

Prince Achille Murat of Territorial Tallahassee



Introduction

Tallahassee Turns 200 is a history-based project examining the early years of the city Florida State calls home. Tallahassee is not only the capital of the Sunshine State, but it is also one of the most historical cities here with a significant and fascinating past. From controversial figures to deadly viruses to flamboyant dances, Tallahassee had it all during the first half of the 19th century. The focus of this specific project is Prince Achille Murat, the nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte. After fleeing France in 1821, Murat eventually made his way to Tallahassee and met his wife, Catherine. His assimilation into American society and influential views on everything from patriotism to social life are important to understanding the early years of Tallahassee. He helped defend the city from Native American troops and advocated on behalf of slavery. Murat was also a part of the early government, and he brought French dance influences to Florida. His contributions to antebellum Tallahassee cannot go unrecognized when studying the founding of Florida.

Methods

This project began with conducting a literature review on various sources regarding Tallahassee's founding and Prince Achille Murat. In the orientation portion of this project, Benjamin Gunter and Idy Codington provided many secondary, and a few primary, sources about antebellum Tallahassee. There were books, novels, transcriptions, and photos on everything from diseases to dances to historical figures in the early years of Florida. After this orientation, a specific focus was chosen as Prince Achille Murat. A comprehensive list of primary sources, with a few additional secondary sources, was gathered from multiple online databases and reviewed in depth. These included letters written by Murat to family members and friends and books he wrote about topics such as slavery and American patriotism. Finally, one source was chosen to be further analyzed based on its relevance to the project, and this was a translation, by Henry J. Bradfield, of a collection of letters Prince Achille Murat sent to his friend, Count Thibodeau, about his experience in Florida. This source, with the other primary and secondary sources collected throughout the project, gave all the information necessary to produce pertinent conclusions. These results explain the life and legacy of Prince Achille Murat, and the role he played in the history of Tallahassee.

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Findings/Conclusions

Sources examined show Achille Murat's influences in:

- Social Life as he and Catherine owned and operated an extensive plantation that often hosted balls and dinner
- Cultural Life because his wealth made Tallahassee a city of high sophistication, and his unconventional diet and European dance style helped shape the lifestyle of Florida's capital
- American Patriotism due to his unwavering support of the country's economics, freedom, arts, and displacement of Native Americans
- Slavery since he owned hundreds of slaves and was a staunch supporter of slavery in the South
- Military for the reason that he was an esteemed military general and staunchly fought against indigenous tribes in battle

Since nearly all existing research about Murat revolves around his political and social life, future research could be about his personal life and relationship with Catherine. This is an area largely unexplored, and it could help to better understand the identity of Achille Murat.



Famous portrait of Prince Achille Murat of Tallahassee

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Residential section of Tallahassee as depicted by the Comte de Castelnau and painted by Paris A. Bernard in 1842