war spilled into the Florida panhandle—the Second Creek War (1836-1840). In response to increasing clashes between whites and Native Americans, the US Army made several campaigns through the region including Okaloosa County (Rucker 2011).

An 1837 newspaper article (*Pensacola Gazette* 11 April 1837) makes passing reference to a militia force that traveled through what is now the Santa Rosa County-Okaloosa County region in the context of the Second Creek War. The force, which was in search of the so called "fugitive Creeks," crossed the Yellow River at a crossing point called "Macdade's" and from there continued eastward to cross the Shoal River at an unidentified ferry. From here, the militia scoured the country between the Shoal River and East Bay. Several months later, a

report by Col. Leavin Brown was issued in the *Pensacola Gazette* (15 July 1837) about a skirmish between militia forces and approximately 125 Native Americans “at the edge of the river hammock” on Shoal River. Brown’s report was dated July 4 at “Camp on Shoal River.” The specific location of these events is undetermined.

Located in northern Okaloosa County, Titi Creek featured in the Second Creek War. Col. Leavin Brown, commander of a militia force, reported to Governor Richard K. Call on the campaign against the Creek in the county in 1837. Brown’s report (dated 20 July) covered events of the month of July. He indicated numerous Creek camps along Titi Creek. On July 19, Brown’s infantrymen and cavalry had skirmished with an estimated 70 Creek warriors in Alaqua Swamp. Brown believed this group of Creeks was associated with a group he had pursued earlier in the month on July 4. On this date, Brown and his men had scouted “a very large Indian trail” for several days in pursuit of the Creek. Brown stated that the trail was located along “a water course between shoal [*sic*] river and East Bay called tight eye” (*Floridian and Advocate* 5 August 1837:1). The “tight eye” watercourse most certainly refers to Titi Creek. Along the trail, Brown found Creek camps and he presumed the Creek “had been encamped for several months, for they had a large place cleared for a ball ground.” Brown followed the Creek along the trail from one camp to the next until the Creek scattered (*Floridian and Advocate* 5 August 1837:1).

Florida Statehood and Civil War

In the antebellum period, present-day Okaloosa County remained a frontier although population was gradually increasing. The lack of roads, railroads, and bridges made waterways important thoroughfares for delivering products to market in this period and also for many decades later. Lumber mills, shipyards, wharves, and trading posts sprang up around the bayous along with a need for ferries and mail boats. By the mid-nineteenth century, mills existed at several locations in the county. The mills produced lumber that was shipped to Pensacola and, from there, all over the world (Wells 1976[2006]).

Whereas many areas of the southeast developed a plantation economy in this period, Okaloosa County was not the site of any substantial plantations. The soil in general was poor and the area suffered from geographic isolation. Throughout the nineteenth century, the inhabitants of the region maintained a pioneer lifestyle. Agriculture was practiced on a small scale and most families ranged cattle, hogs, and other livestock on the open range. The pioneer diet was supplemented with local game and, for those who lived near Choctawhatchee Bay and the Gulf, oysters and fish. In many parts of Okaloosa County, this way of life carried on into the twentieth century (Thomas and Campbell 1993).

Florida was the third state to secede from the Union in the turmoil that led to the Civil War. Pensacola Bay and its fortifications were a point of tension between the Confederates and the Union early in the Civil War. The war-related action spilled over into the small settlements of Santa Rosa County and Walton County, both of which raised troops for the Confederate cause. Shortly after Florida seceded from the Union in January 1861, Walton County raised a militia

force called the Walton Guards. The Walton Guards supported the Southern cause. In their first mission, they gathered at Alaqua Creek (Walton County), boarded a schooner called *Lady of the Lake*, and journeyed across Choctawhatchee Bay to Garnier's Bayou on a scouting mission. As the Civil War erupted several months later, one of the primary missions of the Walton Guards was to defend East Pass (in present Okaloosa County) from Union control (Hutchinson 1961; US War Department n.d.).

The Late Nineteenth Century

As in many places across the defeated South, Santa Rosa and Walton Counties were economically strained in the years following the Civil War. Even into the late nineteenth century, the region had few population centers. Some of the more notable signs of modernity were emerging public school systems and a railroad that ran east–west through the region. Timber, agriculture, and shipbuilding and ship repair were the prominent economic activities that developed in the postwar era. A number of crops emerged as staples including rice, corn, sweet potatoes, and oats. Aside from these standbys, farmers began experimenting with a variety of crops such as peaches, grapes, figs, pears, and pecans. Sheep-raising was a new, promising endeavor, and beef and hides were a source of revenue for many families (Webb 1885:100).

An 1885 directory of Florida towns and communities (Webb 1885) provides information on some of the late twentieth century communities in what later became Okaloosa County. Chaffin was “a thriving lumber town” with a population of 450. The town was located on the recently built Pensacola and Atlantic Railroad which crossed the northern part of Santa Rosa County. The town had two churches, a post office, and at least one public school. The community of Holt was described as “a country station and post-office” that was located on the railroad. Holt had three stores and two saw mills as well as a post office. Mary Esther was on Santa Rosa Sound. The town had a landing frequented by sailing vessels that connected with Pensacola. Of the 300 residents of the general area, the author wrote they were “so independent...that those who have no shoes go barefoot... The people are all white, from various States, poor and satisfied with their lot.” Capt. L. Destin had an orange grove nearby although agriculture was not extensively practiced in the area. Oak Grove was near a landing on the Yellow River, had a population of 100, and boasted of opportunities for sawmill developers. Most of the settlers at Oak Grove were from Alabama. Finally, Otahite, also near the Yellow River, was described as “a small settlement and post office” (Webb 1885:100).

The Early Twentieth Century

The timber and naval stores industries, both of which had earlier roots, were well established in present-day Okaloosa County by the early twentieth century. Both industries were dependent upon the abundant forest resources of the region. The operators of these companies grew steadily larger in the period by acquiring access to forest tracts through purchases or leases. Many of the homesteaders in the region patented homesteads of federal land for the sole

purpose of selling or leasing them to naval stores and timber companies. In most cases, naval stores collection preceded timber harvesting, but timber men often complained that the collection methods of naval stores operations in the region destroyed timber. Nevertheless, the abundance of the forest made timber a strong industry. Countless feet of cut timber were floated down the rivers of the region to the mills of Escambia Bay, the Blackwater River, and Choctawhatchee Bay (Hill 1916). The industry provided income to area settlers who were experts at “getting out logs” and hewing crossties or other wood products (Wells 1976 [2006]:82). **Figure 7** is a ca. 1920s photograph of logmen pushing freshly-hewn crossties into a creek for transport. The identity of the creek is unknown.



Figure 7. Logmen pushing crossties into creek for transport (location unknown), circa 1920.
Source: Parks Photo Lab, Eglin AFB.

The naval stores industry of the region was a labor intensive enterprise that employed whites as well as blacks. Whites operated the companies and usually held high positions. Rare was the case of William Wells, a white man, who recalled working as a dipper (i.e., raw gum collector) for the R.E. Bryan distillery as a young man in the early twentieth century. Naval stores workers, the vast majority of whom were black, often lived in inexpensively built tenant houses that often were built in rows and housed numerous families who shared a shallow well. A company store provided most of their daily needs that were not grown in the soil. Naval stores operations typically employed their black workers under oppressive labor arrangements that aimed to prevent the workers from leaving the company. Many operators leased convicts from the state of Florida to fulfill their labor needs (Wells 1976[2006]).

In the early twentieth century, a large portion of southern Okaloosa County fell under the stewardship of the federal government. The federal government withdrew certain lands from homesteading or other means of ownership in Santa Rosa and Walton Counties (both inclusive of present-day Okaloosa County) in 1906. President Theodore Roosevelt designated these lands the Choctawhatchee National Forest in 1908. The Choctawhatchee National Forest encompassed approximately 468,000 acres. The Forest Service established an administrative base on Garnier's Bayou called Camp Pinchot (Thomas and Campbell 1993). Many residents of Santa Rosa and Walton Counties resented the establishment of the Forest. In 1913, the state legislature submitted a memorial to the US Congress demanding the abolishment of the National Forest and its reopening to homesteading and other means of procurement (Legislature of Florida 1913; Wells 1976[2006]). The effort failed, however, and the Choctawhatchee Forest was maintained and expanded in the years that followed (Hill 1916).

There was scarcely a tract of land in the Okaloosa County area that was not, at some point, touched by the naval stores or timber industries. Strong as the naval stores industry was, the market price of naval stores products declined around the World War I era and many operators went out of business. Yet, in some corners of Okaloosa County, workers were tapping the pines well into the 1930s (Wells 1976[2006]). Timber also experienced a decline, but the effort of the Forest Service helped keep both industries alive by promoting conservation of timber and through leasing the land to the companies. In the late 1930s, a Forest Service report stated that anywhere from 200,000 to 500,000 cups of rosin were harvested from the Choctawhatchee National Forest on an annual basis. The annual yield of saw timber in this same period was reported to be four million feet (US Department of Agriculture [USDA] 1939).

Modernization, such as paved roads, bridges, telephones, and electricity, was slowly reaching Okaloosa County in the early twentieth century and it facilitated the growth of communities. Residents of western Walton County and eastern Santa Rosa County desired the creation of a new county. A bill sponsored by Rep. William Mapoles made its way through the State Legislature and, after the residents of the proposed new county approved it, Okaloosa County was created in 1915 (Wells 1976[2006]). At the time of creation, none of the communities in the new county were incorporated and thus there was no obvious county seat. Milligan initially filled the role, but Laurel Hill, Baker, Crestview, and Camp Walton were interested. In a 1917 election, Crestview prevailed (Dobson 1974).

Crestview, named for its location on high ground between the Yellow and Shoal Rivers, emerged in the late nineteenth century. The town thrived due to its location on the Pensacola and Atlantic Railroad. Prosperity also came with the completion of the Yellow River Railroad from Crestview to Floral, Alabama, in 1894. As time passed and the road system of the region advanced, Crestview was an important crossroads on major highways (Turner 2003).

Though the federal government owned the Choctawhatchee National Forest, much of the forest resources were leased to timber and naval stores companies. Between 1908 and 1936, an estimated 200,000 to 500,000 cups of turpentine were harvested from the Choctawhatchee National Forest. Timber harvesting reached an annual yield of 4 million feet in the 1930s. The

forest also was popular with hunters, fishermen, and other recreation seekers (USDA 1939). Due to over harvesting, the lumber and turpentine output of the region began to decline. Reforestation efforts were implemented to help save an important part of the local economy. Commercial fishing began to offer a new way of life for residents who lived on the water. With the onset of World War II, forest gradually was turned over to the War Department for the establishment of a military training area that is today known as Eglin Air Force Base (Thomas et al. 1994).

Eglin Air Force Base and World War II

Eglin Air Force Base, today one of the most important military installations in the United States and a vital contributor to Okaloosa County's economy, was established in the 1930s. The Army Air Corps Tactical School at Maxwell Field in Alabama was in search of a site for a bombing and gunnery range in the early 1930s. The thinly populated region north of Choctawhatchee Bay attracted their attention. The region provided plenty of space for water and land ranges as well as convenient access to the Gulf of Mexico. A businessman in the growing vacation town of Valparaiso, James E. Plew, maneuvered to attract the military to the region. He had leased an airport to the City of Valparaiso in 1933, one of the first in the region. In the following year, he offered the government 1,460 acres near the city for the establishment of the bombing and gunnery range. The government accepted the offer and by 14 June 1935, they had developed what was known as the Valparaiso Bombing and Gunnery Base (Eglin AFB 2012). **Figure 8** is a 1936 photograph of the early base.

In its early years, the Valparaiso Bombing and Gunnery Base constricted their activities to the 1,460 acres, but within several years, the need for more space was evident. Renamed Eglin Field in 1937 in honor of aircraft crash victim Lt. Col. Frederick I. Eglin, the base grew along with the Army Air Corps which President Franklin Roosevelt ordered to be expanded in 1939 as World War II erupted in Europe. The government selected Eglin as a proving ground for aircraft armament on 27 June 1940 and greatly expanded its boundaries to include the nearly 384,000-acre Choctawhatchee National Forest. Throughout the period of United States involvement in World War II (1941-1945), Eglin was a major training base for the Army Air Corps (later designated the Army Air Forces) and a major testing center for aircraft, equipment, and tactics. It was known as the Air Proving Ground Command (Eglin AFB 2012). Eglin's role as a major training and testing base highly influenced American air success in Europe and the Pacific and provided new jobs to Okaloosa County residents.

Post-World War II

The continued importance of Eglin AFB and the rise of the tourist industry were the most significant themes of the post-World War II era in Okaloosa County. The growing Cold War made Eglin AFB all the more vital to the US military and many of the newly-developed tactics and weapons were put into action in the Korean War in the early 1950s. Eglin stood at the forefront of missile testing in the late 1950s and later decades. Such influential missiles as the



Figure 8. Valparaiso Bombing and Gunnery Base, 1936. Source: Parks Photo Lab, Eglin AFB.

JB-2, the BOMARC (I and II), the Matador, the GAM-72, and the GAM-77 were tested on the base and over the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. In recent decades, Eglin has continued its role as a development and test center. The base is known as the site of Camp Rudder, a US Army Ranger training area. Eglin also includes six auxiliary airfields (Eglin AFB 2012).

In the post-World War II era, federal military installations, and especially Eglin AFB, have continued to be the economic centerpiece of Okaloosa County. The larger cities of the county—Crestview, Destin, Fort Walton Beach, Mary Esther, Niceville, and Valparaiso—owe a large part of their prosperity to these installations. As historian Gary Mormino wrote, “No section of Florida is so dependent upon federal funds, and no county is so tied to military spending as Okaloosa” (Mormino 2005:160). In recent years, three quarters of Okaloosa County’s income was derived from Eglin. The base, as well as other military installations in the region, employs thousands of Okaloosa County residents (Mormino 2005).

Since World War II, tourism also has had a major presence in Okaloosa County and the main attraction has been the Gulf of Mexico. The stunning white sand beaches of Okaloosa County and nearby Walton County, in contrast to other beaches in Florida, were slow to develop. The 1970s and 1980s marked the beginning of large scale condominium, hotel, and tourist

attraction development. The nationwide popularity of Destin, which once was a fishing village, is an example of the dramatic growth the so-called Emerald Coast has seen in recent decades (Mormino 2005).

The Billy Bowlegs Festival, now a popular event in southern Okaloosa County, originated in the 1950s as the Playground Water Ski Carnival. The water skiing event was adapted to include a pirate theme in 1955. The pirate theme was based on Billy Bowlegs who was said to roam nearby waters in the early nineteenth century. Although there may be more myth than truth behind Billy Bowlegs, the event nevertheless attracts thousands of local residents and tourists each year (Dobson 1974).

The population of Okaloosa County in 2010 was estimated at 180,822. The population, which had increased dramatically since the first census in 1920 counted 9,360 people, is expected to continue growing (US Census Bureau 2015) (**Table 2**). Amidst the change that has taken place in Okaloosa County, local and national efforts have recognized Okaloosa County’s unique history. The Northwest Florida Heritage Museum, located in Valparaiso, features displays, events, and a research library that aim to preserve the history of Okaloosa County. Other historical-themed museums include the Air Force Armament Museum (Valparaiso), the Baker Block Museum (Baker), the Destin History and Fishing Museum (Destin), and the Fort Walton Mound (Fort Walton Beach). Currently, Okaloosa County has nine sites listed on the NRHP. Five of the sites are located within Eglin AFB: the Camp Pinchot Historic District, the Eglin Field Historic District, the McKinley Climatic Hangar, the World War II JB-2 Launch Site, and the World War II JB-2 Mobile Launch Site. The Commercial Historic District in Crestview also is on the Register. Fort Walton Beach has three sites on the Register: the Fort Walton Mound, the schooner *Governor Stone*, and the Gulfview Hotel Historic District.

Table 2. Okaloosa County Population, 1920-2010.

Date	Population
1920	9,360
1930	9,897
1940	12,900
1950	27,533
1960	61,175
1970	88,187
1980	109,920
1990	143,776
2000	170,966
2010	180,822

Source: US Census Bureau 2015

