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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Old Town Fernandina Historic Site  
other names/site number Original Town of Fernandina

### 2. Location

street & number Bounded by Marine, Towngate, Garden & Ladies Sts. N/A  not for publication  
city, town Fernandina Beach N/A  vicinity  
state Florida code FL county Nassau code 089 zip code 32034

### 3. Classification

<b>Ownership of Property</b>	<b>Category of Property</b>	<b>Number of Resources within Property</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<b>Contributing</b>	<b>Noncontributing</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>39</u> buildings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>39</u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>39</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

[Signature] Date 12/12/89  
Signature of certifying official  
State Historic Preservation Officer/Bureau of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

John J. Knowl 1/29/90  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

---

**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/ Town SiteDefense/ Fortification  

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/ Town Site  

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**7. Description**

---

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

N/A  

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation N/Awalls N/AN/Aroof N/Aother N/A

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See Continuation Sheet

 See continuation sheet

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

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Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Archeology  
Community Planning and Development  
Exploration/Settlement

Period of Significance

1811-1821

Significant Dates

1811  
1821

Cultural Affiliation

Post European Contact: Second Spanish  
Colonial Period

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A  
N/A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See Continuation Sheet

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See Continuation Sheet

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property 36 apprx.

**UTM References**

A 

1	7
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4	5	6	2	6	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	3	9	5	2	6	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

  
Zone Easting Northing

C 

1	7
---	---

4	5	6	6	8	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	3	9	4	8	2	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

B 

1	7
---	---

4	5	6	7	2	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	3	9	5	2	0	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

  
Zone Easting Northing

D 

1	7
---	---

4	5	6	2	2	0
---	---	---	---	---	---

3	3	9	4	8	8	0
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

N/A  See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

See Continuation Sheet

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

See Continuation Sheet

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title W. Carl Shiver, Historic Sites Specialist  
organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date 12-12-89  
street & number 500 South Bronough Street telephone (904) 487-2333  
city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

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DescriptionSummary Paragraph

The Old Town Fernandina Historic Site comprises the greater part of the Old Town Subdivision of the city of Fernandina Beach, Florida, which is the seat of Nassau County. Old Town is located north of the city, near the north end of Amelia Island on a small peninsula formed by the confluence of Egans Creek on the north and east and the Amelia River on the west. The site comprises all or part of 25 city blocks, including the Plaza Lot (the site of Fort San Carlos), and 10 improved and unimproved city streets, an area of about 36 acres in all. Excluded from the nomination are the City Cemetery and that area west of the eastern right-of-way of Marine Street. The town site contains 39 residential structures that do not contribute to the historic significance of the town site. These are mainly one and two-story wood frame buildings constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Except for 14th Street, White Street, and the south half of Estrada Street, all of the streets in the town site are unpaved.

Supporting Narrative

The present plan of Old Town reflects the original plat of the town in 1811 and its subsequent enlargement in 1821. It consists of a regular grid of streets, most of them unpaved, framing square city blocks. There are no buildings or substantial above ground structures dating prior to the establishment of the new town of Fernandina Beach to the south in 1853. Visible on the surface, however, are oyster shell and scattered artifacts and materials dating from prehistoric and post-contact periods of occupation and settlement. Archaeological excavations on the Plaza Lot in the vicinity of Fort San Carlos which were undertaken in 1950 and 1963 uncovered artifacts and features associated with aboriginal habitation as well as materials associated with the post-contact period. This work was designed to examine the subsurface remains of Fort San Carlos, constructed in 1816 and abandoned ca. 1821.

As no early visual representations of the town of Fernandina prior to 1853 are available, the exact locations of earlier structures can only be determined by written records (particularly Spanish Land Grants), guesswork, and archaeological investigation. None of the existing structures are thought to date from the period of significance. The town that was established in 1821 formalized an existing settlement of small homesteads and buildings associated

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Description

with Fort San Carlos and the wharf on the Amelia River near the fort. A considerable amount of goods passed through the town in the last years of Spanish rule, since the community acted as a conduit of trade between the United States and Spanish East Florida.

Although one can only speculate about the appearance of the settlement upon the imposition of the town plan in 1811, there must have been little formal organization, since the inhabitants were required to relocate houses that did not conform to the new plan. The town site was cleared of the remaining trees and brush and at least some of the streets graded. The 1811 town plat consisted of a grid of thirteen city blocks, eight streets, and the public square in which Fort San Carlos was located. A cemetery was established immediately south of the settlement and was enlarged to abut the town after 1821.

The town occupied a low bluff overlooking the Amelia River and was bounded on the north and south by an extensive marsh, much of which is still in evidence today. Nevertheless, the 1811 map shows groves of fruit trees at the north and south limits of the settlement, and efforts to reclaim sections of the nearby marsh through extensive dredge and fill operations appear to have already been underway by that time. A map of Fernandina drawn in 1821 shows that the community had grown considerably, having reached the approximate geographical area covered by this nomination proposal. The map also shows a number of lots located on the "beach" lying between the bluff and the edge of the Amelia River. There is no evidence that these were ever occupied by permanent structures, as the tracts were subject to constant flooding by rises in the height of the Amelia River and are now almost completely inundated.

That area of the town site along the bluff has seen serious alteration as a result of erosion from rainwater runoff that has caused part of the land forming the right-of-way of Marine Street to collapse onto the river bank below. That part of the bluff, or steep bank, immediately west of the Plaza Lot has also been further damaged by "pot hunters" seeking artifacts associated with Fort San Carlos. Fortunately, this disturbance is not extensive and does not appear recent in nature, probably because the efforts have turned up little of value to the amateur collector.

North of Egans Creek and its surrounding marshes is Fort Clinch State Park, the principal feature of which is a Civil War era fort that overlooks the entrances of the St. Marys and Amelia

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rivers. South of Old Town is another marsh and an industrial plant that separate the earlier community from present-day Fernandina Beach.

By the end of the Spanish era, the town consisted of about 40 houses, built of wood, and 10 or 11 tree-lined streets, regularly intersecting at right angles. There was also a public square with a small fort of eight guns fronting the water. According to contemporary eyewitness accounts, some of the buildings in the town were two stories in height and had galleries or verandas on both stories. Few changes were made to the community after 1821. In 1853 the town of Fernandina was relocated farther south to accommodate construction of a railroad, and the original site of the settlement was largely abandoned. However, there have always been some houses in the area, although none of the present structures seem to date earlier than the late nineteenth century.

Known Archaeological Resources

The boundaries of the town site contain a variety of archaeological and architectural resources that do not fall within the period of significance of this nomination. Some of these may be significant within their own right but do not contribute to the thesis of this nomination. In the case of the architectural resources found within the boundaries of the nominated town site, we have provided a list of these properties and a map showing their location. Subsurface contributing and non-contributing archaeological resources cannot all be sufficiently located or described at this time but must await future excavations and surveys to supplement those that have already taken place.

The 1963 archaeological excavations of Fort San Carlos and the surrounding area indicated that some of the shell midden features interpreted as aboriginal deposits in the earlier 1951 investigations were in fact the result of land modifications made during the Spanish Period as improvements to the town site and Fort San Carlos. On the other hand, there also appeared to be undisturbed features dating from prehistoric archaeological periods from the fiber-tempered potter Orange Period (2000-500 B.C.) through the intervening St. Johns/Savannah periods and into the contact (San Marcos or Mission) period. There were also indications of intermittent and occasional uses and occupations of the town site and, particularly, the plaza areas across many periods, including the British Period (1763-1784). These temporary

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or recurrent occupations are more evident than established villages prior to the creation of the 1811 town plan.

The area has suffered some disturbance through its natural development and use as a town site in the many decades subsequent to the founding of the Spanish town. It is believed that this source of disturbance is not greater than in other occupied communities and is considerably less than in others still having significant archaeological remains. Except for the portions of the site already lost, the natural and human actions have not impacted the resource in a manner detrimental to productive and important research.

Report by Archaeologist John Griffin on Old Fernandina Town Site, July 1988

A visual resurvey of the area and a review of the excavations within the area of Old Town, including the Fort San Carlos Site, indicate that some of the "shell midden" features were, in fact, the result of land modification during the Second Spanish Period. There were, however, undisturbed features dating from prehistoric archaeological periods from the fiber-tempered pottery Orange Period (2000-500 B.C.) through the intervening St. Johns/Savannah periods and into the contact (San Marcos or Mission) period. Selective testing indicates that pre-nineteenth century occupation of the town site was intermittent and somewhat sparse, rather than revealing a history of established villages. Nevertheless, prehistoric and contact period cultural features can be found in isolated features almost anywhere within the site boundaries, and the presence of more substantial prehistoric or mission period occupations elsewhere within the boundaries of the town cannot be ruled out. The same may be said for occupation(s) during the British Period (1763-1784).

The town plan of Spanish Fernandina is remarkably preserved in the present streets, and block and lot divisions of Old Town. Detailed confirmatory excavation has occurred only within the Plaza Lot at the site of Fort San Carlos. Here, archaeological remains of the fort were found which match the plan and location of the fort on early nineteenth century maps. There are also other portions of the town in which surface indications, either of construction remnants or artifactual scatter, provide evidence of earlier occupations. Other important areas are the known locations of the town gate and the north and south blockhouses. Materials



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giving evidence of the locations of early structural occupations are widespread over the blocks of the early town.

About forty wood houses stood on the site in 1821. This is the approximate number of existing structures on the site. While none of these are believed to be survivors of the Spanish town, some may occupy the same sites as the much earlier structures. Barring evidence to the contrary, the wooden houses of Fernandina were probably raised above the ground on wooden piers. This would be in contrast to the stone and tabby floor tradition of earlier St. Augustine, and would result in a quite different archaeological situation insofar as architectural remains are concerned. Wells, trash pits, privies, and fences--along with sheet refuse deposits--constitute other probable non-architectural features.

The archaeological potential of Old Town is considerable and significant, based on the following considerations:

1. The amount of construction subsequent to Spanish times is relatively sparse, and of such a nature as to have caused limited disturbance of previous occupations. Long-term archaeological projects in nearby areas, such as St. Augustine, have shown that very important information can be secured by careful work even in areas with a record of over 400 years of use.
2. The archaeological significance of Old Town Fernandina as an area of potential research lies in its relatively short time span (as compared, for example with St. Augustine) and the opportunity it provides to recover and analyze the material remains of such a multi-cultural community. This site should contain features relating to Hispanic, Anglo, and mixed households in a Spanish colony on the very border of the new United States. There should be evidences of Spanish, American, and privateer military occupation. It was the site of smuggling and illegal slave shipment to the United States.

In many ways Fernandina provides an unusual, if not unique, opportunity to formulate a series of hypotheses relating to fluid culture contacts and interaction. The resulting data should provide particular cultural historical information and data for the examination of culture change, culture contact, and processes involved.

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The major disturbance to the site has been the erosion of the bluff edge on the west side of the site. As demonstrated by the archaeology at Fort San Carlos, this has been substantial, leading to the loss of a considerable part of the fort. Early maps show the fort as located on a protruding bulge of the bluff, and it is this protrusion which has seen the major erosional reduction. While natural erosion must be considered a major cause, human agency--in part the actions of pot hunters and souvenir seekers--account for some of the disturbance. Overall the town site has suffered to some extent from natural human development of the area as a town site; however this disturbance is considerably less than in many areas. Except for those portions of the site that have already been lost, the natural and human actions have not impacted the resource in a manner detrimental to productive and important research.

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Description

List of Noncontributing Structures in Old Town

Note: The addresses in Old Town are extremely irregular and may be listed differently, depending on the map or directory in which they are listed. Therefore, this list is mainly useful for accurately locating the noncontributing structures represented on the map of the Old Town Fernandina Historic Site.

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. <u>14th Street</u> (not a historic street) | 8. <u>San Fernando Street</u> |
| None  | 712                           |
|   | 714                           |
| 2. <u>Amelia Street</u>                       | 715                           |
|   | 801                           |
| 205   | 803                           |
|   | 808                           |
| 3. <u>Commandant Street</u>                   | 818                           |
|   | 908                           |
| 406   | 910                           |
| Box 4   |                               |
| 4. <u>Estrada Street</u>                      | 9. <u>Someruelus Street</u>   |
|   | 819                           |
| 106   | 822                           |
| 107   | 902                           |
| 112   | 908                           |
| 117   | 916                           |
| 212   | 10. <u>Towngate Street</u>    |
| 514   | None                          |
| 5. <u>Garden Street</u>                       | 11. <u>White Street</u>       |
| None  | 801                           |
|   | 807                           |
| 6. <u>Ladies Street</u>                       | 914                           |
|   | 915                           |
| 713   | 916                           |
| 715   | 917                           |
| 818   | 918                           |
| 902   | 1006                          |
| 1012  | 1011                          |
| 7. <u>New Street</u>                          | 1119                          |
|   |                               |
| 309   |                               |

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Description (photographs)

List of Photographs

1. 212 Estrada St., Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View from Plaza Lot, Looking East
  7. Photo No. 1 of 23
- 
1. Intersection of White & Estrada Sts., Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking North
  7. Photo No. 2 of 23
- 
1. Intersection of Amelia & White Sts., Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking South
  7. Photo No. 3 of 23
- 
1. 910 San Fernando St., Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking Southwest
  7. Photo No. 4 of 23
- 
1. Intersection of Commandant & San Fernando Sts., Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking North
  7. Photo No. 5 of 23

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1. 902 Ladies St., Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking Southwest
  7. Photo No. 6 of 23
- 
1. Intersection of Ladies & Amelia Sts.,  
Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking South
  7. Photo No. 7 of 23
- 
1. Intersection of Ladies & Estrada Sts.,  
Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking North toward Egans Creek
  7. Photo No. 8 of 23
- 
1. Intersection of Ladies & Estrada Sts.,  
Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking South
  7. Photo No. 9 of 23
- 
1. 715 San Fernando St., Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking Northwest
  7. Photo No. 10 of 23

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Description (photographs)

1. 714 & 712 San Fernando St., Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
3. Carl Shiver
4. 1989
5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. View Looking Southwest
7. Photo No. 11 of 23

1. Intersection of San Fernando & Estrada Sts.,  
Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
3. Carl Shiver
4. 1989
5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. View Looking East
7. Photo No. 12 of 23

1. Intersection of White & Estrada Sts.,  
Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
3. Carl Shiver
4. 1989
5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. View Looking South
7. Photo No. 13 of 23

1. 107 & 117 Estrada St., Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
3. Carl Shiver
4. 1989
5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. View Looking Southwest from Plaza Lot
7. Photo No. 14 of 23

1. Intersection of Marine & White Sts.,  
Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
3. Carl Shiver
4. 1989
5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
6. Looking North toward the rear of 712 San Fernando St.
7. Photo No. 15 of 23

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Description (photographs)

- 
1. Plaza Lot, Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking West toward Amelia River.
  7. Photo No. 16 of 23
- 
1. Plaza Lot, Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking Southeast from the West Side of the Plaza Lot.
  7. Photo No. 17 of 23
- 
1. 819 Someruelus St., Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking Northeast
  7. Photo No. 18 of 23
- 
1. 920 Garden St. (outside of district)  
Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking Northwest from the Intersection of Garden & Estrada Sts.
  7. Photo No. 19 of 23
- 
1. Intersection of Estrada & Garden Sts.,  
Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking East
  7. Photo No. 20 of 23

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Description (photographs)

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1. Intersection of Garden & Commandant Sts.,  
Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. (Detail) Oyster Shell & Sand Roadway
  7. Photo No. 21 of 23
- 
1. Intersection of White & New Sts.,  
Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking West
  7. Photo No. 22 of 23
- 
1. 918 White Street, Old Town Fernandina Historic Site
  2. Fernandina Beach (Nassau County). FL
  3. Carl Shiver
  4. 1989
  5. Bureau of Historic Preservation
  6. View Looking Northwest
  7. Photo No. 23 of 23



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Significance

Statement of SignificanceSummary Statement

The Old Town of Fernandina Historic Site fulfills criteria A, C, and D for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. It is significant in the areas of exploration and settlement, community planning, and historic archaeology. Founded in 1811, Fernandina is nationally significant in the area of exploration and settlement because of its association with Spanish conquest and settlement in the Western Hemisphere. It was the last town founded by Spain in North America and is significant in the area of community planning by embodying urban design concepts employed by the Spanish throughout their colonies in the New World. The archaeological potential of Old Town is considerable and promises to yield valuable data relating to aboriginal, Hispanic, and Anglo cultural crosscurrents in a Spanish colony on the border of the United States. This data will allow for the formulation of hypotheses relating to the contacts and interactions of these cultures.

Historical Context

The nomination proposal for the Old Town Fernandina Historic Site is concerned with the relatively short period from 1811 to 1821, a mere decade. However, that part of Amelia Island on which the town site is located had seen European occupation since at least the seventeenth century. What appears to be the earliest historical record of what was to become the Spanish town of Fernandina is a reference by Pedro de Arcos in his 1675 list of Spanish missions of Guale (Georgia and the Carolinas) and Mocama (Amelia Island) to a village of about 50 pagan Yamassee Indians located near what is now known as the Plaza Lot. This same settlement is mentioned in a letter of the same year written by Bishop Calderon to the Queen of Spain. Arcos also referred to the Franciscan mission of Santa Maria, at that time located about 2 1/2 miles south of the Yamassee village. The mission, however, may have earlier been located near the Plaza Lot and moved to its new location, as a more defensive position, because of British pressure on Spanish settlements in the Guale region.

At that time there was a fort associated with the Santa Maria mission and an advance guard post located at the Plaza Lot. Both the mission and fort at the Plaza Lot were noted in 1696 by

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Significance

Johnathan Dickinson, who was among a party of Quakers that were shipwrecked on the coast of Florida during a voyage to Philadelphia from the Bahama Islands. Dickinson's Journal, which calls the settlement the "Town of St. Mary's," gives an account of what the group saw when transported along the waterway by the Spanish. Six years later, the British sent a military expedition, led by Governor James Moore of South Carolina, against the Spanish missions and settlements north of St. Augustine. The mission of Santa Maria and the guardhouse at the Plaza Lot were burned and the inhabitants of Amelia Island compelled to flee to the safety of St. Augustine.

The Spanish did not immediately bother to reoccupy Amelia Island when the British withdrew. It was still abandoned in 1732 when James Oglethorpe and his associates began formally establishing their Georgia colony. On a trip south, Oglethorpe visited Amelia Island, to which he gave its present name, and established an advance garrison at the Plaza Lot, providing the troops with boats with which to patrol the Amelia and St. Marys rivers. The men also built a small palisade mounting eight guns which overlooked the Amelia River. The garrison was withdrawn in 1742, and Amelia Island once again was left deserted until Florida became a British colony as a result of the Seven Years War.

More familiar to Americans as the French and Indian War (1754-1760), the conflict was the final phase of a century-long struggle between France and England for colonial and commercial supremacy in North America. Florida played little direct role in the war itself, but became a pawn in international politics when it came time to make peace. In the Treaty of Paris (1763), England took Canada from the French and Spain received France's trans-Mississippi lands (Louisiana Territory). Spain also exchanged Florida for the city of Havana, Cuba, which had been captured by the British during the war.

Early during the British colonial period, Amelia Island was acquired by John Perceval, the Earl of Egmont, who established a plantation and the site of "Egmont Town" on the north end of the island. A map drawn in 1769 labeled the plan as "new settlements and new town laid out in streets 66 feet wide and building lots 66 by 132 feet each." In 1770, the surveyor general of the southern colonies, William Gerad de Brahm, published his survey, which included Amelia Island. At the site of Old Town, de Brahm showed a north-south oriented plat and labeled it "Egmont Town," described as having been laid out that year by the Earl of Egmont. Egmont,

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however, died the same year, and although British subjects settled on small farms within the town area, no attempt was made to have construction conform to Egmont's plan. This earlier plat was similar to the later Spanish town site in one important respect: it set aside the Plaza Lot as a public area, probably for the construction of a fort.

At the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1783, Florida once again passed into Spanish hands. Many British subjects departed Florida for England's West Indian colonies, but a number of persons remained, including inhabitants of Amelia Island, by virtue of declaring allegiance to the Spanish Crown. Little change took place at "Egmont Town" at first, but in 1807 the community experienced a spurt of growth when the United States proclaimed the Embargo Act, closing ports to foreign shipping. Located on the American border, the small port quickly became an important avenue of exchange of goods entering and leaving the United States.

By 1811, the town had grown sufficiently to move the Spanish government to officially establish the "Town of Fernandina." The formal establishment of a town near the confluence of the Amelia and St. Mary's rivers also represented a last desperate attempt by the Spanish to block American territorial ambitions in East Florida and to serve as a defensive buffer against military attacks on St. Augustine. The new town was laid out and organized around a classical Spanish grid plan. Fernandina became, therefore, the last Spanish colonial town founded in North America, the honor previously going to Los Angeles, California in 1781.

The design provided for the construction of important buildings facing onto the Plaza Lot, such as the town hall, customs house, the mayor's or commandant's hours, the church, and important commercial buildings. Houses which already occupied the town site were ordered moved to conform to the new plat, the inhabitants receiving an additional lot or half lot adjacent to their property as compensation for doing so.

The town had been without any defense works since the small fort on the Plaza Lot had been abandoned by Oglethorpe's garrison in 1742. Of this nothing remained, and a new battery was constructed on the Plaza Lot about 1801. It consisted of a few buildings and some cannon facing the Amelia River, but had no defensive walls. Thus the town had little protection when American "patriots" sought to seize East Florida by force in order to annex it to the United States, a tactic that had been successfully used

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Significance

in West Florida (now the southern part of Alabama and Mississippi) two years earlier. On May 17, 1812, the independent military command seized Fernandina without firing a shot and remained there for a year, but the troops were unable to achieve their aim because they could find no means of capturing the more strongly defended capital of East Florida, St. Augustine.

Upon the departure of this foreign force, Spain immediately reasserted its authority over Fernandina and Amelia Island and began construction of Fort San Carlos on the Plaza Lot, which was completed in 1816. The fort had a semi-octagonal plan and consisted of earthworks and wooden palisades. Its walls supported a terreplein eight feet high and four feet wide and surrounded a number of buildings, including storehouses, the commandant's quarters, and the enlisted men's barracks. Its major armament faced the Amelia River. These new works, however, proved as ineffective as earlier defenses when the town was captured on June 29, 1817 by the privateer Gregor MacGregor, who was acting under a commission from the government of Mexico, which remained at hostilities with Spain since declaring its independence in 1810. MacGregor declared Florida independent of Spain and hoisted the "Green Cross of Florida" flag over the fort.

MacGregor departed Fernandina two months later, leaving his forces under the command of Jared Irwin, one of his officers. Irwin was joined in September by Luis Aury, another privateer commanding the brig Mexican Congress. He took over command from Irwin and declared Amelia Island to be a possession of the Republic of Mexico and replaced the "Green Cross of Florida" with the Mexican flag.

The Spanish protested to the United States government about the disorder along its southern border and the involvement of American citizens in the capture of Fernandina. The U.S. responded by landing troops on Amelia Island on December 23, 1817 and persuaded Aury to surrender without opposition. Fernandina had supposedly been reclaimed for the King of Spain, but American forces were still occupying the town when the Adams-Onis Treaty ceding Florida to the United States was ratified by Congress in 1821. At the time of the cession, Fernandina was described as a town of about 40 houses and 150 inhabitants.

Three years after Florida became an American territory, Fernandina was made the seat of newly created Nassau County, and the town was incorporated the same year. The community, however,

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failed to prosper, and between 1835 and 1840 the county seat was moved to a new location. The construction of Fort Clinch on the north shore of Amelia Island began in 1847, and Fort San Carlos was abandoned. In 1853, the town site was moved further south, so that the newly incorporated Florida Railroad could avoid laying track across the marshes surrounding Old Fernandina. Most of the inhabitants moved to the new city, and today nothing survives from the pre-1853 period except archaeological remains and the plan of the town, which is still evident in the street layout of the subdivision which contains fewer than fifty structures.

Statement of Significance

The original town of Fernandina is nationally significant in the area of exploration and settlement because of its association with Spanish conquest and the establishment of colonies in the New World. It was the last town founded by Spain in North America. Historians of Spanish town planning previously credited Los Angeles, California, founded in 1781, with being the last town in North America laid out by the Spanish. Documentation recently uncovered in the East Florida Papers, however, clearly establishes that a plan for Fernandina was prepared and implemented in 1811, nearly thirty years later than Los Angeles. The town known as Fernandina was named in honor of the ruling Spanish monarch, King Ferdinand VII.

In addition to its association with the Second Spanish Colonial Period per se, the site of Old Town fulfills criterion C because of its significance in the area of town planning. It embodies the urban design concepts of Spanish town founders and planners operating in the New World during the colonial period and, therefore, is representative of a distinctive "type and period" of town planning. Spanish towns in the New World have long been recognized as significant to urban history. To a far greater degree than any other colonial power, the Spanish followed a system of land settlement and town planning formalized in written rules and regulations. Old Town Fernandina embodies significant features of Spanish towns through its gridiron layout, its orientation, its central plaza, and the regularity of its streets, blocks, and lots.

The site of Spanish Fernandina also fulfills criterion D because of its proven and potential archaeological significance, particularly in the area of the information it may provide in the future about Spanish colonial culture during Florida's Second

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Significance

Spanish Colonial Period (1784-1821). The value of the site lies in its relatively undisturbed character. Also, the town plan of Spanish Fernandina is remarkably preserved in the present streets, providing visual guidelines for future investigations.

Confirmatory excavation has occurred to any great degree only on the Plaza Lot at the site of Fort San Carlos. Archaeological remains of the fort were found which match the plan and location of the fort on early nineteenth century maps. Other sections of the town reveal surface features and artifact scatter suggesting construction and other activities during the Second Spanish Period and other periods of occupation. As indicated in the Description Section, there are historic landmarks that have yet to be definitively located and investigated, such as the city gate, and the north and south blockhouses. Indications of aboriginal activity are also widespread over the blocks of the early town.

As noted earlier, about forty wooden houses stood in Old Town when Florida became a U.S. territory in 1821. About the same number of structures is found there today. While none of these structures is believed to be a survivor of the Spanish period, the buildings may occupy some of the same sites as earlier structures. Barring evidence to the contrary, the wooden houses of Fernandina probably were raised above the ground on wooden piers. This would be in contrast to the stone and tabby floor tradition of earlier St. Augustine, and would result in a quite different archaeological situation, insofar as architectural remains are concerned. Wells, trash pits, privies, and fences, along with refuse deposits, constitute some of the probable non-architectural features of the town site.

The archaeological potential of Old Town is particularly promising because the amount of construction subsequent to the Second Spanish Colonial Period is relatively sparse, and of such a nature as to have caused only very limited disturbance of previous occupation. Long-term archaeological projects in nearby areas such as St. Augustine have shown that important information can be secured by careful work even in areas with a record of over 400 years of use. In Old Town Fernandina, closed features of restricted temporal periods can possibly be more fully examined and interpreted because of the lesser degree of disturbance and more accurately associated with specified cultural and economic groups. One should expect to locate material remains and features relating to Spanish, British, and American influences, as well as privateer military occupation. It was a site of smuggling and illegal slave

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Significance

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shipment to the United States. In many ways Old Fernandina provides an unusual and unique opportunity to formulate hypotheses relating to fluid contact and interaction of various cultural groups. The resulting data should provide valuable insights and additions to our history and understanding of New World cultural phenomena at the end of the Colonial Era.

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Boundary/Justification

Boundary Description

Begin on the south side of Garden Street at the point it intersects the east side of the right-of-way of unimproved Marine Street and run east along the south side of Garden Street to the boundary line of the City Cemetery, a distance of approximately 1,000 feet; then run north and east along said boundary line to the point it intersects the east right-of-way of unimproved Towngate Street which is the southwest corner of Block 25 of Old Town; then run north along the east right-of-way of Towngate Street, which is also the west boundary of Blocks 25, 23, 22, 21, and 34, approximately 1,125 feet to the northwest corner of Block 34, the northern limit of Old Town; then run west approximately 1,300 along the northern limits of Old Town as described by the north boundary of Blocks 34, 31, 19, 18, 37, and 35 to the point said line intersects the east right-of-way of unimproved Marine Street, which is the northwest corner of Block 35; then run south approximately 1,200 feet along the east right-of-way of Marine Street, which is described by the west boundary of Blocks 35, 17, 1, the Plaza Lot, and 2 to the intersection of said line and the south side of Garden Street, the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The above boundary description includes all of those portions of the Original Town of Fernandina, also known as Old Town, that were included in, or added to, the town plan during the period 1811 to 1821 when the town site was part of Spanish Florida. The boundaries described in the nomination proposal do not attempt to imply the total extent or limits of occupation by the inhabitants of the town during the Spanish Colonial Period, nor does the location of the structures presently found within these boundaries necessarily reflect the siting of structures from the Spanish Period. Also, the boundaries do not attempt to reflect the location, extent, or limits of any archaeological or historic resources of the Spanish Colonial, or any other period, that individually or collectively may also be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

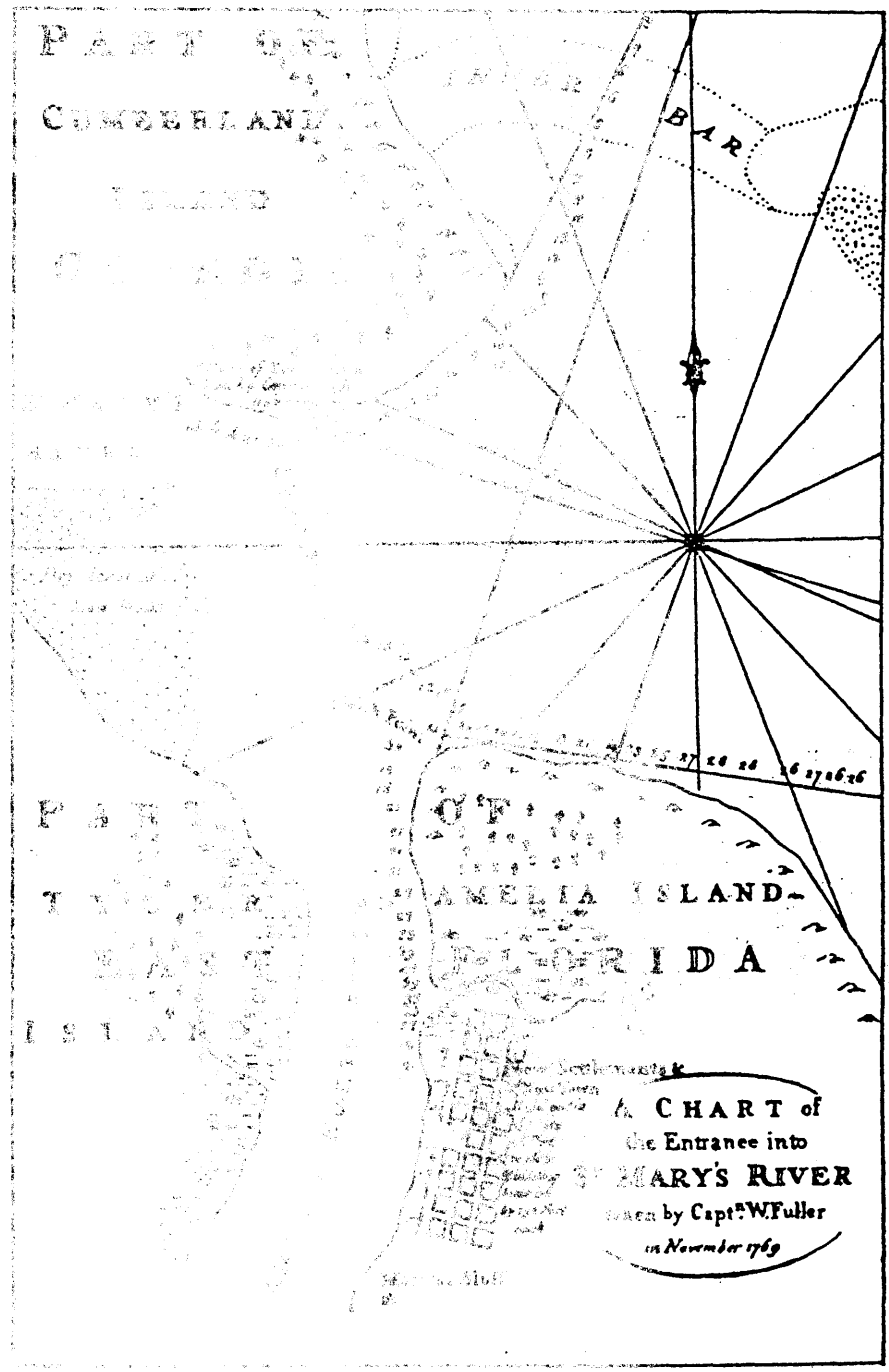
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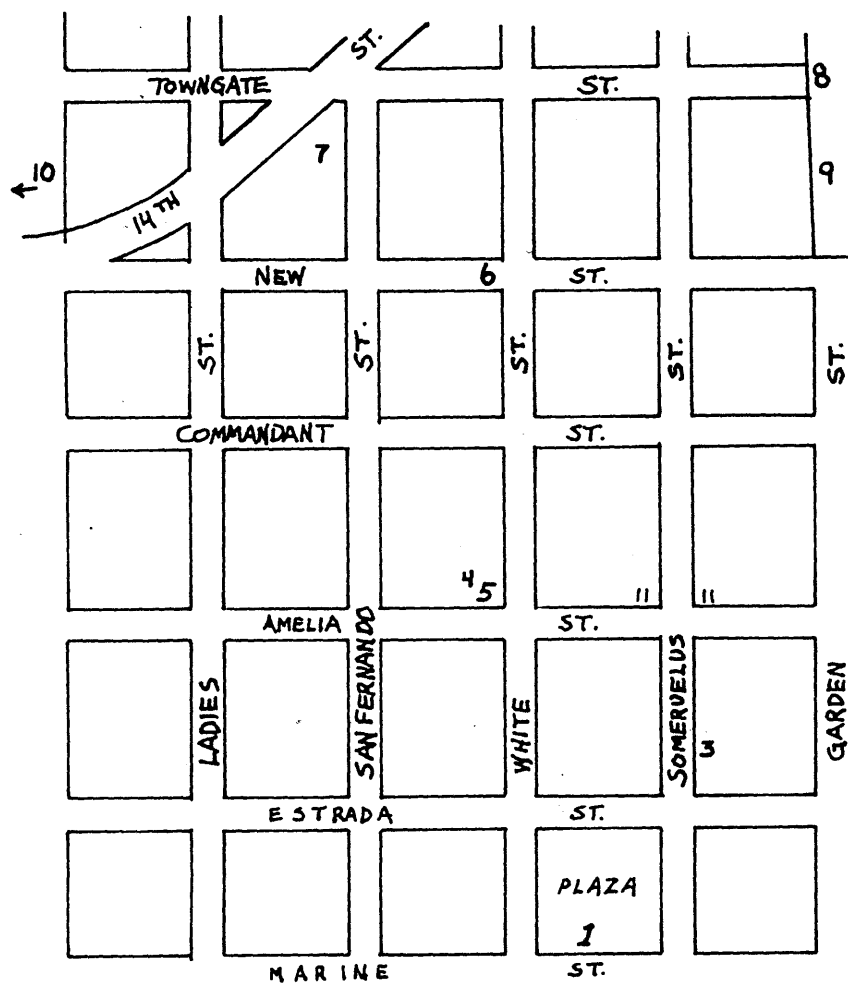
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CITY CEMETERY  
(BOSQUE BELLO)

POTENTIAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
SITES IN  
OLD TOWN  
FERNANDINA BEACH, FL

- KEY
- 1- FORT SAN CARLOS (PREVIOUSLY EXCAVATED)
  - 2- BRICK FOUNDATION
  - 3- PREHISTORIC & HISTORIC ARTIFACTS ON SURFACE
  - 4- CISTERN
  - 5- PIERS MADE OF TABBY MORTAR
  - 6- EARLY 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ARTIFACTS ON ROAD
  - 7- EARLY 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ARTIFACTS IN AREA EXPOSED BY EARTHMOVING ACTIVITY
  - 8- SITE OF TOWNGATE
  - 9- SOUTHERN BLOCKHOUSE (ON MARSH)
  - 10- NORTHERN BLOCKHOUSE (ON CREEK)
  - 11- MIDDEN

2

RIVER FLOOD PLAIN

