



Historic Strawberry Plantation

The 8,000 acre Strawberry Mills and Plantation, part of a Spanish sawmill grant to Francis Richard, Jr., was purchased by John S. Sammis circa 1840. Sammis, a native of New York, moved to Florida in the 1820s and worked briefly for prominent plantation owner Zephaniah Kingsley. In 1830, Sammis married Mary Kingsley, the mixed-race daughter of Zephaniah and his African-born wife, Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley.

The plantation produced Sea Island cotton, rice and provisions crops, and had summer and winter range for cattle and sheep, an abundance of fish in the rivers and creeks, and forests of live oak, cedar and pine. There was also a large mineral spring and bathhouse. The plantation home was built sometime after 1850 and is still in use today as a private residence.

Sammis was also a prominent merchant in Jacksonville and owned extensive real estate in downtown Jacksonville. The Sammis children were educated by private tutors in Florida and by educators at finishing schools and universities in the United States and Europe. One of Duval County's largest slave owners in the 1850s, Sammis sold his slaves at New Orleans in April 1860. In 1861 and 1862, Sammis was threatened with violence and death by Confederate extremists for his outspoken advocacy of the Union. In response, he moved his family to a Northern state during the Civil War.

After the war, his wealth greatly diminished, John Sammis sold the plantation, mill, and family residence. The family continued to bury their dead in the cemetery at the rear of the old plantation home. John S. Sammis died in 1884. Mary Kingsley Sammis died in 1895. They, too, are buried in what is now known as the Clifton Cemetery in the Old Arlington neighborhood of Jacksonville.

Source: *Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley*, by Dr. Daniel L. Schafer

1918 Arlington Map



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This marker erected in 2009 with a grant from **Comcast** through Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.