

# Columbus & Ellaville - Two Florida Ghost Towns

by Thomas Lera

Researching postal history can be exciting, especially when your explorations take you to ghost towns.

Confederate troops constructed earthwork or bunker fortifications on a high bluff overlooking the junction where the Withlacoochee River joins the Suwannee River, a portion of which now lies in Suwannee River State Park. Their purpose was to protect the men guarding the Pensacola and Georgia Railroad bridge at the town of Columbus, a vital link in the cross-state transportation of troops and supplies. **Picture 1** is a view of the railroad bridge from the earthworks. They can be viewed from a wooden walkway along the Earthworks Trail in the park and interpretive signage provides historical information.<sup>i</sup>



Picture 1

Once a stage-stop, Columbus also supported Platt's Ferry, a sawmill, and steamboat traffic including the steamship Madison, a floating country store operated by Captain James Tucker.



Picture 2

Columbus was the first chartered American community in Suwannee County, and its post office was established February 17, 1842, with David Platt as its first postmaster. During the stampless period, mail was handled on postal routes No. 3294 and 3531. **Picture 2**, Columbus E. F. [East Florida] December 28, 1844<sup>ii</sup>

Postal route No. 3531 connected Madison with Tallahassee to the west, Columbus, Little River and Alligator to the east. P. A Stockton was the contractor in 1851 providing service with a 2-horse coach. It also was a station stop between those towns on the Pensacola & Georgia Rail Road and the Florida Atlantic and Gulf Rail Road. Postal route 3294, connected Troupville by Clyattsville, to Columbus.

There is an unverified mention of a name change to Suwannee Mills, with that post office also being established by the Confederate Post Office Department. However, later records show Suwannee Mills was changed to Columbus [**Picture 5**].<sup>iii</sup> Confederate postal route 6505, from Jacksonville to Tallahassee via Baldwin, Barber's, Newburg, Sanderson Station, Olustee, Alligator (Lake City), Little River, Spring Grove, Columbus, Suwannee Mills, Madison, Sandy Ford, Monticello, Walker's Mill, Bailey's Mill and Chaires handled the mail for Columbus with daily service, except on Sunday. The contractor was the Florida Atlantic & Gulf Railroad.<sup>iv</sup>

Today the Columbus cemetery [**Picture 3 & 4**], considered one of Florida's oldest, is the only remaining evidence of the town and is located on the Sandhill Trail in Suwannee River State Park.



Picture 3 & 4

**OLD COLUMBUS CEMETERY**  
THIS CEMETERY SERVED COLUMBUS, A THRIVING TOWN OF 500 PEOPLE DURING THE MID 1800'S. A PORTION OF THE TOWN WAS LOCATED IN THE VICINITY OF THE CONFEDERATE EARTH WORKS IN THE PARK.



Picture 5

In 1872, the post office was moved across the Suwannee River to serve the new sawmill town of Ellaville [Picture 6], and was closed in 1943.

Ellaville, Florida is also located in the Suwannee River State Park where the Suwannee and Withlacoochee Rivers merge in Madison County. Founded in 1861 by George Franklin Drew, the town was named Ellaville in honor of one of his African-American servants. Drew had built a mansion on the western banks of the Suwannee River, was the first post-Reconstruction governor of Florida, and served as the first postmaster from 1867 – 1883.

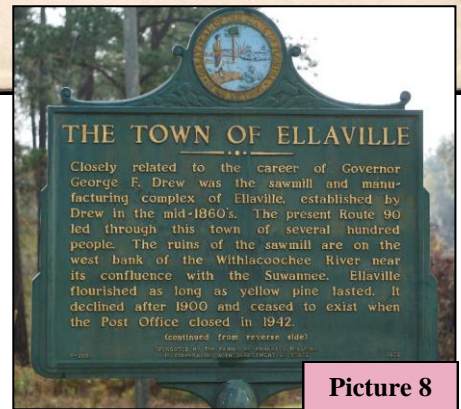


Picture 7



Picture 6

He built a sawmill that employed over 500 people, one of the largest in Florida at the time. The Florida Railroad soon built a line to the town with direct access to the mill. In the early 1870s, the town had a train station, two schools, two churches, a steamboat dock, and commissary, as well as the sawmill. It was also involved in the manufacture of turpentine, railroad car building and logging. With the onset of the Great Depression there seemed to be no future for the town, and when the townsfolk left in 1943, the post office closed, and Ellaville became another Florida ghost town.<sup>v</sup> The bridge [Picture 7], closed to traffic, that across the Suwannee River that leads to Ellaville.



Picture 8

The only reminders of the town today are the historic sign [Picture 8] shown above, some brick foundations, and the bridge [Picture 7] across the Suwannee leading into the town.

In 2001, Jim Warnke published *Ghost Town Locations in Florida: 350 Forgotten Sites Pinpointed by County*. This book is a must if you are looking for the locations of discontinued post offices. Look for more articles as we visit them.

**Credits; Thomas Lera, pictures 1, 3, 4, 7 & 8. Cover (picture 5), Todd A. Hirn. Cover (picture 6) Deane R. Briggs, M.D.**

<sup>i</sup> Eric Musgrove, 2008, A Brief History of Suwannee County, Florida, <http://suwcounty.org/county/>, look under “About Us”. Retrieved November 20, 2016.; Ghost Town of Columbus. [www.ghosttowns.com.](http://www.ghosttowns.com/), look under *Florida/Columbus* Retrieved November 14, 2016.

<sup>ii</sup> *Florida Stampless Postal History 1763 – 1861*. 1999. Deane R. Briggs, M.D., ed. David G. Phillips Publishing Co., Inc. North Miami, Florida 33261-1388, pp 43, 47, 114.

<sup>iii</sup> *A List of Establishments, Discontinuances and Changes in Name of the Post Offices in the Confederate States since 1861*. CSA Reprint, 1961, 24p.; McNeil, H.P. 1991. “Florida Post Offices During the War Between the states.: *The Confederate Philatelist* 36(4): 124.

<sup>iv</sup> Jaronski, Stefan T. “The Postal Routes of Confederate Florida Part 1.” *The Confederate Philatelist*, 37:1 (1992) page 26.

<sup>v</sup> *The Ghost Town of Ellaville*”. *Atlas Obscura*. <http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/the-ghost-town-of-ellaville>. Retrieved November 14, 2016.; “Suwannee Past Town of Columbus” <http://www.fl-genweb.org/mpc/suwannee/articles/Columbus.html>. Accessed December 29, 2016.