



risky business: The Cruger-dePeyster Sugar Mill

These walls are reminders of an agricultural venture gone up in smoke along with people's plans for taming the Florida frontier. In 1830, Henry Cruger and William dePeyster acquired six hundred acres near the village of New Smyrna, borrowed money, secured machinery from New York, and established a sugar factory. Five years later, their plantation lay in ruins.

In fact, coquina *ruins* are the story of this site. The mill had little time to produce sugar (or to repay investors) before it was wrecked by the Seminoles. In December 1835, they ran off the overseer, burned the complex, and destroyed other plantations throughout the region. Helping the Indians stage their raid here were Cruger-dePeyster slaves themselves.

In the years that followed, this ruined mill became a subject of paintings, photographs, travel writings, and speculation. Not long after the factory's destruction, soldier-artist John Rogers Vinton explored the site—then painted a re-creation of events in 1835, with a Seminole warrior and the smoldering structure. Owned by Sam and Roberta Vickers of Jacksonville, Vinton's 1843 work is among the rarest of Florida sugar mill images.



Above: The Ruins of the Sugar House by John Rogers Vinton (1843). Oil on canvas, 11" x 16," courtesy of Sam and Roberta Vickers.

Left: Early twentieth-century view of the ruins. Period postcard, courtesy of Dot Moore.