

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1 **CHAIRES COMMUNITY HISTORIC DISTRICT,
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

SUMMARY

The Chaires Community Historic District is located in the unincorporated community of Chaires, Leon County, Florida. The district consists of 15 contributing resources; residential, religious, educational, and out buildings. The historic buildings date from the 1850s through the 1940s and represent excellent examples of frame vernacular construction and a 1920s Romanesque Revival Styled school. The community developed organically, and is aligned with a crossroads intersection.

SETTING

The community of Chaires is located one mile north of Chaires Crossroads (intersection of Chaires Road and United States Highway 27). The community is situated around the intersection of the north/south County Road 154 (which is called Chaires Crossroad north of the railroad, and Chaires Road south of the railroad), and east/west County Road 54 (Jackson Street), and east/west C.S.X. railroad tracks which parallel highway 54 (Photos #1&2). Lake Lafayette is one mile to the west. Two miles to the northeast is the community of Capitola, north of the railroad. Chaires Crossroads curves to the west within the community before turning due north. The dirt road to the east, Hancock Road, was recently renamed Parkhill Road. The area has scattered mature oak trees which form a canopy over Chaires Crossroads. The land to the southwest is flat and marshy, and is a wood stork sanctuary. Higher elevation pasture land is directly north, east, and northwest of the community. From a hill with mature oak trees on the western edge of the community, the ground slopes down to Lake Lafayette. Due to its undeveloped character, the community of Chaires retains much of its turn-of-the-century feeling.

Evidence of Native-American habitation of the area is commonly known by residents of the community. Projectile points and pottery are frequently found throughout Chaires, particularly on the slopes toward Lake Lafayette. In 1985, state archeologist Calvin Jones identified site #LE1647 on the eastern shore of the lake. He found a serrated point, waddle and daub clay, and a corn burn pit. The point dated to the Middle Archaic Period (6000 years old), and the waddle and daub to the period of Spanish Settlement. At nearby site #LE2218 was located a Hamilton point from the Late Archaic Period (4000 years old). The Chaires community contained many 19th and 20th century commercial buildings, now gone, whose sites have the potential for revealing historic evidence. A large well that served a cotton gin and some homes was located southwest of the crossroads.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The district contains 11 contributing buildings, and 4 contributing outbuildings; 1 non-contributing building, and 3 non-contributing outbuildings. The district roughly runs along Chaires Crossroad from the historic school, east to the railroad crossing; and along the unpaved Parkhill (Hancock) Road which bends to the north and east past the historic church. The district encompasses approximately 30 acres. The resources are

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 2 **CHAIRES COMMUNITY HISTORIC DISTRICT,
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

primarily frame vernacular except for a Romanesque Revival Style brick school. The frame buildings are built on piers with horizontal wooden siding.

Chaires Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 9243 Parkhill Road, (lot 470), 1892 (Photo #3). The one-story, frame vernacular building has a pier foundation. The main, double-door entrance is centered in the south gable facade. The roof has cornice returns, a square belfry with hip roof, and is surmounted with a wooden cross. Aluminum siding has been added.

Chaires School, 4774 Chaires Crossroad, (lot 851), 1929 (Photo #4). The school replaced an earlier wooden frame school. The one-story brick school has a "T" footprint, continuous brick foundation, and a hip roof. The elaborate main entrance is recessed with a fan light. The gabled portico has two twisted columns with Corinthian capitals, supporting a brick arch over the porch. An inner arch has cast stone quoins alternating with brick. The side, and rear elevations have banks of 6/1, double-hung wooden sash windows. Non-historic school buildings have been constructed on school property to the west.

"Railroad Foreman's House." 9243 Parkhill Road (lot 682), ca.1890 (Photo #5). The one-story, frame vernacular house has side gables, and a pier foundations. The house is unusual for Florida in that it has a "saltbox" roof. The roof slope to the rear is longer than that on the front of the house. The house was labeled "railroad house," on the 1890 Chaires Plat, indicating that railroad employees resided there. Employees living at Chaires were responsible for ten miles of track maintenance on either side of the town. Because the depot no longer exists, the house is the most significant building associated with the depot's presence at the crossroad that remains. The house was moved from northwest of the intersection in 1962 to be used for Sunday School by the Methodist Church, and remains in church ownership. It is still visible from the railroad. Aluminum siding has been added.

Patterson-Thompson House, 4890 Chaires Crossroad, (lot 681), ca.1880 (Photo #6). The one-story, frame vernacular house has an "H" shape foundation with two inner spaces. Built on pier foundations, the building has two parallel gable blocks, joined in the middle by a cross-gable block. A small hip roof addition, and a larger gable block are within the northern space of the "H." The main porch is on the southern, center block. A gable roof outbuilding garage is northwest of the house. The Patterson's had the largest commercial operations at the crossroads at the turn of the century. The Patterson Store was located on the eastern edge of the property.

Cotton-Stephens House, 4938 Chaires Crossroad, (lot 683), ca.1850 (Photo #7). The one-story, frame vernacular house has an "L" shape footprint, built on pier foundations. A side gable roof has a southerly gable extension with an "L" shaped hip roof porch in the southwest corner. The porch's Craftsman Style battered columns were added in the early part of the Twentieth Century. Unlike most houses built after the Civil War from long-needle pine wood, the ante-bellum Cotton-Stephens House was built of red oak with cypress for the floor joints and beams.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 3

**CHAIRES COMMUNITY HISTORIC DISTRICT,
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

David Chaires House, 4867 Chaires Crossroad, (lot 689), 1875 (Photo #8). Built as a wedding present on the hilltop on the west end of town, the one-story frame vernacular house on pier foundations was built in the Georgian Four-Square form. Two brick fireplaces are centered in the walls between the four rooms. The historic main block retains its integrity to a high degree. The house was moved to save it from demolition when Chaires Crossroad was widened 1994. A rear addition was made in 1998. The house was owned by the son of the community's founder.

Shuford House, 9027 Parkhill Road, (lot 466), ca.1880 (Photo #9). The one-story, frame vernacular house has an "L" footprint, and a cross gable roof. The first floor of the main block contains two rooms with a fireplace within the dividing wall. The kitchen and work area are within the rear extension. The horizontal wooden siding was surfaced with asbestos shingles in the 1940s. A non-contributing, moved, historic shed was used to store a handcar for railroad workers, but is not significant architecturally.

Tom Chaires House, 9493 Road to the Lake, (lot 682) ca.1880 (Photo #10). The one-story, frame vernacular house has a rectangular footprint with side gable roof. The house had a verandah on three sides with a kitchen extension on the rear. By 1920, the house was owned by Tom Greene and Rosa Chaires, descendants of Benjamin Chaires. Tom's parents, Sam Parkhill and Kate Hill Chaires, lived there as well, and may have been earlier owners.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 4 **CHAIRES COMMUNITY HISTORIC DISTRICT,
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

CONTRIBUTING/NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES LIST

1-school, 1-church, 9-residences, 4-outbuildings = 15 contributing
(1- non-contributing residence, 3-non-contributing outbuildings)

North side Chaires Crossroad.

#4813 E.B. Chaires House, 1940s Frame Vernacular Lot #685-694
Contributing Mule shed

#4867 David Chaires-Thompson House, c1875 Frame Vernacular Lot #689-605

#4901 Blakey House, 1890s Frame Vernacular Lot#690
Contributing Garage

#4913 Susan Thompson House, 1880s Frame Vernacular Lot#676

South side of Chaires Crossroad

#4774 Chaires School, 1929 Romanesque Revival (brick) Lot #851

#4938 Cotton-Stephens House, ca.1850 Frame Vernacular Lot#683
Contributing Garage
Non-contributing Shed

#4890 Patterson-Thompson House, 1890s Frame Vernacular Lot#681
Contributing Garage

Road to the Lake

#9493 Tom Chaires House, 1880 or earlier Frame Vernacular Lot#682

Parkhill/Hancock Road

#9027 Schuford House, 1880s Frame Vernacular Lot#466
Non-contributing Shed
Non-contributing Workshop

#9243 Non-contributing House (Methodist parsonage) Lot#451

#9243 "Railroad Forman's House," ca.1890 Frame Vernacular Lot#451

#9243 Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1892 Frame Vernacular Lot#470

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 1 **CHAIRES COMMUNITY HISTORIC DISTRICT,
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

SUMMARY

The Chaires Historic District is nominated to the National Register for significance on the local level under Criteria A and C in the areas of Community Development and Architecture. Florida Territorial Period settlers, the Chaires family, farmed the area and created the county's first surveyed plat. The infrastructure developed from the 1850s through the 1940s along a cross roads and railroad. The 1857 construction of a railroad depot facilitated the shipping of cotton and agricultural products, and encouraged commercial development. The community school was one of the county's best regarded, early public high schools. The buildings are excellent examples of vernacular construction, and include a brick Romanesque Revival Styled school.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

The history of the community dates to Florida's territorial settlement with the 1820s plantation of Green H. Chaires. Three Chaires brothers, Green Hill, Benjamin, and Thomas Peter, moved from Georgia in the 1820s, and started farming in Leon County. Benjamin developed the largest plantation for the times, Verdura, consisting of over 9,000 acres, south of Old St. Augustine Road. There he built a three story brick mansion, the largest ante-bellum mansion in the county (Paisley 1989: 89). Benjamin was the first millionaire in Florida, and he and his brothers manufactured bricks, which were used in the state capitol. Green developed a plantation that later grew to 20,000 acres, and built a mansion on the north and east side of Lake Lafayette. He maintained cordial relations with the local Indians, but tensions increased between Indians and settlers in the 1830s. One night in July 1839, the Indians cut down all the corn surrounding the house, and Chaires knew these relations had changed. According to one version of the event, he went to Bainbridge, Georgia, to arrange military assistance, and on July 13th, while gone, Indians killed his wife, two children, and several slaves, and burned the house (Thompson 1992: 10). This dramatic event in local history is marked by a small family cemetery off Old Dirt Road. Green Chaires then built a house called Evergreen on the western edge of Chaires. Thomas Peter built a house called Woodlawn between his brothers on Old St. Augustine Road near where it crossed Chaires Crossroads. The community's current population retains a direct link to the historic settlement. Descendants of Green Hill Chaires still residing in the community include: Earl B. Chaires, Jr.; Harry Chaires; and Mrs. Barbara Smith; and descendants of Benjamin Chaires: Gwendolyn P. Thompson, Earl Chaires, and Elinor Chaires Shuford.

During ante-bellum times in Florida, cotton was the dominant agricultural product, and the largest area of production was in Leon County, north/central Florida. One of the great challenges of cotton growing was getting the product to market in Savannah and New York. The state's earliest railroad was a mule drawn car on rails from Tallahassee to Port Leon on the coast, constructed in 1837. After a hurricane destroyed the small town in 1843, deliveries were made to St. Marks, two and one-half miles up river. Green and Joseph Chaires were instrumental in the building of a plank road in 1851 (Groene 1981: 89), the first of its kind in Florida. It ran from the town of Wakulla, north of St. Marks, to the Chaires Crossroad at Old St. Augustine Road, and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 2 **CHAIRES COMMUNITY HISTORIC DISTRICT,
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

northeast to Monticello in Jefferson County. Cotton was delivered by wagon to either St. Marks or Newport, several miles to the north. In 1855 the Pensacola, Georgia Railroad began rebuilding the St. Marks line, and began to connect Tallahassee with Lake City and Jacksonville. The first benefactors of the extended railroad were the planters in Tallahassee and eastward through Leon and Jefferson Counties.

After the Civil War there was less reliance on cotton, and a greater diversification of agricultural products. The most important of these was lumbering, as old growth pine existed in the area in great abundance. Green A. Chaires (Green Hill's son) was foremost in lumber cutting and hauling. A Mr. Hancock, for whom Hancock Street (now Parkhill) was named, ran a saw mill southeast of the intersection of Chaires Road and Jackson Street (Chaires, Earl, 1999). The milled lumber was used to construct many of the historic homes that exist today, including several not included in the district due to alterations and distance.

Churches held a prominent place within the small Chaires community. Three churches were built there, and drew upon the populace of the region to fill the congregations. Only the historic Methodist church remains. The 1868 St. Paul AME Church was formed after the Civil War when freed Blacks started their own churches. The church was begun under the Reverend George Larramore who officiated until 1890 (W.P.A. 1936). Their third wooden church with steeple and bell was built in 1904, and it was replaced in the 1960s. Members of the congregation were buried on Gopher Hill, north of Lake Lafayette into the early 20th century (White 1999). The bell remains, and approximately one hundred historic unmarked graves are within the cemetery. A Baptist church was built in the early 20th century, and taken down in the 1960s. The church was located next to the Methodist Church where the "Railroad Foreman's House" now stands, and the two congregations would try to out-sing each other on Sunday mornings (Schuford 1999).

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The last surviving of the three Chaires brothers, Green Hill Chaires, divided a large portion of his property between eight descendants, and in so doing created the county's first plat (see map of the 1890 plat). The plat indicated land ownership rather than existing patterns of land use or intended development. Marked on the plat map is the location of the railroad depot, railroad house, cotton gin, store, and "Negro" church. Green Hill Chaire's son, Green A., was one of the county's most successful cotton growers working on much of the property owned by his father. He also kept 150 cattle, 200 pigs, and 40 sheep in 1860 (Paisley 1968: 16). On the hill west of the community he built a house for his son, David, as a wedding gift (Smith 1998). The Chaires Crossroad curved to the north, skirting this homestead and cattle fence, before turning due north.

With the Chaires community's reliance on agriculture and cotton, the 1857 establishment of railroad station #1, east of the main depot in Tallahassee was a welcome addition facilitating the transportation of products to market. The first shipment from the Chaires depot (no longer extant) was on November 28, 1857 (Paisley, Red Hills, p.159). The 1858 establishment of a post office in Chaires contributed to the sense of its being a rural civic center (Bradbury 1962). A special edition of Tallahassee's New Democrat newspaper from 1911 described the community as "one of the busiest places visited," because of the commercial/railroad activity at the cross roads (Reese 1911: 97). Mr. John H. Patterson owned a store directly east of the Patterson

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 3 **CHAIRES COMMUNITY HISTORIC DISTRICT,
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

House, and a cotton gin and cotton packing warehouse on the southwest corner of the crossroads (E.B. Chaires) (see Illustration). His brother George owned a store next to his. Commercial activity focused on the cotton gin "around which was clustered a dozen or more well filled wagons, waiting to be relieved of their burdens" (Reese 1911:). The Chaires store, which included the post office, was directly north of the crossroad in front of the Murray Thompson House (Schuford, Thompson). A small store owned by David Chaires was located beside the Patterson Store. A smaller and short lived store in the early 20th century was owned by J.P. "Skeeter" Chaires. It was near the Methodist Church (Schuford). In the late 1910s, Eualia Stephens and her mother Mattie Johnson started cooking and selling fig preserves out of the Stephens (Cotton-Stephens House) kitchen. The activity grew into the Gypsy Products Company. They expanded in the 1920s into three wooden buildings on the north side of the Cotton-Stephens property, and hired help (see Illustration). Their Le-Ko brand preserves, and shelled pecans thrived, and in 1929, moved to Havana (Shuford 1999; Thompson 1992: 117).

The Methodist Episcopal, South congregation built a large frame church beside Hancock Road in 1892. One of the oldest Methodist churches in Florida was in Tallahassee, and the immediately outlying churches were a part of the same circuit for traveling ministers. By 1863, a mission church at Chaires was served by the Reverend Simon Peter Richardson from Pisgah Church north of Tallahassee, who also served churches in Miccosukee, north of Chaires, and Quincy, west of Tallahassee. The church at Chaires, known as Mt. Zion, was officially chartered in 1871. The church was reorganized in 1887 as New Hope. In 1891, land was purchased, and the church with steeple and bell was soon constructed under Pastor L.W. Moore. In 1899, the church was involved with the formation of the Union School under H.P. Woodbery (Thompson, "Methodist Church"). This became known as the Chaires School. The school was located east of Chaires Road near the southern edge of the 1890 plat (E.B. Chaires). Mr. Woodbery's teaching skills were so admired that by 1904, children from Tallahassee were boarding at Chaires to receive his instruction.

The Chaires School was a two-room frame building to which an additional wing was attached early in the 20th century. The larger of the two rooms was an auditorium. In 1925 the student population was growing, and Mr. Woodbery was still a teacher and the principal (see Illustration). By 1910, the Chaires School offered classes through high school, making it one of only three in the county; the other two high schools were in Tallahassee and Woodville. The graduating 10th grade class in 1928 consisted of 12 students. In 1929 a new brick school was built. The frame building became the Black school which had been conducted in private homes until that time. Mr. Virgil Townsend was the principal of the new school, and Maggie Patterson, Marie Johnson, and May Bird Carmine were the three teachers. Mr. Townsend formed boys and girls basketball teams. In 1933, buses began taking 12th graders to Leon High School in Tallahassee so they could complete high school. In 1938, the school was accredited for classes 1st through 9th, and the 10th and 11th grades were bused to Leon High. During the World War II years students planted gardens in the side yard and raised chickens (Halsema 1995: 8).

With the depot, cotton gin and packing house, public schools, stores, a post office, churches, and Le-Ko processing, the crossroads was the commercial hub for the surrounding agricultural community (see 1912 reconstruction illustration). Throughout the community's historic period, agriculture was the county's primary economic base, and Chaires was one of the most active and largest of the nine agricultural crossroad

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 4 **CHAIRES COMMUNITY HISTORIC DISTRICT,
LEON COUNTY, FLORIDA**

communities in the county. Currently, Chaires is one of only three such communities that still exist, and the only one that retains enough historic resources and historic character to be called a historic district.

With the exception of the Romanesque Revival Styled brick school, all other buildings within the community are of frame vernacular construction. Without building or county records, the dates of many of the 19th century buildings are necessarily estimates. Ranging in age from the 1850s through the 1940s, the vernacular forms of construction are exceptionally varied.

The Schuford House, dating from 1880, if not earlier, has two rooms within the side gable main block. The dividing wall contains a chimney. A cross gable rear extension contains the kitchen and work area. The "Railroad Forman's House," dating from ca.1890 if not earlier, has a "saltbox" type of roof, longer on the rear than the front, that is very unusual in Florida. Though moved from the railroad right-of-way, it is the best and only substantial railroad-associated building remaining in the community. The David Chaires House, built in 1875, has a four-square Georgian arrangement. The dividing walls between the side rooms contain double fireplaces. Small connector halls are beside the fireplaces. The exposed all wooden interior, large central hall, and the formality of the arrangement make the house one of the most significant architecturally in the county. The Patterson House, built in 1880, if not earlier, has the community's most complex arrangements. Built with an "H" footprint, the main entrance is in the center of the central block which contains the living and public area. The wing to the west contains the kitchen and work areas, and the wing to the east contains the bedrooms. The Patterson House is the largest in the community and reflects Patterson's commercial success at the turn of the century. The most distinctive vernacular building is the 1892 Methodist Church. It has horizontal siding, front gable roof with corner eaves returns, and belfry tower with a cross at its peak. The unadorned rectangular building has central double doors, flanked by two rectangular windows. Each side elevation has four rectangular windows. An enclosed vestibule is within the main doors with a rope to the belfry hanging from a hole in the ceiling. The chancel has a curved apse that has been squared off with removable plywood.

The 1929, one-story, brick, Chaires School is an excellent example of an institutional construction in a Romanesque Revival Style, and elaborate brickwork. The projecting pediment portico has a Roman arch, and ornate gable cornice with corbel arch brickwork. The projecting gable is supported by two spiraling columns with sculpted capitals made of cast stone. The building's edges, forming an inner arch, have cast stone alternating with brick. The double wooden doors with 9 lights are surmounted by a fan arch transom. Some side elevation windows are paired metal casements divided by engaged spiral columns supporting a blind arch. The building's central hall is flanked by classrooms and offices, with an assembly room to the south. The community was so committed to education that it levied its own school bond to raise the money for the building, which is architecturally one of the finest educational facilities in the county.

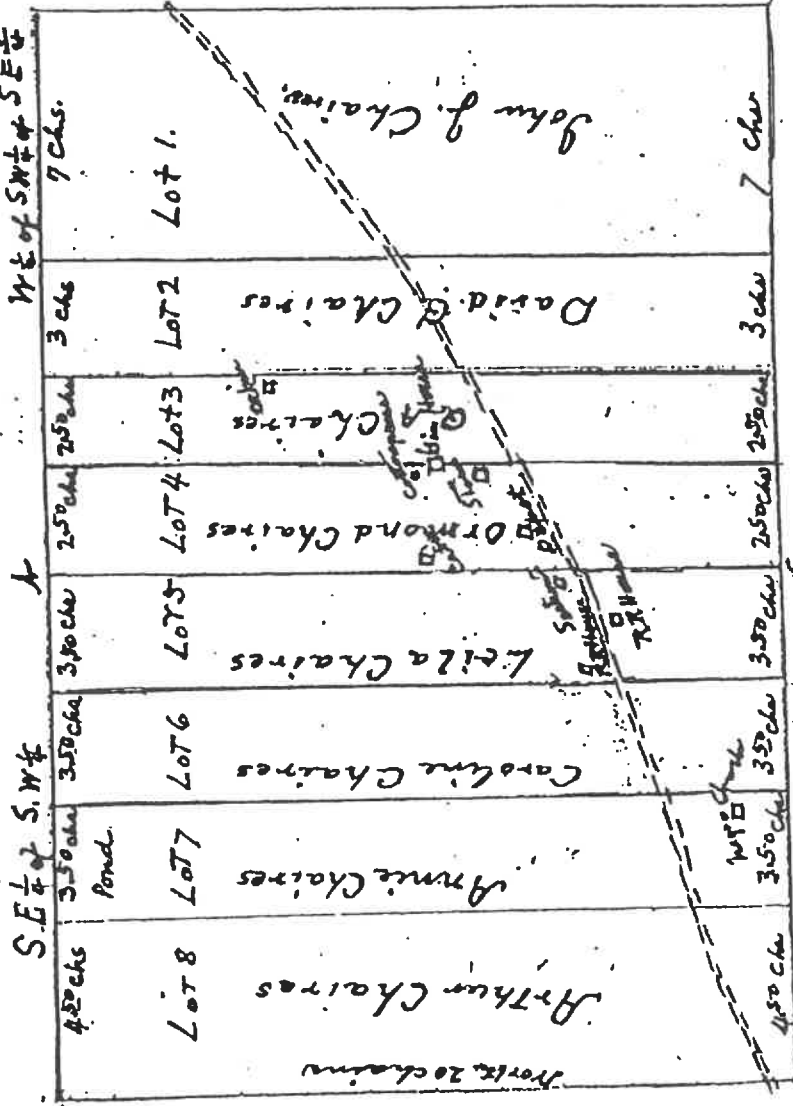
Est 'Amanda Chaires.

Amanda Chaires was Burroughs Chaires' grandmother.
 Green A. Chaires was Burroughs' grandfather.
 David G. Chaires was Burroughs' father.

Plat "A"

Original plat of Chaires.

Sec 34 Twp. 1 N R 2 E



Subdivision of S E 1/4 of SW 1/4 of N 1/2 of SW 1/4 of Sec 34 Township 1 N Range 2 E

By H. T. Blocker - Samuel Chairesy O. Bernard

Commissioners

Oct 1890.



CHAIR'S COMMUNITY U.D., LEON CO, FL

#1





CHAIRES COMMUNITY H.D., LEON CO, FL # 6



