

Volusia and Vibilia: Companion Plantations on the St. Johns River in Spanish and Territorial East Florida

by Lani Friend

The names Volusia and Vibilia are mellifluous, “soft and pleasing to the ear.” These are words used by Horatio Dexter to describe the Seminole language,¹ but they are well suited to the names of these Spanish land grant plantations on the St. Johns River. Volusia and Vibilia seem to belong together because they do—they share a semantic affinity; they originate from a common cultural source; they were likely bestowed by the same person/s; and the lands bearing the names are closely linked in their history and development. Volusia and Vibilia were companion plantations in Spanish and Territorial East Florida.

Both tracts were developed by Horatio Dexter—trader, land dealer, and frontier diplomat—who lived on the Volusia plantation for at least eight years.² Although he is often credited as the name-giver, this is not documented, and there are several other candidates worthy of that honorific. Situated on the east side of the St. Johns River about six miles south of Lake George, Horatio Dexter’s nineteenth-century plantation grew into a bustling river town that

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- 1 Mark F. Boyd, “Horatio S. Dexter and Events Leading to the Treaty of Moultrie Creek with the Seminole Indians,” *Florida Anthropologist* II, no. 3 (September 1958): 83.
- 2 John W. Turner, *The Volusian: Horatio S. Dexter* (Cocoa: Florida Historical Society Press, 2006), 65.

gave its name to present Volusia County. The site and the name of Volusia have been studied historically in isolation, apart from any other site along the St. Johns River. But careful examination of the provenance of Volusia shows that it is, in fact, closely tied to a second Spanish land grant tract called Vibilia which once encompassed the southern portion of present-day Palatka and its south to southwestern environs.

The tracts of Volusia and Vibilia were part of a 50,000-acre grant awarded by Governor José Coppinger in 1818 to Joseph Freeman Rattenbury, a London lawyer seeking opportunity in Spanish East Florida. They were to be inaugural settlements in Rattenbury's proposed colony of British immigrants who would "augment the population" and, with the labor of African slaves, cultivate and turn a profit from the land.³

Rattenbury's scheme seems to have been inspired by Lord Denys Rolle's 1765 colony of Charlota, or Rollestown, a 78,000-acre British grant on the east side of the St. Johns River south of present-day Palatka. For colonists, Rolle recruited "hopeless vagrants, debtors and beggars off the streets of London" ⁴ with the intent to reform them and make new citizens out of them. ⁵

For almost twenty years, Rolle struggled to make his colony a success, but it was doomed from the start. His epic failure was widely known in London. Although Rattenbury's proposal seems similar, he had nothing but derision for his Rolle's plan. In 1818 he visited the ruins of Rollestown on his travels through East Florida and wrote about it in his *Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main* published anonymously the next year in London.

On a journey from Amelia Island to St. Augustine in January of 1818, Rattenbury was rowed in a canoe manned by slaves up the St. Johns River to Rollestown where he viewed the remains of the settlement. In his narrative he evinced amazement at Rolle's "folly and infatuation" in his choice of "penitent prostitutes" of London as the objects of his philanthropic bounty. He was also incredulous that Rolle had situated the settlement in such a remote location, "...did he propose to found a colony of Amazons?" He concluded

3 *American State Papers, Public Lands* 6: 419. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsp&fileName=033/llsp033.db&recNum=442> (accessed 12/16/18).

4 Carita Doggett Corse and James Grant, "Denys Rolle and Rollestown, a Pioneer for Utopia," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (1928):118.

5 Carl Bohnenberger, "The Settlement of Charlota (Rolles Town), 1765," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1925): 46.

that Rolle “must have intended to promote their intermarriage with the Seminole Indians,” following George Washington’s advice on the best way to integrate “North American Indians with the people of the United States.”⁶

Apart from the brief proposal quoted in the *American State Papers*, nothing else is known about Rattenbury’s planned colony. It may have been devised solely to obtain a large grant of land. In his published narrative of three hundred and twenty-nine pages covering every detail of his experiences in East Florida, there is no mention of a colony other than “discussions” with the Spanish Governor Coppinger. Relating that Coppinger was liberal with grants of land to foreigners, he states as an aside, only that “a considerable tract was assigned to me upon the borders of Lake St. George.”⁷ It is hard to take Rattenbury’s colonizing idea seriously. But his journal provides a revealing picture of the turbulent state of Spanish East Florida of the time.

Rattenbury had come to Spanish East Florida in 1817 as part of an adventure gone wrong. The British public had long sympathized with the struggle of South American insurgents to throw off Spain’s “most oppressive tyranny,” a conflict deemed nothing less than “a holy war.”⁸ In July of that year, inspired by London newspaper accounts of successful rebellions in South America and desiring to leave England, Rattenbury embarked on an expedition to the Spanish Main. Many British veterans of the Napoleonic Wars, reduced to half-pay, came home during a time of economic distress. Agents of Venezuela in London targeted them with offers of higher rank and corresponding pay for their services in fighting for independence from Spain.⁹ It is probable that Rattenbury was a veteran, and he enlisted in the cause. Also, the recent death of his father and other “circumstances of a painful and distressing nature” caused him to “seek relief to my feelings in absence from my country.”¹⁰

6 [Joseph Freeman Rattenbury], *Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main, in the Ship “Two Friends,”* (London 1819), 153-154. <https://archive.org/details/narrativeofvoyag00lond/page/152> (accessed 12/10/18).

7 [Rattenbury], 125.

8 [Rattenbury], “Introductory Matter,” B.

9 Patrick W. Doyle, “Unmasked: The Author of ‘Narrative of a Voyage to the Spanish Main in the ship “Two Friends,”” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (1999): 190.

10 [Rattenbury], 4.

He sailed from England with eighty other passengers, many of them veterans like shipmate Charles Blacker Vignoles,¹¹ for the Caribbean island of St. Thomas where a Venezuelan agent was to direct them on the next leg of the voyage. But on their arrival, no agent was to be found or ever would be, according to a gentleman they encountered who was on the same mission. Townsfolk sympathized with their plight, confirming that they had been hoodwinked. Survivors of a previous schooner of recruits, maimed and abandoned in the service of the insurgents, shared stories of the despotism of General Simon Bolivar, revolting cruelties on both sides, and the character of the people—"blind, bigoted...victims of the priesthood, and instruments of designing men." Rattenbury's group realized they had been "decoyed from their country" to engage in a "despicable and dishonorable" cause.¹² Some returned to England, others were forced to chase down their boat which had sailed in the night without paying harbor dues, carrying off all their possessions.¹³

The American consulate on St. Thomas, in support of its country's goal of possession of the Floridas, recommended that the remaining thirty British officers join up with Sir Gregor MacGregor on Amelia Island. MacGregor, veteran of the Napoleonic wars and South American revolutions, had recently captured Fernandina as a base from which he planned to free the Floridas from Spanish control.¹⁴ "Sick of the scenes at St. Thomas's and of the prospects on the Spanish main," Rattenbury and his party resolved that MacGregor's was a worthier cause, and sailed for Amelia Island.¹⁵

Unknown to them, MacGregor's coup had failed, and French pirate Louis Aury had assumed command, raising the flag of the Republic of Mexico. The buccaneers then proceeded to make a fortune at Amelia by capturing ships and selling slaves, as many as a thousand Africans in less than two months.¹⁶ Rattenbury and his companions met with Aury and his followers, "the refuse of all nations."¹⁷ In a short time, the British officers became disillusioned with all revolutionary causes, and went their separate ways.

11 Patrick W. Doyle, "Uninvited Guests: A Night at Cedar Point Plantation," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 89, no. 3 (Winter 2011): 376.

12 [Rattenbury], 42.

13 [Rattenbury], 48-49.

14 Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 244.

15 [Rattenbury], 54.

16 Landers, *Black Society*, 245.

17 [Rattenbury], 96.

Fernandina residents asked Rattenbury to help rid them of Aury and the French party, but Rattenbury got involved in a brawl, was arrested, and banished.¹⁸ “Tired and disgusted with the scenes I had witnessed at Amelia, and cured of my expectation of finding patriotism in the Western Hemisphere,” Rattenbury set off for St. Marys.¹⁹ There he received an invitation to meet with Coppinger in St. Augustine where they discussed his proposal for East Florida. He also volunteered to lead a raid against Aury, but when Aury got wind of it, Rattenbury had to flee overland to St. Marys to avoid capture by the pirate forces, then sailed to Charleston.²⁰

The “Amelia Island Affair,” as it became known, brought to a peak ongoing tensions between the Spanish and American governments. Weakened by the Napoleonic Wars and struggling to quell uprisings in Latin America, Spain had few troops or resources to spare for East Florida.²¹ East Floridians realized that Spain couldn’t hold on to the province much longer. To secure their positions under American rule, residents and foreign investors rushed to solicit land from Governor Coppinger who, to strengthen Spain’s hold on the land, generously complied.²²

News spread that people on Amelia Island were about to declare independence. President James Monroe informed Congress that Amelia Island had been made “a channel for funneling illicit slaves from Africa into the U.S., an asylum for fugitive slaves from neighboring states, and a port for smuggling of all kinds.” Seizing the opportunity, American forces moved in on December 23, 1817 to clear out the “pirate’s den” and occupy Amelia Island, which they held until the Spanish finally left Florida.²³

In early February of the next year, Rattenbury again met with Coppinger at St. Augustine. Two weeks later Rattenbury’s 50,000-acre grant was officialized on condition that the whole or part of it should be settled and cultivated within two years. In the fall, he sailed to Philadelphia where he made an agreement on October 16, 1818 with New York attorney James Alexander giving Alexander power of attorney and authorizing him to manage his affairs in Florida. Rattenbury also transferred one-half interest in the grant

18 Doyle, “Unmasked,” 192.

19 [Rattenbury], 101.

20 Doyle, “Unmasked,” 193.

21 Doyle, “Unmasked,” 190.

22 Frank Marotti, Jr., “Edward M. Wanton and the Settling of Micanopy,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (April 1995): 465.

23 Landers, *Black Society*, 246.

to Alexander, then left for England to make further arrangements for the colony.

Mr. Alexander then proceeded to New York City to meet with Horatio Dexter who agreed to act as Alexander's agent in East Florida. Alexander then hired four New York men to help develop the proposed settlement and traveled on to East Florida, procuring livestock and necessary supplies along the way. On arriving in St. Augustine, he arranged to have various tracts of Rattenbury's land surveyed and registered in the proper offices in East Florida.²⁴

Two tracts of land claimed by Rattenbury on the west side of the St. Johns River were located south of Lake George; the third was downriver north of Lake George. About six miles south of Lake George lay the Volusia tract shown on a Spanish Land Grant Survey Map as 10,000 acres on the west side of the river,²⁵ a tract later described by Dexter as 11,000 acres traversed by the river. Volusia, as seen on the Tanner Map of 1823,²⁶ encompassed one of four major Indian crossings on the river. At the Indian ferry landing there, trails from St. Augustine and the east coast crossed over the river and headed southwest to Chucachate (Red House/Town), the seat of Seminole territory northeast of the site of present-day Tampa, and the village of Okehumke (Deep Waters). Connecting trails led north to Micanopy (named for a leading Seminole chief) and southwest to the site of current Tampa, where a major native hunting trail traversed the peninsula to Jupiter Inlet.

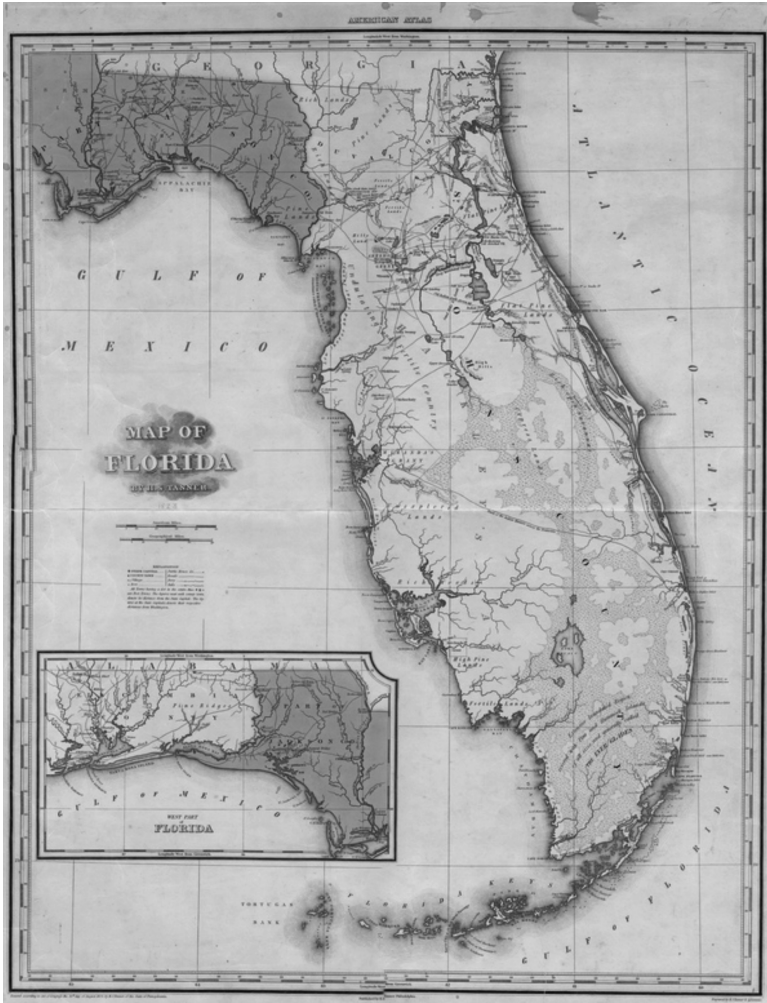
Dexter later stated that, through a transaction that remains unclear, he acquired from Rattenbury 2,000 acres of the tract. Dexter's friend, Peter Mitchel, lawyer and land speculator, maintained that Rattenbury had also conveyed to him 3,500 acres of the Volusia tract. Both men began improvements on the land in 1819.

Coppinger was eager to grant land to Dexter and others associated with the slave trade whose labor force would ensure development. Both Dexter and Mitchel were involved in the domestic slave trade, and Dexter was one of a few Anglo planters who dominated

24 *American State Papers, Public Lands* 6: 420, <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsp&fileName=033/llsp033.db&recNum=443> (accessed 18 August 2019).

25 Map depicting unconfirmed Spanish land grant of Joseph F. Rattenbury, in Box 8, Folder 1 of Unconfirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, 1763-1821 (Series S 991), State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/233236?id=44> (accessed 18 August 2019).

26 Charles Blacker Vignoles and Henry Schenck Tanner, Map of Florida [S.L., 1823], <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003627045/> (accessed 18 August 2019).



Tanner Map of Florida, 1823

the St. Augustine slave market.²⁷ Peter Mitchel was a partner in the large mercantile house of Carnochan and Mitchel that shipped slaves in and out of Savannah, Georgia between 1817 and 1820, with Peter Mitchel acting as an individual shipper in 1821 and 1833.²⁸

²⁷ Landers, *Black Society*, 178.

²⁸ Series D: Records of the U.S. Customhouses. *Papers of the American Slave Trade. Part 1: Port of Savannah Slave Manifests, 1790-1860*. 1, 89-94, 97, 115, <http://>

By as early as June or July of 1819, Alexander had settled fifty slaves on the Volusia tract and “made considerable improvements” including introducing “various species of stock.” In December of that year, Horatio Dexter arrived and “commenced with Alexander a settlement” at Volusia. Seventy “hands...cleared 157 acres and planted sugarcane, built 49 slave houses, and planted orchards and vineyards.”²⁹ At some point, Dexter established a trading post, possibly taking over a former store of Panton, Leslie and Company. The store was noted in Don Fernando de la Maza Arredondo’s 1817 petition to Governor Coppinger for 30,000 acres of land south and southwest of Lake George. Fifteen thousand acres of this grant were located on the west side of the St. Johns River starting from the “old Indian Chucichatty path opposite the site on which the firm of ‘Panton and Leslie’ had their store established known by the name of the Upper Store.”³⁰ Losses suffered by the company during the War of 1812 combined with the alienation of its Indian customers and declining trade in the province led in 1817 to the closing of this store and Panton and Leslie’s entire East Florida branch.³¹

The trading post at Volusia was originally located on the west side of the river at or near present-day Astor in Lake County. Scottish trader James Spalding established Spalding’s Upper Store there as it was convenient for trading with the Creek Indians, soon to be known as Seminoles, whose lands lay west of the St. Johns River. From Spalding’s Upper Store, traders with pack horses carrying trade goods traveled to Indian villages in the interior, bringing back deerskins to be shipped to company headquarters in Savannah and Charleston. In 1774 William Bartram lodged at Spalding’s Upper Store for several weeks.³² William de Brahm’s 1771 Map of the General Surveys of East Florida shows the “Indian trading house” south of Lake George (Dartmouth) on the west side of the river.³³ In 1775 the mercantile firm of Panton and Forbes in

www.lexisnexis.com/documents/academic/upa_cis/100539_AmSlaveTrade-SerDPt1.pdf (accessed 18 August 2019).

29 *American State Papers, Public Lands* 6: 421.

30 *American State Papers, Public Lands* 3:720-724, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/llsp/030/0700/07360721.tif> (accessed 16 August 2019).

31 William S. Coker and Thomas D. Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands* (Pensacola: University of West Florida Press, 1986), 370.

32 Daniel L. Schafer, Florida History Online, Department of History, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL, https://www.unf.edu/floridahistoryonline/Plantations/plantations/Spaldings_Upper_Store.htm (accessed 18 July 2019).

33 William Gerar de Brahm, *History of the three provinces South Carolina, Georgia,*

St. Augustine bought out the businesses and real estate of James Spalding and Roger Kelsall, including Spalding's Upper Store and the Lower Store located on the west side of the river at Stokes Landing six miles south of present-day Palatka. Panton and Forbes eventually became Panton and Leslie.³⁴ The Upper Store at Astor began operations under Panton, Leslie and Company possibly in 1783.³⁵ At some point after ownership changed, it began business on the east bank of the river.³⁶

Dexter's plantation was "said to have been built on a high shell mound,"³⁷ and the 1834 U.S. Government Township Survey would seem to confirm this as the plantation site is drawn as distinct from the wide riverbank margins to the north and south depicted as "marsh."³⁸ When Dr. William Hayne Simmons visited Dexter at Volusia in 1822, he described the ground appearing in many places "as if covered in snow from an abundance of these [periwinkle] shells scattered over the surface, while they are found by digging twenty feet below the level of the soil."³⁹ The site was located in a flood-plain, and the rich muck of the soil further inland would have been very conducive to agriculture.⁴⁰ Dexter's sugarcane fields may have been located north-northwest of the shell mound site where aerial photos from the 1940s show old cleared areas⁴¹

and East Florida: manuscript, [after 1771] Map of the General Surveys of East Florida (Cambridge, MA: Colonial North America at Harvard Library, Harvard University). https://colonialnorthamerica.library.harvard.edu/spotlight/cna/catalog/990098790550203941_FHCLHOUGH:11113614 (accessed 25 July 2019).

34 Schafer, "Forbes Bluff," Florida History Online, https://www.unf.edu/florida-historyonline/Plantations/plantations/Forbes_Bluff.htm (accessed 16 August 2019).

35 Coker and Watson, 365.

36 Brad Sanders, Official Site of the Bartram Trail Conference, email correspondence July 21, 2019; "The Bartram Trail: Florida," <http://bartramtrail.org/page-1657751> (accessed 20 July 2019).

37 Lillian Dillard Gibson, *Annals of Volusia: Birthplace of Volusia County* (Volusia, Florida: R. Alex Gibson, 1978), 35.

38 State of Florida Township Maps, T15S, R28E.

39 William Hayne Simmons, *Notices of East Florida with an account of the Seminole Nation of Indians* (Charleston 1822), 28, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00103078/00001/72x?search=volusia> (accessed 26 July 2019).

40 George Johnson, District Conservationist, Flagler and Volusia Counties, USDA-NRCS, "Historical Site of Volusia: Soils and Terrain," phone interview and emails, July 26, 2019.

41 University of Florida Aerial Photographs of Volusia County (1942), links courtesy of George Johnson, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00071789/00001/41x?search=volusia+%3dcounty> (accessed 26 July 2019).

or to the immediate east of the shell mound site where the survey noted an old field.

Further upriver south of current Lake Dexter was a tract of 11,520-acres encompassing Alexander Springs and Creek, presumably named by James Alexander. There Dexter supervised slaves putting up three buildings and planting a small orange grove.

Encompassing the southern half of current Palatka and its south to southwestern environs was Rattenbury's 4,000-acre tract called Vibilia.⁴² The Vibilia tract was bounded on the northerly or short side by the claim of Bernardo Segui and the "road to Lochway," the Seminole headquarters of Alachua. At Vibilia, Dexter's slaves cleared twenty-seven acres of land; planted corn, rice and potatoes; and built three dwelling houses.⁴³

Vibilia, "now called Vibrillia," is noted on the list of Spanish surveys of Rattenbury's claims.⁴⁴ Vibilia became known as Vybrillia and several other spelling variants of the name.⁴⁵ The tract lay across the river from "lands planted by the mulatto John/Juan Moore." Since Blacks and slaves sometimes used their master's surname and sometimes their biological father's surname, John Moore may have been John/Juan Gray/Grey, a free quadroon who worked for Hannah Mills, also known by her maiden name of Hannah Moore. [H]annah Mills is recorded in a baptismal record from St. Augustine as the mother of Edward Mills Wanton⁴⁶—trader, community leader, and possible kin (unverified) to Horatio Dexter's

42 Map depicting unconfirmed Spanish land grant of Joseph F. Rattenbury, in Box 8, Folder 1 of Unconfirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, 1763-1821 (Series S 991), State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/233236?id=28> (accessed 18 August 2019).

43 *American State Papers, Public Lands* 6: 421.

44 List of unconfirmed Spanish land grant claims and surveys of Joseph F. Rattenbury, State Archives of Florida, https://www.floridamemory.com/FMP/SLG/doc_images/Rattenbury_JosephE_75x1/75x1_1_8_Rattenbury_JosephE_030.jpg (accessed 18 August 2019).

45 The phonetic tendency to put an "r" after the "b" in Vibilia endures in modern times and can be seen in the modern blog page of two science educators doing a krill survey in Antarctica, December 2011, wherein the species Vibilia is spelled Vibrillia: "Life as the Fraurers, Antarctica," Fraurers.blogspot.com (accessed 18 August 2019); the correct spelling of the species name Vibilia is verified at "Nature Picture Library" at www.naturepl.com, [https://www.naturepl.com/stock-photo/vibilia-sp-\(hyperiidia-vibiliidae\)-this-is-a-genus-that-isnt-too-easy/search/detail-0_01139284.html](https://www.naturepl.com/stock-photo/vibilia-sp-(hyperiidia-vibiliidae)-this-is-a-genus-that-isnt-too-easy/search/detail-0_01139284.html) (accessed 18 August 2019).

46 *Black Baptisms*, Roman Catholic Cathedral Parish of St. Augustine Records, vol. 2, no. 224, "Juan Zeferino Alexandro Wanton," St. Augustine Historical Society, St. Augustine, Fl.

wife, Abigail Dennis.⁴⁷ The baptismal record also shows that John Moore's sister Margarita was Edward Wanton's wife.⁴⁸ Moore's land (unclear whether Hannah Moore's or John Moore's) included a ferry, a guardhouse or "pueste militar" (military post), and Moore's dwelling.

The Vibilia tract encompassed another of the four major Indian crossings on the St. Johns River, the remaining two being at Cow Ford and Picolata. As early as the 1650s, cattle from Spanish ranches at La Chua (Gainesville), Apalachee (Tallahassee), and north and south of present-day Palatka were driven across the river here on their way to the slaughterhouse at St. Augustine to supply meat for the garrison.⁴⁹ By the mid-1700s, Seminole Indians came to dominate the interior of the peninsula in a district variously known as "La Chua, Latchaway, and Allatchua," where they controlled the transpeninsular routes of travel.⁵⁰ Trails ran from the river here to Alachua, then north to the province of Apalachee in the current Florida Panhandle. The Seminoles called the crossing "pilo-taikita" meaning "ferry," "ford," or "canoe crossing". This was eventually simplified to Pelitka, then became Palatka.⁵¹ In the mid-1820s, Palatka replaced the river landing of Picolata further north as the head of ocean navigation on the St. Johns River. The "port" of Vibilia, or Vybrillia, became the gateway to the interior of north-central Florida.

Horatio Dexter was instrumental in opening this gateway. In 1818 Don Fernando de la Maza Arredondo and his son, Havana merchants living at St. Augustine, were granted almost 290,000 acres in the heart of Seminole-Creek territory around Alachua by

47 "History Bytes: Newport and Florida," March 29, 2011, Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island, <https://newporthistory.org/2011/history-bytes-newport-florida/> (accessed 18 August 2019).

48 Black Baptisms, Roman Catholic Cathedral Parish of St. Augustine Records, vol. 2, no. 224, "Juan Zeferino Alexandro Wanton," St. Augustine Historical Society, St. Augustine, FL.

49 Justin B. Blanton, "The Role of Cattle Ranching in the 1656 Timucuan Rebellion: A Struggle for Land, Labor, and Chiefly Power," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 92, no. 4 (Spring 2014): 672, 677-78; "A Brief History of Palatka," Putnam County Historical Society, <http://www.putnam-fl-historical-society.org/Historic/Historical%20Documents/PALHIST.html> (accessed 18 August 2019).

50 "Images of Alachua: From Planes to Trains, Sinks to Citrus", UF Libraries, University of Florida, 1, <http://web.uflib.ufl.edu/spec/pyongee/alachua/voa1.html> (accessed 18 August 2019).

51 "Name Origins of Florida Places @OCHP," <http://info.flheritage.com/florida-names/> (accessed 18 August 2019); Allan A. Swanson, "Pilo-Taikita: A History of Palatka, Florida" (Jacksonville, FL: s.n., 1967), 1.

the King of Spain as a reward for Don Fernando's years of unpaid service to the Crown. Although the area had apparently been abandoned by the Seminoles, the Crown mandated that the Arredondos could not violate Indian rights to the land.⁵² In 1820, Peter Mitchel became one of Arredondo's partners, and asked Horatio Dexter to start a settlement in Alachua. Dexter, like Arredondo, was one of twelve merchants influential in St. Augustine affairs. As a plantation owner, a land speculator, and a trader with the Seminoles, Dexter had much-needed skills and connections.⁵³

Dexter's first task was to obtain the approval of the Seminole Indians. For this he called on his possible relative Edward Wanton who had worked for Panton and Leslie at Pensacola and was adept at Indian diplomacy. Dexter and Wanton realized that under American rule, settlers would pour into the Alachua region. They sought to obtain legal agreements with the Indians to deter American squatters and possibly delay Indian removal from Florida.⁵⁴

In the spring of 1823, Dexter was asked to be an Indian sub-agent for the Territory, to produce a comprehensive report on the Seminoles, and to assist in assembling them for a treaty. In a letter to Gov. William P. Duval, Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Territory of Florida, Dexter states, "The Indians coming to attend the treaty will pass the St. Johns at Volusia and Vibrillia [sic] opposite [the old Spanish fort of] Buena Vista, and it will be necessary to provide food to enable them to go to town [St. Augustine]." Dexter then calculates the amount of rice needed for each site including Vibrillia.⁵⁵ That September, several hundred Seminoles passed through Vibrillia on their way to attend the Treaty of Moultrie Creek at a site several miles south of St. Augustine. The treaty would restrict the Seminoles to a reservation south of the Alachua country, freeing that area for white occupation.⁵⁶

In 1822, several Europeans and a group of tradesmen from New York and New Jersey recruited by the Florida Association of New York sailed by schooner from New York harbor to the St. Johns River. They disembarked at the port of Vabrillia, also cited as Vybrillia and Vebrillia where, with the labor of fifteen slaves, they began building a storehouse for their supplies, a dwelling for the agent, and a "practical wagon road" to Alachua. When completed,

52 Marotti, 465.

53 Marotti, 466.

54 Marotti, 468.

55 Boyd, 86.

56 Marotti, 471.

the road had nine bridges and extended fifty miles from the river into the settlement—“a road of great value not just to those who live there but to the country in general.”⁵⁷ The settlement, called “Wanton” or “Wanton’s,” would later become Micanopy, the first permanent white settlement in Alachua County.⁵⁸ Two years later, the Arredondo grant would include twenty farms and 200 residents.⁵⁹

In 1821 British engineer Charles Blacker Vignoles was appointed city surveyor for St. Augustine and began traveling throughout East Florida collecting materials for a new map of the province. He wrote in his *Observations upon the Floridas* that from Micanopy, the “ancient capital of the Indian nation,” the tracts “diverge in all directions to Black creek, Picolati, Vibrilia [sic], and Buffalo Bluff [south of current San Mateo and across from Stokes Landing] on the central parts of the St John’s River”. He also cites Vibrilia as one of the places the mail should pass through on its way from Pensacola to St. Augustine instead of the current route.⁶⁰

Dr. William Hayne Simmons, an East Florida resident who traveled through the province in the winter of 1822, saw a hollow gum tree “near Vibrillia” in which an Indian corpse had been placed with the feet protruding. He had already passed an “Indian tomb” of pine logs lashed with grape vines covering a body on the ground. In his *Notices of East Florida*, Simmons relates that Dexter had told him about cutting down an old cypress tree and finding a body inside. The author wondered that the Indians seemingly had no fixed mode of disposing of the dead. At a later point in his journey, he parted with his guide who was to go on to Vibrillia with horses to meet some settlers who were on their way to Alachua.⁶¹

What is the origin of the names Volusia and Vibilia?

Much like today’s housing developments, these sites were intended to appeal to potential colonists, and the names would

57 *Full Text of “Record in the Case of the United States of America Versus Fernando M. Arredondo and Others,”* Supreme Court of the United States (Washington 1831), 131, 134, 268, <https://archive.org/details/recordincaseuni00courgoog/page/n274> (accessed 18 August 2019).

58 Micanopy Marker. University of North Florida Digital Commons. Historical Architecture Main Gallery, https://digitalcommons.unf.edu/historical_architecture_main/3355/ (accessed 18 August 2019).

59 Marotti, 471.

60 Charles Blacker Vignoles, *Observations upon the Floridas* (New York, 1823), 79, <https://archive.org/details/observationsupon00vign/page/68> (accessed 18 August 2019).

61 Dr. William Hayne Simmons, *Notices of East Florida*, 35, 42, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00103078/00001/79x?search=volusia> (accessed 26 July 2019).

have been an important marketing tool. Nineteenth-century plantation owners often looked to antiquity for inspiration. George Fleming named his 1,000-acre plantation north of Green Cove Springs “Hibernia,” the classical Latin name for Ireland, the land of his birth. Two early plantations in the Ormond area, “Rosetta” and “Damietta,” were named for ancient Egyptian cities and river branches near Alexandria at the mouth of the Nile.

Greco-Roman references evoking timelessness and tradition were especially popular. Someone with a high level of education, particularly for that time, put a good deal of thought into naming Volusia and Vibilia, possibly consulting reference books available in private collections or nineteenth-century libraries and bookstores, including those at Savannah and Charleston.

And that is where the source of these names can be found.

Volusia and Vibilia, Latin in origin, are Roman goddesses cited in numerous nineteenth-century dictionaries of classical mythology commonly used by headmasters, teachers, and tutors in both English and American schools. These books were “necessary for the understanding of the ancient poets”.⁶² As an editor of Tooke’s *Pantheon* wrote, “Without a general knowledge of Heathen Mythology, the immortal writings of Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and others are almost unintelligible, and their principal beauties lost.”⁶³ Such a text, according to an editor of an earlier mythological dictionary, “will enable the scholar to understand the purport of his lesson, and thereby render his talk more pleasant and consequently, less tedious.”⁶⁴

From the end of the 18th century to mid-19th century, the intellectual and artistic achievement of ancient Greece and Rome was considered one of the foundations of Western culture. “The Classical world permeated almost every aspect of life, from political institutions and philosophical enquiry to scientific method and the basic forms of architecture. The classics of Latin literature, such as Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the *Odes* of Horace, and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* were

62 William King, *An Historical Account of the Heathen Gods and Heroes* (London 1750, 1772), title page, <https://archive.org/details/anhistoricalacc00king-gooq/page/n12> (accessed 18 August 2019).

63 Andrew Tooke, *The Pantheon: Representing the Fabulous Histories of the Heathen Gods* (Baltimore: William and Joseph Neal, 1833), iii., <https://archive.org/details/tookespantheonof00pomerich/page/n9> (accessed 18 August 2019).

64 Thomas Carnan, *The gentleman and lady’s key to polite literature, or, A compendius dictionary of fabulous history* (London 1783), Preface B1, <https://archive.org/details/details/gentlemanladyske00carn/page/n11> (accessed 18 August 2019).

standard texts.”⁶⁵ A grounding in Greek and Latin was part of the general education for gentlemen and a few privileged women of the time.

Beginning in the early 1700s, there was a “great outpouring of popular mythologizing.” Numerous inexpensive handbooks were printed to spread ideas about mythology to various audiences, especially students.⁶⁶ Andrew Tooke’s *Pantheon*, first published in English in 1698, was a bestseller. Tooke was an English scholar and headmaster of Charterhouse School in London who translated (though failed to credit) a Jesuit work called *Pantheum Mythicum* written in 1659 by Father Francois Pomey.⁶⁷ Tooke’s *The Pantheon: Representing the Fabulous Histories of the Heathen Gods and Most Illustrious Heroes* went through seventeen editions in Latin and thirty-six English editions before an American edition was published in New York in 1810.⁶⁸ Over the course of two centuries since its first appearance in English, it was in wide circulation on both sides of the Atlantic and was a standard text at Boston Latin School, one of the oldest schools in America. Tooke’s *Pantheon* became a standard textbook on Greek and Roman mythology in Britain for well over a century until 1859, when it was supplanted by Thomas Bulfinch’s *Age of Fable* (1855). As late as 1859, *The Pantheon* was published in America as “adapted for the use of students of every age and either sex,” as its title proclaimed.

Tooke’s 1774 and 1810 editions describe Volusia as a “goddess of corn” whose responsibility it was “to fold the blade round the corn before the beard breaks out, which foldings of the blade contain the beard as pods do the seed”. Vibia was “a tutelar goddess... presiding over young and adult persons” whose task it was to “bring wanderers into their way again.”⁶⁹

From 1769 through the 1790s, John Bell, a popular London publisher and bookseller, had a bookstore and circulating library on the Strand called “The British Library”. Bell’s *New Pantheon*, a historical dictionary of gods and goddesses of antiquity published in 1790, volume two, provides similar entries for the names that are

65 Stephen Hebron, “The Romantics and Classical Greece” (British Library 2014), <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-romantics-and-classical-greece> (accessed 18 August 2019).

66 Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson, *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000), 130.

67 Tooke’s *Pantheon*, <http://www.hellenicaworld.com/Greece/Mythology/en/TookesPantheon.html> (accessed 18 August 2019).

68 Feldman and Richardson, 130.

69 Tooke, *Pantheon* (London 1774), 229, 290; (New York 1810), 205, 260.

far more readable than those in Tooke's *Pantheon*.⁷⁰ It is notable that Bell's bookstore in the Strand was just a short carriage ride away from Joseph Rattenbury's London insurance office at Copthall Court.

William King's *Historic Account of the Heathen Gods and Heroes* (1710) was part of Thomas Jefferson's reference collection and another standard text of Boston Latin School. It was one of the most popular classical handbooks of the time, going through five editions by 1731 and still being printed in 1761.⁷¹ Multiple editions of King's book describe "Volutia" (variant) as "a goddess of young leaves," one of many deities who "protect plants as they grow out of the ground". She had charge over the plant as the leaves were opening.⁷² King does not provide an entry for Vibilia.

Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* is one of the most famous dictionaries in history and "one of the greatest single achievements of scholarship...ever performed by one individual who laboured under anything like the disadvantages in a comparable length of time." First published in 1755, the dictionary took nine years to compile, required six assistants, and listed 40,000 words. The first Miniature Edition was published in London in 1800, and the first American Miniature Edition was published in Boston in 1804 from the fourteenth English edition.⁷³

The goddesses Volusia and Vibilia are to be found in many editions of *Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language in Miniature*. Volusia was "a goddess of corn," and Vibilia was "the goddess of wanderers". In several editions, both are listed on the same page which would have been remarkably convenient for someone researching potential plantation names.⁷⁴

Rev. John Entick's *The New Spelling Dictionary...with a Compendious Historical Dictionary of the Heathen Gods and Goddesses...Deduced from the Best Authorities* published in London in 1777 and 1783 cites

70 John Bell, *New Pantheon*, v. 2 (London 1790), 311, 318, <https://archive.org/details/b28777992/page/318> (accessed 18 August 2019).

71 Feldman and Richardson, 130.

72 King, *Historic Account* (London 1750, 1772), 162, <https://archive.org/details/anhistoricalacc00kinggoog/page/n204> (accessed 18 August 2019).

73 "Bureaucracy, Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language," University of North Texas Libraries, <https://exhibits.library.unt.edu/bureaucracy-love-story/items/johnson%E2%80%99s-dictionary-english-language> (accessed 18 August 2019).

74 Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language in Miniature* (Boston: W.P. and L. Blake, 1804), 262, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?q1=vibilia;id=nyp.33433081987871;view=plaintext;seq=270;start=1;sz=10;page=search;nun=262> (accessed 18 August 2019).

Volusia as “a corn goddess” and Vibalia (variant) as “a goddess of wanderers.”⁷⁵ American editions were published in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1804 and 1812.

The names are also cited in *A Dictionary of Polite Literature*, v. 2, London (1804) with Volusia erroneously listed as “Wolusia. An inferior rural deity. [followed by her duties].”⁷⁶ Peacock’s *A General and Complete Dictionary of the English Language, To which are Added, an Alphabetical Account of the Heathen Deities* (1785) lists Vibilia as “a goddess of wanderers” and “Voluna, [error variant] a corn goddess.”⁷⁷

The name Volusia may originate in the latter half of the Republican Period of Roman history or even earlier, in the founding days of Rome. Ettore Pais, director of excavations at Pompeii in the early 1900s, wrote about the discovery of a Roman fresco based on a famous painting representing myths about the origins of Rome. In his book *Ancient Legends of Roman History*, Pais analyzes the painting and describes the deities depicted. He relates that a goddess named Volusia was worshipped in a temple area located at the end of the Nova Via, a road paralleling the Via Appia, which connected the two most ancient parts of the Palatine Hill, the oldest part of the city, also called “the nucleus of the Roman Empire.” Here there was an altar of Volusia upon which sacrifices were made. The cult of Volusia was associated with the Mother of the Earth and with the Lares, spirits of the dead. “Volusia, under the appellation of Libertina, was considered a goddess...analogous to Venus.” Volusia may have been similar to Libertina, being “at one and the same time, the goddess of Love and of Death.”⁷⁸ It is not known how a goddess of this stature was transformed or demoted over the centuries into an inferior rural deity of corn. However, according to Pais, Volusia was also closely associated with Angerona, a goddess of Death and

75 Rev. John Entick, *The New Spelling Dictionary* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1777), 451; (London: Charles Dilly, 1783), 456; (New Haven, CT: Sydney’s Press, 1804, 1812), 400, <https://archive.org/details/enticksnewspell-00murggoog/page/n386> (accessed 18 August 2019).

76 *A Dictionary of Polite Literature*, v. 2 (London: Scatcherd and Letterman, 1804), 400, 408, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?num=400&u=1&seq=9&view=plaintext&size=100&id=uiug.30112112354235> (accessed 18 August 2019).

77 W. Peacock, *A General and Complete Dictionary of the English Language, To which are Added, an Alphabetical Account of the Heathen Deities* (London 1785), 264, <https://archive.org/details/ageneralandcomp00unkngoog/page/n264> (accessed 18 August 2019).

78 Ettore Pais, *Ancient Legends of Roman History* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1906), 53, 97, 272, <https://archive.org/details/ancientlegendsr00paisgoog/page/n78> (accessed 17 August 2019).

Silence.⁷⁹ The Latin word for silence, *silentium*, is close to the word for corn, *frumentum*. The long s, an archaic form of the lower-case letter s, was derived from the old Roman cursive medial s which looks like an *f*. It could have been a transcription or printing error replicated over time, given the lack of standard orthography or printing techniques.

The melodious names of Volusia and Vibilia raise questions about who bestowed them on the two companion tracts and why these names were chosen. These questions are part of the larger issue of place and the power of naming. Space becomes “place” when it is given boundaries and accorded value. Place is created and recreated over time by diverse groups of people.⁸⁰ Place refers to how people are aware of or attracted to a space; it can be understood as “space that has meaning.” More than just a location, place is a location created by human experiences.⁸¹

Names give a place identity. Place names can evoke strong imagery and connotations. They can tell us about the topography of a site or about its history and are of special interest to those who study the past. Abraham Resnick, a social studies educator, compares place names, collectively, to characters in a regional narrative.⁸² Place names can “commemorate an event, recognize a past incident, honor a noteworthy person, or remember a founder.” They can reflect national, ethnic, or foreign or linguistic features. They can originate in a literary reference or a Native American term. Place names may be religious or mythical, or even manufactured or contrived.⁸³

Naming is a platform for the construction of heritage and identity. It is a powerful method of creating an identification with the past and “locating oneself within wider networks of memory.” Naming is a means of appropriating or taking ownership of places. It can be part of the process of claiming territory and subordinating

79 Pais, 79.

80 K. L. Wolf, S. Krueger, and K. Flora, “Place Attachment and Meaning - A Literature Review,” *Green Cities: Good Health* (University of Washington: College of the Environment, 2014), http://depts.washington.edu/hhwb/Thm_Place.html (accessed 13 July 2019).

81 Dr. Huib Ernste, “Space vs Place,” The Human Geography Knowledge Base, Dept of Human Geography, Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands, http://geography.ruhosting.nl/geography/index.php?title=Space_vs._place (accessed 14 July 2019).

82 Abraham Resnick, *In Search of American Place-Name Origins: Clues to Understanding our Nation's Past and Present* (Bloomington, IN: Iuniverse, 2012): 2.

83 Resnick, 2-4, Table of Contents.

indigenous histories. A name has the power to privilege one world view over another.⁸⁴ As Dolores Hayden notes in her book *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, “those in privileged positions can bury the truth of occupation and inhabitation in historical geographies.”⁸⁵

“Renaming” projects seek to create new connections between the past and the present.⁸⁶ The goal of these projects is to replace names that may reflect “racialized, classed, or gendered” accounts of place, as Hayden calls them, with names that bring to light hidden narratives or are more accurate and culturally inclusive. Some projects involve removing colonial names and bringing back aboriginal or indigenous ones. They all address basic issues such as: Who has the power to name? Whose knowledge is privileged? And whose narrative will dominate the political, cultural, and social landscapes?⁸⁷

The power of the names Volusia and Vibilia to evoke a “network of memory” was lost on most contemporary inhabitants who would have been unfamiliar with these references from classical mythology. In the case of Volusia, its meaning and origin may never have been known to the inhabitants of the area and, over time, became the source of endless and imaginative speculation continuing to the present. The name Volusia endures in the community of Volusia and Volusia County. Vybrillia and its variants, however, went out of use in the mid-1820s when they were superseded by the Seminole-derived “Palatka.”

Indigenous history and names for the Volusia site might have been known to at least Horatio Dexter, but native names would never have been considered for a large-scale settlement of immigrants from the British Isles. An English or European name, preferably one from antiquity, would have been favored by the men associated with these land claims.

84 Derek Alderman, *Place, Naming, and the Interpretation of Cultural Landscape* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2008): 195-200, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286121765_Place_Naming_and_the_Interpretation_of_Cultural_Landscapes (accessed 16 July 2019).

85 Jen Jack Gieseking & William Mangold, et al, editors, *The People, Place, and Space Reader*, Section 3: Place and Identity, <https://peopleplacespace.org/toc/section-3/> (accessed 15 July 2019).

86 Alderman, 195.

87 Michaela J. Carter, “The Power of Place Names: Embedding Bama Local Languages into the Australian Landscape,” *Langscape Magazine*, Vol. 7, Issue 1 (June 15, 2018) <https://medium.com/langscape-magazine/the-power-of-place-names-embedding-bama-local-languages-into-the-australian-landscape-2d43277b284a> (accessed 15 July 2019).

By imposing names from the distant past and from cultural references foreign to most settlers along the river, the namers rejected authentic connections to the land and its history, stamping it with their own Euro-centric brand. There was no attempt to relate to any physical feature of the claims or to their planned purpose as an agricultural enterprise. The names may have been intended to “gentrify” the tracts, conferring a contrived status and distinction on future settlements. Like many feminine names of plantations and ships, they established masculine ownership of and symbolic dominance over the named object, and, in this case, served to reflect the namer’s erudition and aesthetic sensibilities.

Many native Florida Indian and Seminole place names have survived in Florida, but in the case of Volusia and Vibilia, the narrative that dominated the landscape was privileged, white, male, and Anglo/American or British, based on a nineteenth-century English educational curriculum of the time and derived from knowledge of a specialized field in that curriculum.

A similar story characterized Moses Levy’s claim at Micanopy. In 1822 Levy acquired 2,000 acres of land in the heart of Alachua territory abandoned by the Seminoles as they were driven further south. The Seminoles, in turn, had occupied it after the native Florida Indians were decimated during the Creek raids of the mid-1600s to 1700. On this land Levy worked to develop “Pilgrimage Plantation” as a refuge for European Jews fleeing persecution.⁸⁸ The native names or Seminole names for the site, if they were known, were not part of the naming process. Levy chose the English word “Pilgrimage”—suggesting a long journey of moral or spiritual significance—for its legacy of literary and religious connotations which would resonate with European Jews seeking haven in a new and foreign land.

The site of Volusia was shaped by historical events, economic influences, and technological change. It was undoubtedly an important native Florida Indian crossing long before European exploration of the St. Johns River. A native village of Mayaca or Mayarca appears on the 1591 De Bry and Le Moyne Map of Florida and Cuba located roughly south of a large lake that could be present-day Lake George. The map was based on a Le Moyne drawing done during a French expedition upriver circa 1564 and (possibly)

88 Jerry Klinger, “Moses Elias Levy,” *Jewish Magazine* (2015): 14, http://www.jewishmag.com/2015/moses_elias_levy//moses_elias_levy.htm (accessed 16 July 2019).

reconstructed from his memory after he settled in London. In 1566, Gonzalo de Gayon, a river pilot for Pedro Menendez de Aviles, was sent south from St. Augustine to ransom some Frenchmen said to be held by a Chief Mayaca. Gayon's records situate the native village of Mayaca, head of the province of Mayaca, on the river at or near present Volusia. Two temporally-distinct Spanish missions were built here in the mid-1600s, one named San Salvador de Mayaca which appeared on the 1655 mission list drawn by Juan Diez de la Calle.⁸⁹

In 1774 William Bartram stocked up on supplies and lodged for several weeks at Spaldings Upper Indian Trade Store located at or near present-day Astor across the river from Volusia.⁹⁰ When the trading firm of Panton, Leslie and Company bought out Spalding, they established a new Upper Store across the river at the site that would become Volusia. Dexter's plantation of Volusia began to appear on maps in 1823 at the river crossing where several native transpeninsular trails came together. The "Road of Chocochate Settlement" leading from the river crossing to Seminole territory in the southwest of the peninsula is seen on the 1819 Spanish land grant survey map of Moses Levy's 14,500-acre tract located south of present-day Astor across the river from Volusia.⁹¹

On this claim, Levy developed a settlement and sugarcane plantation called Hope Hill which in 1822 was described by Charles Blacker Vignoles as "a good tract of land and settling with much enterprise."⁹² This did not last, however, as Levy set up a trading post in direct competition with Dexter's store across the river, violating the frontier rule of "one trader, one town" and creating serious conflict. Dexter, leading his Indian allies, had once threatened Levy with violence, infuriating Levy. An accident soon occurred to the overseer's houses, and Dexter was implicated.⁹³ In April of that year, Thomas Murphy wrote to Dexter, "I am sorry for the

89 Bonnie G. McEwan, ed., *The Spanish Missions of La Florida* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993): 112-114, 133.

90 Daniel L. Schafer, Florida History Online, Department of History, University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL, https://www.unf.edu/floridahistoryonline/Plantations/plantations/Spaldings_Upper_Store.htm (accessed 18 July 2019).

91 Survey map depicting confirmed Spanish land grant of Moses E. Levy, in Box 12, Folder 12 of Confirmed Spanish Land Grant Claims, 1763-1821 (Series S990), State Archives of Florida, <https://www.floridamemory.com/items/show/232763?id=140> (accessed 20 July 2019).

92 Vignoles, 68, <https://archive.org/details/observationsupon00vign/page/68> (accessed 26 July 2019).

93 C. S. Monaco, *Moses Levy of Florida: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005) 100-101.

accident that has occurred to Mr. Rutan's [the manager's] houses and [??] it has not been done by design. Anything of that kind is [allowed/allotted?] to the injury of the Indians more than anything else."⁹⁴ Hope Hill seemed to be deliberately destroyed, probably by fire. Levy incurred heavy losses and was forced to abandon the plantation.

Levy later confronted Dexter in St. Augustine, calling him "an assassin, an incendiary, a scoundrel and a rascal." Dexter claimed he had been falsely accused, denying any involvement in "murder" and "house burning". He sued Levy for slander, seeking \$10,000 in damages.⁹⁵ It is worth noting that Dexter's anger towards the proprietors of the Arredondo grant together with increasing competition for the Indian trade later motivated him to plan to join his Indian supporters in burning down the incipient settlement of Micanopy.⁹⁶

Horatio Dexter's plantation at Volusia was an important crossing for the Seminole Indians and a strategic riverboat landing where his trading post provided supplies, labor, boats, and horses to settlers and traveling officials. There was still a trading post at Volusia when it was surveyed in 1834.⁹⁷ The U.S. Survey Field Notes for 1834 mark the "Volusia Indian trading and Indian crossing" site with a dwelling icon.⁹⁸ During the Second Seminole War, it was the site of Forts Call and Volusia, and Fort Barnwell/Columbia.⁹⁹ Riverboats and, later, steamboats brought supplies, mail, and passengers upriver from Jacksonville in return for shipments of fish, oranges, cotton, and animal pelts. After the Civil War, steamboat traffic increased, bringing tourists and settlers to the communities along the river south of Lake George. By the 1890s, railroads began taking

94 Letter of Thomas Murphy to Horatio Dexter, 1822, Horatio S. Dexter Correspondence, 1821-1823, 14, James David Glunt Collection, 1797-1930, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida Digital Collections, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00016873/00005/14> (accessed 17 August 2019).

95 Monaco, 101; Horatio Dexter v. Moses Levy [1824], folder 31, box 134, Civil Cases St. Johns County, SAHS.

96 Monaco, "A Sugar Utopia on the Florida Frontier: Moses Elias Levy's Pilgrimage Plantation," *Southern Jewish History* (2002):5, 112, https://www.jewishsouth.org/system/files/sjh_v_5_2002_monaco.pdf (accessed 17 August 2019).

97 Gibson, *Annals of Volusia*, 31.

98 U.S. Survey Field Notes and Maps, Volume 60, Section 29, T15S, R28E, State of Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Survey and Mapping, Title and Land Records Section; State of Florida Township Maps, T15S, R28E, State of Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Survey and Mapping, Title and Land Records Section.

99 Gibson, 36.

shipping away from the steamboats, but logging, naval stores, citrus, and fishing remained major industries.¹⁰⁰

After WWI, buses and trucks began to take over transportation, and the population of Volusia declined.¹⁰¹ But the area gained new life when it was later discovered by tourists and became a popular fishing, hunting, and boating resort. In 1980 a new Astor Bridge was constructed between Astor and Volusia on State Road 40 facilitating travel on the main route to Ocala and Gainesville going through the Ocala National Forest.

Volusia today is an unincorporated community of several hundred homes and a river resort with seafood restaurants, waterside inns, campgrounds, marinas, and vacation rentals. To the northeast is Pierson, a major fern-growing center; to the south is Lake Dexter; to the east is Barberville; and to the west are Astor, Lake County, and the Ocala National Forest.

Who assigned the names Volusia and Vibilia to these historical tracts of land along the St. Johns River?

Joseph Rattenbury, James Alexander, and Horatio Dexter all had the knowledge and the legal standing to name them. Or Peter Mitchel, whose heirs, two of his brothers, are named in an Alachua County abstract as Octavius and Hector,¹⁰² pointing to a family who revered classical history and literature. These men were highly educated and worldly, with far-reaching business interests—Rattenbury as a merchant and lawyer in London with high-level and governmental contacts in England, the United States, and Spanish East Florida; Horatio Dexter as a prominent merchant in St. Augustine whose business took him to New York, Charleston, and Havana, Cuba, and who had close contact with Spanish and U.S. Territorial governmental officials; Peter Mitchel as a partner with his brothers in the Savannah-based Carnochan and Mitchel firm with commerce in Charleston, Pensacola, and Havana. In 1817 the firm of Carnochan and Mitchel bought most of the massive Forbes Land Grant in the Florida Panhandle. Of attorney James Alexander, it is known only that he conducted business in New York and Philadelphia and died of fever in 1820 in St. Augustine. Each of these men had motive, means, and opportunity to name these sites. Of course, it is entirely possible that the sites could have been named

100 Gibson, 57-59.

101 Gibson, 67.

102 Abstract of Title, Lot 5 Maple Hill, Alachua County, FL, page 5, <http://www.genedavisfamily.com/family/abstract/ABSTRACT.pdf> (accessed 18 August 2019).

by a landowner previous to Rattenbury, but it is unlikely that this person would own or claim the land of both the Volusia and Vibilia tracts concurrently as did Rattenbury.

Horatio Singer Dexter was born in 1785 in Grafton, Massachusetts, to a large and prosperous family who valued education. His middle name is that of his father's revered tutor, and Horatio had probably also been privately tutored. In 1802, seventeen-year-old Horatio was living with family members either in Pawtucket or Newport, Rhode Island.¹⁰³ That year a trio of full-rigged East India ships carrying valuable cargo foundered in a terrible winter storm off nearby Cape Cod, resulting in heavy loss of life and financial damage. The ships were the *Ulysses*, the *Brutus*, and the *Volusia*, which was partially saved. The storm and the wrecks were widely reported in the New England news and also in London media. Dexter may have experienced the storm and, in the maritime culture of the area, would have had certain knowledge of the event and the name *Volusia*.

In 1807 as a young merchant residing in Newport, Rhode Island, Dexter married Abby Dennis, also of Newport.¹⁰⁴ Abby's father and grandfather were famous sea captains and owners of sailing ships, some engaged in the East India trade, one ship with Edward Wanton's father as master.¹⁰⁵ She would have grown up in a family familiar with the tradition of naming ships for figures from antiquity, and it is possible that the idea for the plantation names came from her. By 1813 or 1814, Horatio was a trader on the St. Marys River, the eastern portion of the Florida-Georgia border.¹⁰⁶ As a land dealer and businessman in East Florida, he traveled to New York; Charleston, South Carolina; Savannah, Georgia, and presumably back to Rhode Island for family visits and had access to the best bookstores and libraries, or, more likely, had his own reference collection.

Dexter knew Latin and referenced the *Lex Talionis* in describing Seminole culture. He wrote polished, informed letters to government officials, and his report to Secretary of War John Calhoun

103 Susan Wildemuth, "Quilt History Stories: Elgin, Illinois; Pawtucket, Rhode Island; Dexter Yarn Company Story," Bk 4, <https://www.illinoisquilthistory.com/dexterlineage.html> (accessed 18 August 2019).

104 Vital Record of Rhode Island. 1636-1850. XVII, Rhode Island Historical Society, 245.

105 "To James Madison from Samuel Vernon, Jr., 7 December 1805 (Abstract)," *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/?q=%20Author%3A%22Vernon%2C%20Samuel%20Jr.%22&s=1111311121&sa=vernon&r=1> (accessed 18 August 2019).

106 Turner, 3.

on the state of the Indians called “Observations on the Seminole Indians” (1823) is scholarly and well written. He possessed a special talent in learning languages and forming relationships with the Seminoles through interpersonal communications.

Greco-Roman names from antiquity were popularly used for nineteenth-century sailing vessels. The *Vibilia* was a brigantine built in 1818 in the north of England. Joseph Freeman Rattenbury, his father, or brother is listed in a Plymouth, England city directory of 1812 as a ship broker.¹⁰⁷ Through this connection, Rattenbury may have had knowledge of the ship and the name.

Rattenbury was a witty and urbane writer, steeped in the classics, and fluent in Latin and French. He practiced law in London, was by his own account a “considerable traveller on the continent of Europe,”¹⁰⁸ and wrote extensively on international politics. He had access to the best English libraries and bookstores. His 1819 narrative includes quotes in Latin from Cicero, a Roman statesman and orator; Syrus, a Latin writer; and Seneca, a Roman philosopher, quotations which are found in *A Dictionary of Select and Popular Quotations published in London 1803 and Philadelphia in 1810*.¹⁰⁹ Rattenbury referenced the Romans in expressing his disillusionment with General Simón Bolívar, “whose devotion and *amor patria* we had been taught to admire as a splendid imitation of the heroic and noble Romans of the best ages of that commonwealth”¹¹⁰; Rattenbury’s descriptions in the narrative also reference Greco-Roman mythological figures such as Morpheus [Greek God of Dreams]; “the god of day”; and “Neptune [Roman God of the Sea] and his tritons.”¹¹¹ In a seemingly unrelated endnote to the narrative, he includes Plutarch’s story of Eponia [Epona] and Sabinus.¹¹²

In 1822 Rattenbury published *Edgar and Ella: A Legendary Tale of the Sixteenth Century in Three Cantos and Other Poems*, a book of Romantic poetry harshly panned by a contemporary critic. The poetry contains references to Homer’s “rosy-fingered dawn”

107 *The Picture of Plymouth* (Plymouth, England: Rees and Curtis, 1812), 205, <http://web.archive.org/web/20111125202945/http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~terryw/plydirec/plym1812/plymouth/norrich.jpg> (accessed 18 August 2019).

108 [Rattenbury], 133.

109 David Evans Macdonnel, *A Dictionary of Select and Popular Quotations, which are in Daily Use: Taken from Latin, French, Greek, Spanish, and Italian* (London 1803; Philadelphia 1810).

110 [Rattenbury], 43.

111 [Rattenbury], 141, 14, 34.

112 [Rattenbury], 329 (misnumbered as 159).

from the *Odyssey* and “Bright Phoebus,” Greek God of the Sun, from Homer’s *Iliad*.¹¹³ Two of Rattenbury’s poems celebrating women and wine are written in the style of the ancient Greek poet Anacreon.¹¹⁴

Rattenbury, especially, and Horatio Dexter would seem to be foremost among the contenders for the title of name-giver. However, the former does not show much apparent interest in his own project. In October of 1818 he turned over half interest in his claim to James Alexander and by 1819 was back in London writing his memoirs. Perhaps Rattenbury named the tracts before he left East Florida. Dexter, on the other hand, had immediate personal possession of the Volusia tract for eight years and was also closely involved with the site of Vibilia/Vybrillia for many years as the supplier for settlers landing there and heading to Alachua. This would lend credibility to Dexter as the name-giver of the sites.

In the end, all of Rattenbury’s land claims and those of his grantees were rejected by the U.S. Board of Land Commissioners set up by Congress to determine the validity of land grant claims. Upon ratification of the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1821, control of Florida passed to the United States which agreed to honor any valid land grants made under Spanish rule if they were verified through documentation and testimonials. As one legal analyst put it, the U.S. faced a dilemma: on the one hand, the U.S. government wanted to obtain title over as much of the Florida territory as it could for its own use and purposes; on the other hand, the federal government was committed to treating private property owners justly, even when their claims arose under Spanish authority. The two parties came to an agreement that January 24, 1818, would be a cut-off date. If the Spanish Crown, or other lawful Spanish authority in Florida, made a grant before that date, then the U.S. agreed to recognize the legitimacy of claims to land arising thereunder. If a Spanish land grant was made after January 24, 1818, however, such a grant would be “null and void,” and the U.S. would end up owning the land covered by grants of this latter type.¹¹⁵ Ratten-

113 Ralph and G. E. Griffiths, eds., *The Monthly Review, or Literary Journal, Enlarged* XCVII, January to April 1822 (London 1822), 436-38, <https://books.google.com/books?id=s6zQAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA436#v=onepage&q&f=true> (accessed 18 August 2019).

114 Doyle, “Unmasked,” 200.

115 Glenn Boggs, “The Case of Florida’s Missing Real Estate Records,” *The Florida Bar Journal*, V. LXXVII, No. 9 (October 2003), 10, <https://www.floridabar.org/the-florida-bar-journal/the-case-of-floridas-missing-real-estate-records/> (accessed 18 August 2019).

bury's claim was rejected, first, because it was determined that he had not complied with the conditions and the spirit or intent of the grant, and second, because it was made after the cut-off date.¹¹⁶

Nonetheless, Rattenbury was later able to use his experience in East Florida to represent several English peers in their own claims. In 1823, he would write from London as an attorney for, among others, Lord John Rolle, who had succeeded his father, Denys Rolle, as MP for Devonshire, to record a claim for the 20,000-acre site of Rollestown.¹¹⁷

In 1823 Horatio Dexter submitted a claim for the 2,000 acres at Volusia which he stated Rattenbury had conveyed to him, and Peter Mitchel submitted a similar claim for the 3,500 acres he had acquired from Rattenbury. Both claims were rejected, Dexter's because he was considered to be more of a business partner with Rattenbury than an objective and independent memorialist.

Volusia and its companion tract of Vibilia encompassed major Indian crossings on the St. Johns River. Volusia was the site of Panton, Leslie and Company's Upper Store which closed in 1817 when the company ceased operations in East Florida, but Horatio Dexter maintained an important trading post at that location. From 1819 until about 1828, Volusia was a successful sugarcane plantation and a supply depot for Indians, settlers, and traveling government officials. During the Second Seminole War, several U.S. Army forts were established in the area, opening up trails and bringing in steamboat transport. Volusia developed into a busy river landing exporting local goods to northern markets. In 1854 the new Florida county of Volusia, formed from Orange County, took its name from the community of Volusia. After the Civil War, major steamboat lines visited Volusia Landing, bringing in increasing numbers of tourists and settlers. Railroads eventually diverted much of the traffic from the river, taking tourists to the interior and further south. After WW2, roads and highways made it easier to access places like Volusia, giving it new life as a residential community and recreational resort for boating, camping, and fishing.

116 *American State Papers, Public Lands* 4: 398, <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsp&fileName=031/llsp031.db&recNum=408> (accessed 18 August 2019). *Public Lands* 6: 421, <https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsp&fileName=033/llsp033.db&recNum=444> (accessed 18 August 2019).

117 United States. Works Projects Administration. *Historical Records Survey. Spanish Land Grants in Florida*. (Tallahassee: State Library Board, 1942) 1: 270, https://dcms.lds.org/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE221353 (accessed 18 August 2019).

Vibilia, commonly known as “Vybrillia,” first appears in the records in 1819 as a small agricultural development supervised by Horatio Dexter. When Dexter was asked to help start a settlement in Alachua, he partnered with Edward Wanton, Dexter acting as an Indian agent for the territorial government and Wanton devoting himself to the Alachua grant, supervising the development and trading with the Indians. The site of “Vybrillia” served as a supply depot, trading post, and “port” or landing for the Alachua settlement, bringing goods and people into the interior of the peninsula.

In 1827, as Charles Vignoles had suggested, the postal route from Pensacola to St. Augustine was rerouted through “Vybrillia,” now known as Palatka. At this time, the U.S. Army constructed warehouses where provisions were deposited for further shipment along the river and into the interior. Seminole Indian unrest began in 1826, causing the influx of settlers to reverse itself, and the post office was closed in 1829, due to the decrease in population.¹¹⁸

During the Second Seminole War, Palatka was attacked and burned, sending residents of the entire St. Johns River Valley fleeing to St. Augustine. In 1838, the U.S. Army established Fort Shannon at Palatka as a garrison, supply depot, and hospital for forts in the area. By the mid-1800s, lumber and citrus industries flourished, and tourism increased, making Palatka the hub of river transport into and out of central Florida. In 1849, Palatka was named Putnam County seat, and it was incorporated as a town in 1853.¹¹⁹

After the Civil War, Palatka became known as “The Gem City of the St. Johns” when steamboats brought tourists to its several world-class hotels and to the tributaries of the St. Johns, particularly the Ocklawaha River. Palatka prospered, eventually rivalling Jacksonville as the major port on the St. Johns River.¹²⁰ By 1885, seven steamboat lines operated out of Palatka. However, the railroads increasingly expanded into the interior and freight was shipped directly by rail. During the 1880s, Palatka attracted five new railroad lines and established itself once again as central Florida’s

118 “A Brief History of Palatka,” Putnam, FL Historical Society, <http://putnam-fl-historical-society.org/Historic/Historical%20Documents/PALHIST.html> (accessed 25 July 2019).

119 Ben Brotemarkle, “Palatka: Small Town with a Long History,” Florida Frontiers, Florida Historical Society, Dec. 17, 2017, <https://myfloridahistory.org/frontiers/article/188> (accessed 27 July 2019).

120 “About Palatka,” <https://palatka-fl.gov/274/About-Palatka> (accessed 26 July 2019).

transportation center.¹²¹ But, as with Volusia, railroads caused steamboat transport to decline, and Palatka's days as a major tourist resort ended. Modern Palatka has a large downtown business district and is known for its Riverfront Park, area paddling trails, cultural arts venues and festivals, and two nationally-designated historic districts.

Volusia and Vibilia should be understood within the context of their shared provenance: as ancient river crossings at the convergence of native Florida Indian, Seminole, and Spanish trails; as Spanish land grant claims of London entrepreneur Joseph Freeman Rattenbury; and as properties co-developed by Horatio Dexter and, until his death in 1820, James Alexander, with Dexter taking ownership of Volusia while supplying settlers arriving at the port of Vibilia. Strategically located, the settlements had similar histories as sites of U. S. Army forts during the Second Seminole War; as important river landings for steamboat transport of freight and passengers with Palatka becoming a major winter tourist resort; as exporters of citrus and timber to northern markets with Palatka growing into a major shipping port; and, in this century, as popular destinations for recreational and ecological tourism with Palatka also being known for its architectural preservation and heritage tourism.

The key to the relationship between Rattenbury's companion plantations on the St. Johns River lies not only in their shared history. The key is to be found primarily in their names—in their harmonious and lyrical quality, in their ancient origins in “*la lingua romana*,” and in their genesis in the classical mythology of possibly the earliest days of the Roman Empire. Volusia and Vibilia—timeless Roman goddesses who once presided at the portals to the heartlands of Spanish and Territorial East Florida.

121 “A Brief History of Palatka,” Putnam, FL Historical Society, <http://putnam-fl-historical-society.org/Historic/Historical%20Documents/PALHIST.html> (accessed 25 July 2019).