251# Battle of Gainesville (Script by Joanna Grey Talbot and Peggy Macdonald)

Although Florida was quite removed from the front lines of the Civil War, skirmishes and smaller battles did take place within the state. Gainesville served as a breadbasket of the Confederacy, shipping foodstuffs and supplies on the railroad. At one point during the war, 10,000 head of cattle were stored at Paynes Prairie, which was considered safe from Union attacks because it was so far inland. This provided much-needed rations for Confederate soldiers.

In an effort to block shipments from the Old Gainesville Depot, Union forces attacked Gainesville on two occasions. On February 15, 1864, a skirmish occurred between Confederate and Union troops. The 40th Massachusetts Cavalry had entered Gainesville with the hope of capturing two trains. They barricaded themselves at the intersection of present-day University Avenue and Main Street after meeting resistance. The 2nd Florida Cavalry was outnumbered but when they returned the next morning the Union troops had left.

A larger battle took place here a few months later on August 17, 1864. The 2nd Florida Cavalry, led by Captain Jonathan J. Dickison, routed the Union forces and took 300 prisoners. With the fighting taking place in the streets, many citizens watched from the windows of the Beville Hotel, which was at the corner of Southeast 4th Street and 4th Avenue. Women took to the streets to tend the wounded and repeated officers’ orders so soldiers could hear them. The battle was also waged in present-day Sweetwater Park behind the Matheson History Museum.

The Battle of Gainesville was a Confederate victory. The Old Gainesville Depot was saved and is now part of Depot Park.