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HISTORIC SUWANNEE ONCE CALLED 'GUASACA ESQUI'

By HAMPTON DUNN

SUWANNEE RIVER --- The village on Suwanee River, from which this is written, until a few years ago was called Fannin Springs and it is where U.S. 19 crosses the famous stream immortalized by Stephen Foster in his "Old Foks at Home," State Song of Florida.

The river itself has had a number of names. The Indians called it "Sawani" or "Echo River." Natives who lived on the banks called it "Guasaca Esqui"---River of Reeds. Hernando DeSoto, the Spanish conquistador who tramped this way in 1839, renamed it "The River of Deer," and he was disappointed that the river's bottom was not laden with gold, as he had been led to believe. The present name is a corruption of "San Juanee" (Little St. Johns) given by runaway slaves.

Call it what you will, the Suwanee is beautiful in any language. As a matter of fact, Jonathan Daniels, has written that truly it (the Suwannee) is the only river that surpasses in beauty the descriptive power of language. He reminds us that the river rises in the high regions of people's nostalgic love of home, and then flows smoothly across the heart of all humanity. Still the origin of the word remains an intriguing mystery:

Present day newsman, Malcolm B. Johnson, editor of the Tallahassee Democrat, suggests that if Yankee song writer Foster had seen "the lovely Suwannee --- even as it is today --- before he wrote the song that made it damous, he might have written a more immortal piece."

The superb Suwannee made famous by Foster, who never saw the river, nor Florida for that matter, is a fairly narrow stream that meanders from its origin in the dense Okefenokee Swamp in South Georgia for a distance of 245 miles, mostly in Florida, before it flows out into the Gulf of Mexico at a community called Suwannee, north of Cedar Key.