



The French phosphate mine near Anthony was a result of foreign investment that came about when new companies were formed to buy up Marion County lands where valuable phosphate might be found.

## Boom and bust in phosphate mining

**T**he Ocala Banner, which began in 1866 as the East Florida Banner, reflected the euphoria of the great phosphate boom on Marion County by abandoning its weekly publication to become a daily newspaper in early 1890.

It was exciting times in Ocala as well as Dunnellon, where the initial discovery of phosphate had occurred the previous year. Speculators, workers and schemers were arriving daily in hopes of cashing in on the bonanza that had turned the local business scene into a frenzy of activity.

The Banner's founder, and still editor, Frank E. Harris, noted the feverish activity of land buyers and speculators who stood ready to offer any price for land that might contain phosphate rock.

"It is remarkable the number of discoveries that are still being made," he commented.

The richest specimen seen up to that time by Harris was brought in by R.K. Kraile, whose property was south of Ocala. There was no report on how much money Kraile was being offered for his property, but it must have been considerable compared to normal land prices.

Despite the euphoria that spread throughout the entire area — not just Marion County — the Banner's experiment in daily publication would not last. By summer of 1890 it had lapsed back into weekly publication. But there would be other spurts of daily publishing in the future.

### Wild times

Fortunes were made and lost during the phosphate boom. The banking was done primarily in Ocala by John F. Dunn with his Merchants National Bank and E.W. Agnew with his Ocala National Bank.

Borrowing was heavy, and numerous people overextended themselves to the point of bankruptcy. Some, however, made big profits, and some of that profit was plowed back into the local economy.

Dunnellon, meanwhile, had gone wild. With its wide-open saloons and the rowdy behavior of many newcomers, the town was transformed into something like an untamed, lawless western town like those depicted in western movies. It was not Dunnellon's finest hour, but it would survive when the phosphate business moved south.

Neither Dunn's bank nor Agnew's institution would survive, however. How much phosphate land speculation figured into the failures isn't known. It is known that some of Ocala's most prominent businessmen lost their heads and their wealth through speculation, and the banks took some of the loss.

### After the bust

In 1890, business activity in Marion County surpassed anyone's grandest dreams. Nobody seems to have seen what was coming. By the mid-1890s, the entire country was gripped in an economic depression that was acutely felt in Ocala

and Marion County.

Not only the banks, but many businesses failed. Phosphate mining was still big business, but it had settled into a steady activity. The era of big money from land speculation was gone.

One Ocalan who benefited greatly from the phosphate mining was the architect and builder George Mackay, the man who designed and built many of the brick buildings in Ocala that earned the town the title of "the Brick City."

Mackay went to the Dunnellon area early in the boom to design and erect mining machinery. He began the Ocala Iron Works, located on North Osceola, which specialized in making and repairing phosphate plant equipment.

The iron works would continue into the 1920s, long after phosphate mining had become something of a historical memory. By then the plant was specializing in ornamental and decorative iron as well as repairs to machinery.

### Sending phosphate to Europe

Initial shipments of phosphate from Marion County in 1889 were transported to Brunswick and Savannah, Ga., where the ore was loaded on ships bound for European markets, where phosphate was in great demand for agricultural purposes.

During the following year, the Dunnellon Phosphate Company, which had been organized by John Dunn and his associates, constructed a shipping basin near the mouth of the Withlacoochee River. The new depot was called Port Inglis, named for John L. Inglis of North Florida, an initial investor in Dunn's firm.

A railroad line was built from the Dunnellon mines to Port Inglis, but it wasn't until 1902 that the first ship loaded with phosphate cleared the port.

That was a Dutch steamer bound for Hamburg, Germany. Soon, other ships were being loaded for England, France, Sweden, Denmark and other countries. Within five years, Port Inglis is said to have led the world in phosphate shipments.

### Drawn to Anthony

During the boom era, more than 100 phosphate companies were organized. Only 41 are said to have actually begun mining in Marion and surrounding counties. A French company was attracted by the quality of deposits found near Anthony, northeast of Ocala.

The French company built a large plant near Anthony, but it was ultimately closed when it was discovered the quality of rock didn't measure up to industry standards. That pretty much closed the phosphate chapter in North Marion.

The local phosphate industry was still in its infancy when John Dunn unexpectedly died in 1893. He was buried with great ceremony in the old city cemetery off North Magnolia, Evergreen, where a grand monument still stands. His bank would struggle on until 1897, and others would lead the Dunnellon Phosphate Company.

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