

Reflecting On Ocean Pond

A PAINTING BY CHRISTOPHER M. STILL

OIL ON LINEN, 126" BY 48"

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The last glow of the setting sun falls on a cattle drive through Florida pines. The trail leads to a marshy bank, and in the distance is the silhouette of a train, pulled slowly by a regiment of soldiers. A Civil War drum in the foreground is a reminder of the call to war—and the bullet holes in its shell—of the cost. This is the 1860s.

Conflicts with native tribes had been subdued, and the pathway for pioneers was clear. Land grants and recent statehood attracted families searching for a new start. Most were poor, and eked out a living by subsistence farming and cow hunting.

Pasture land was scarce and expensive, so cattle were allowed to freely roam and graze, later to be captured. Cow hunters seasonally searched out their cattle, branded them, and sorted out the calves.

The hardy breed of cow introduced by the Spanish formed the foundation for the cattle industry that eventually became a major economic force in Florida.

Florida was a very recent member of the American Union, and seemed on its way to becoming another southern cotton state. As the country struggled to abolish slavery, the state's influential planters, who relied on slave labor, resisted. In 1861, following the lead of Mississippi and South Carolina, Florida seceded from the Union—joining the Confederate States of America when it was formed shortly afterward.

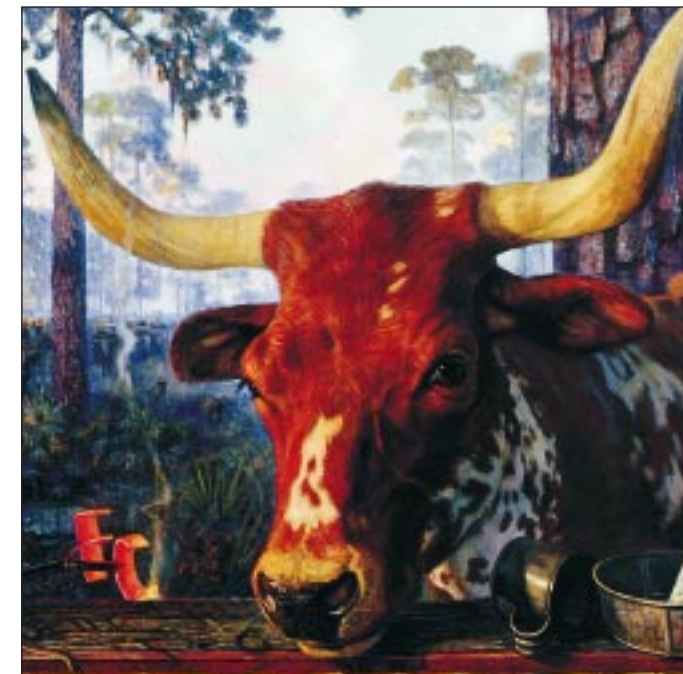
The state prepared for a short war, expecting little Northern challenge. The least populous Confederate state, Florida provided 15,000 men to the southern war effort, most fighting far from home, leaving women, children, and the elderly to carry on in the pioneer environment. Florida also contributed critical supplies—

including salt, beef, pork, and cotton. Battles within the state were mainly small raids on salt operations or cotton supply boats en route to Cuba, led by the Union troops who occupied many coastal towns and forts.

Florida's largest battle—the Battle of Olustee—took place in an area near Ocean Pond in 1864. Union soldiers attempted to cut off the cattle route near Lake City. They were defeated, and in retreat toward Jacksonville, they placed wounded men on flatbed railroad cars. When the train broke down, the 54th Massachusetts reg-

iment came to its aid, pulling the engine and four cars for five miles. Some of these soldiers were escaped Florida slaves, and all were lauded for this heroic deed.

The war had taken a heavy toll by 1865, and Floridians longed for peace. Yet in March, a final Union incursion that threatened Tallahassee was thwarted by Confederate troops and local militia, including a company of cadets from West Florida Seminary (a predecessor of Florida State University) in a battle at Natural Bridge. Tallahassee was the only southern capital east of the Mississippi uncaptured at the war's end a month later.

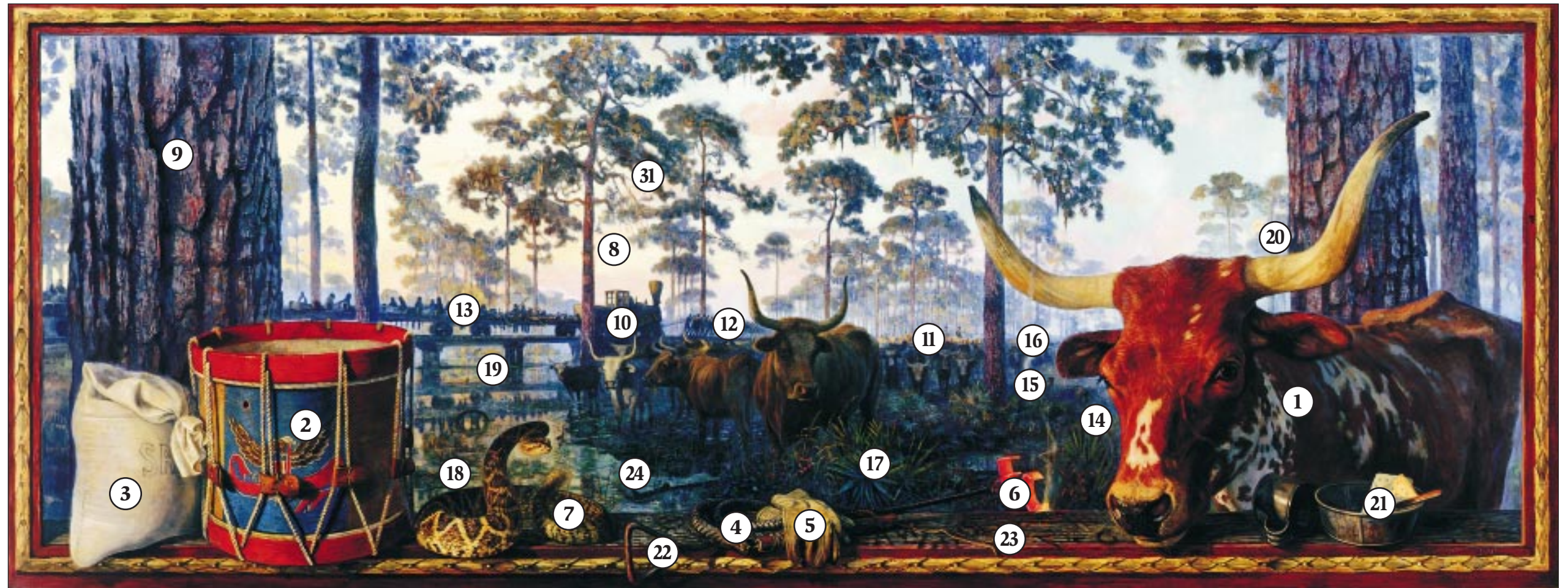


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The full moon ascends above the pines at dusk—a link to the next moonlit mural. As you view the murals notice that the sun moves in each painting as if the events are taking place in the span of two days.

Many motifs such as the train, deer, raccoon and cattle are repeated once again to strengthen the artist's symbolism that, although events may seem distant, time is irrelevant to the ancient land we call home.



1) **Spanish or "Cracker Cow".** Livestock accompanied early Spanish expeditions beginning in the 1500s. By the 1600s, the Spanish maintained herds of cattle on ranchos, relying on Native Americans to help manage them. This breed, known sometimes as a Florida Longhorn, was hardy enough to survive in the wild. Florida pioneers allowed the cattle to roam freely, rather than bear the expense of feeding them and owning costly pasture land.

2) **Civil War Drum.** This drum with a Federal eagle resembles those from Union troops, but is actually a Confederate drum. It is believed to have been used by the First Florida Infantry in 1861. The Latin motto "E Pluribus Unum," meaning "Out of Many, One," is absent from the red banner, symbolizing the division of the country.

3) **Bag of Salt.** Salt was a critical item during the Civil War, used for curing and preserving meat and providing an important source of dietary iodine. Union raids often destroyed salt works, but they were quickly rebuilt. The production of salt was considered so important that salt workers were exempted from military service.

4) **Whip.** The cow men's ten to twelve foot long whips were made of braided strips of deer hide, attached to a wooden handle. The leather strip at the whip's end is known as the "cracker," due to the cracking sound it makes when the whip is circled over the head and snapped. Floridians possibly became known as "Crackers" because of the use of these whips. Modern day cattlemen still rely on the same design, but nylon has replaced the leather.

5) **Cattleman's Gloves.** This pair of gloves resembles those of the past, but were borrowed from a present day cowboy working in Florida. This is a

symbol of Florida's continuing tradition of cattle ranching.

6) **FC Brand.** Cattle brands and ear marks have been used since the early introduction of cattle by the Spanish. This particular brand was introduced by the Department of Agriculture in 1989. Cattlemen across Florida searched and tested cattle for those with a genetic connection to the original Spanish cow. A herd was established to preserve this hardy and historic stock. They were branded with "FC" which stands for "Foundation Cattle," but has become known as "Florida Cracker."

7) **Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake.** This venomous snake has the unique ability to shake the naturally formed rattles on its tail in warning. A rattlesnake's poison can be fatal, creating a hazard to cattle and cattlemen. Often associated with the American slogan "Don't Tread On Me," the rattlesnake has been adopted as a symbol of Florida A&M University.

8) **Pileated Woodpecker.** Easily recognized by its striking red head crest and white stripes, this large black bird makes a loud, rhythmic hammering sound while foraging for insects in trees.

9) **Pine Trees.** Florida's pine trees are a source of a number of useful products. During the Civil War, turpentine, made by distilling the trees' gummy sap, was an important one. The solid material left over, called rosin, was used to make soap. Trees were felled for timber as well. Older pines have a dense core resistant to termites—valued building material known as "heart pine".

10) **Florida, Atlantic, and Gulf Central Railroad.** The railway was built by Jewish plantation owner, David Yulee, to provide transportation between Fernandina Beach on Florida's east coast and Cedar Key on the west. Yulee became Florida's first U.S. Senator. He initially pushed for Florida to join the Union, but later supported secession.

The small scale of this locomotive is typical of lumber trains.

11) **Florida Cowman.** The roots of Florida cattle ranching reach back to the introduction of cattle and horses into North America by Spanish explorers. Franciscan friars and Spanish rancheros established the first domestic herds during the eighteenth century. They were followed by Florida Indians. The Florida cowmen of the territorial period

expanded cattle production into an important part of Florida's economy.

12) **Union Soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts.** This African-American unit of the Union army came to the aid of wounded soldiers stranded on a broken down train retreating from the battle of Olustee. They fastened ropes to the train and pulled it five miles before horses were found to complete the trip. Their strength and courage was applauded throughout the country.

13) **Wounded.** On February 20, 1864, Union troops attempted to capture Lake City and cut off the cattle supply to the Confederacy. They were defeated in the Battle of Olustee near Ocean Pond. Those too hurt to escape on foot were put on rail cars.

14) **Razorback Pig.** Feral pigs were introduced into Florida's ecosystem by the Spanish. They adapted easily to their new home. Pioneers relied on the wild boars as a major source of meat.

They are often called "razorbacks" due to the coarse bristles that stand up along their backs when they are agitated. They are also referred to as "pinewoods rooters" because they dig up the ground while searching for food.

15) **Cow Dog.** Cattle dogs were also introduced into Florida by the Spanish—they were an important component in cattle ranching. A dog could flush cows from dense foliage and keep them together. They were also used to hunt wild pigs.

16) **Prairie Schooner.** Small scale wagons, pulled by horses, cattle or mules, were used by the pioneers. The cloth covered portion of the wagon appeared like a sail on a ship as the wagons moved through tall grass or palmettos.

17) **Saw Palmetto.** The stems of this native Florida plant were commonly used to cook food over an open fire. During the Civil War, clothing and fabric were often difficult to obtain. Woven palmetto fronds were used to make hats and other wearable items.

18) **Cow Lily.** This native variety of water lily, also commonly called bonnets or spatterdock, produces a small yellow bloom. Cattle would surround themselves with these aquatic plants, seeking relief from the heat. Native Americans ate the root and roasted the seeds, which pop like popcorn.

19) **Deer.** A white-tailed deer drinks by the water's edge. Deer are a repeated symbol throughout the murals.

20) **Rising Moon.** A full moon begins its ascent above the trees, relating to the following mural's nocturnal theme.

21) **Hard Tack.** Made from flour, water, fat, and salt, this hard biscuit was baked for a long time to dehydrate it so it would not mold. It was softened by holding in the mouth, or by dipping into soup or coffee. Its cracker-like appearance led some to attribute the name "Cracker" to Floridians who commonly ate this bread.

22) **Spanish Brand.** This is a cattle brand used by the Spanish in the 1600s.

23) **Brands and Cow Calvary.** Shown here are some of the brands used during the Civil War.

The "Cow Calvary" was one of the most effective Florida units during the Civil War. They were formed to guard the cattle ranges from Union raids, and protect the supply of beef for Confederate armies.

24) **Map of Florida.** A reflection in the water takes the shape of a map of the state of Florida. Small sticks mark Tallahassee and Olustee. The train line of the Florida, Atlantic and Gulf Central railroad is evident.