

# A WATERY WILDERNESS

From 1500 into the early 1800s, land that will become South Florida is wet and wild. Spring and summer rains fall, often causing Lake Okeechobee to spill its waters over the natural southern shore and form a slow-moving river. The river spreads over more than 8 million acres, flowing a quarter mile a day at depths ranging from a half-foot to two feet. It moves down the southern peninsula, through a few outlets east and west, but mostly south to Florida Bay.

## 1500

An estimated 350,000 Native Americans live in the present-day state.

In letters, Spanish explorers describe multitudes of fish and fowl and "a great plenty of all things mentioned." Panthers roam the territory. During this first European contact, native peoples of South Florida include the Calusas living off the rich natural environment of the southwest peninsula, the Jeagas settled along the Atlantic coast and the Tequesta in the far lower peninsula. The Calusa lash canoes together into catamarans to fish the generous Gulf of Mexico.



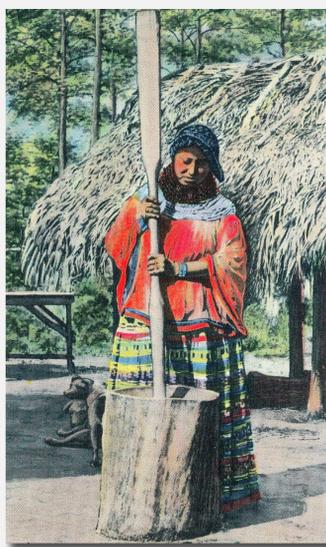
Panthers roam the Territory of Florida

Newly arrived Europeans find the Florida wilderness a natural provider for well-developed civilizations of Native Americans

## 1513

Ponce de Leon lands on Florida's east coast.

A Spanish explorer who once sailed with Columbus, Ponce de Leon lands in St. Augustine and "claims" this beautiful land for Spain and names it La Florida (**LAH** flow-**REE**-dah) or "place of flowers." Sailing to South Florida eight years later, he dies after being wounded by a Calusa tribe member.

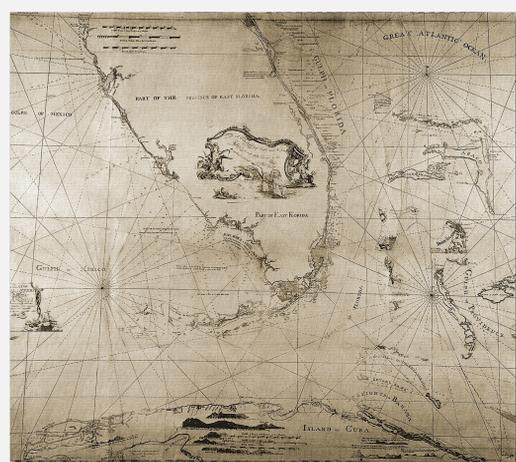


With their distinctive chickees and loose, colorful patchwork clothing, Seminoles are an important part of Florida's history

## 1760

Seminoles begin moving into Florida.

Most original Florida Native Americans succumb to European diseases by the early 18th century. Seminoles — native peoples of the southeastern United States, mostly from the Creek group — settle around the shallow, slow-moving water south of Lake Okeechobee and call it Pahayokee (pah-**HIGH**-oh-geh), "grassy waters." Englishmen recall the glades of their native countryside and name the wide-open, green wet prairie, "Everglades."



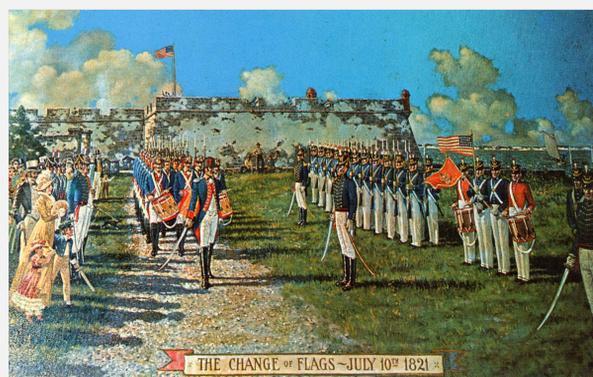
Early 1700s map of South Florida

1500

1513

1760

1821



The change of flags - Spanish to U.S. - at Castillo de San Marcos

## 1821

Territory of Florida is established.

Andrew Jackson claims the region for the United States. The Spanish and English have struggled for control for more than 300 years. Florida is a watery wilderness sparsely dotted with settlements of remnant Native American tribes, African Americans who escaped enslavement in the South and a few remaining Spaniards.



Andrew Jackson, governor of the Territories of East and West Florida