



Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley Chesterfield Plantation

In 1806 Anna Madgigine Jai, a 13 year old girl of royal lineage in Senegal, West Africa, was sold into slavery and brought to the port of Havana, Cuba. There she was purchased by 38-year-old Zephaniah Kingsley, Jr., a wealthy white plantation owner, ship owner and captain, and slave trader. Kingsley took Anna as his wife.

Kingsley took Anna to his Laurel Grove plantation located near present-day Orange Park where she managed his household and assisted with the management of his plantation. On March 4, 1811, Kingsley formally emancipated Anna and their three young children, George, Martha and Mary. Within a year after gaining her freedom Anna established her own homestead across the St. Johns River in what is now Mandarin and became the owner of twelve slaves.

Anna's courage and resourcefulness is evident in 1813 during the Patriot Rebellion. To prevent herself, her children and her slaves from being seized and sold back into slavery by marauding Patriot raiders, she arranged with a Spanish gunboat captain to provide safe passage to Ft. San Nicolas on the south bank of the St. Johns River. She then set fire to her homestead and Laurel Grove to prevent their use by the Patriots. In 1814 Anna, Zephaniah and their children sailed to their new home on Ft. Georgia Island. There a fourth child, John Maxwell, would be born.


Florida became a territory of the young United States in 1821 and with that came changing social attitudes regarding race and slavery. No longer would the tolerant Spanish laws provide protection to persons, both free and slave, of color. In 1838, fearful for his family's well-being, Zephaniah moved Anna, his two sons and other family members to the island of Haiti. Their two daughters, Martha Baxter and Mary Sammis, both married to white businessmen, remained behind. But Zephaniah lived only five more years, dying in 1843 of lung disease. Oldest son George died in 1846 in a shipwreck. Anna chose to return to what is now the Old Arlington area of Jacksonville to be near her two daughters.

In 1847 Anna purchased a 22-acre farm located on the St. Johns River between the homes of her daughters, property now owned by Jacksonville University. Her farm, known as Chesterfield, was tended by her 15 slaves.

The Civil War years 1860-1865 were times of great turmoil for Anna and her family. Though slave owners, they were staunch Union supporters and fled their homes during the war. By the end of the war, Anna was 72 years old and living with her daughter Martha, her fortunes and health greatly diminished. Anna died sometime prior to June of 1870 and is buried in the Clifton cemetery with her daughters and grandchildren. Anna's remarkable life from African princess, to slave to respected plantation and slave owner was lived with courage and resilience. Today Anna's known descendents are white, black and Hispanic.

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

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