

From Phil Panaritis

in late 1870s, Spofford owns sugar plantations in Texas worked by convict labor (wonder how many were black? see Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War Two, by Douglas Blackmon).

Leasing the property to John Wells in the late 1870's convict labor was potentially available to harvest the cane and corn crops at Osceola. With banking and shipping lines at their disposal Paul N. Spofford and Thomas Tileston were the owners of one of the largest investment and mercantile houses on the east coast, Spofford Tileston & Company of New York. During this same time period they purchased the Waldeck Plantation just south of Osceola. Paul N. Spofford chose to finance his holdings in Osceola on the east coast through the Sewell Estate. In 1880 the estate took over the Osceola Plantation and for the year 1882 John Wells again leased the property. In 1889 Branch T. Masterson bought the property at auction. Harris Masterson, T. L. Smith, John G. Smith, and Branch T. Masterson gained control of the large plantation in the early 1890's. T. L. Smith started to divide part of the plantation up into small tracts and sell them to a group of Italian immigrants in 1893. The Italians seemed to have little knowledge of cane or cotton production and were gone from the area after only a couple of years. After trying rice farming for a couple of years, a scheme which didn't prove profitable, in 1905 T. L. Smith bought out his partners. Cattle ranching became the main use of the property and the plantation remained with heirs of the Smith family until 2007.

<http://lifeonthebrazosriver.com/OsceolaPlantation.htm>

<http://books.google.com/books?id=wtYUAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA313&img=1&zoom=3&hl=en&sig=ACfU3U3dAnY4G4vDYACJ2JL1imEO85WFQ>