

A Swampers Life

The term *swamper* was given to the people who once lived in the Okefenokee Swamp. The Chesser family were swampers who first settled in the Okefenokee in 1858 on what is now called Chesser Island. The homestead you are visiting was built by Tom and Iva Chesser in 1927. The Chesser's were able to grow, catch, or make most of what they needed.

After your tour, complete the activities below. For more information about the Chessers, read the brochure *Chesser Island Homestead*. Answers are in italics.

On the list below, draw a rectangle around each object that can be found in a swampers home, draw an oval around each object found in a modern home, and draw a squiggly line around each object that can be found in both.

Oil Lamp	Refrigerator	Trunk	Computer
Photograph	Telephone	Wood Stove	Chamber pot
Air Conditioner	Well Pump	Fireplace	Bath Tub
Television	Electric light	Quilt	Battery Operated Radio

The Chesser's did not have a supermarket near them to purchase their food. Instead, they grew, collected and hunted for much of their food.

Write down two vegetables they grew, two fruits they grew or collected, and two animals they raised or hunted.

-Corn, tomatoes, sugarcane, butterbeans, sweet potatoes, okra, peas, peanuts, mustard greens, collard greens, squash

-Grapes, peaches, blueberries, huckleberries, wild plums

-Chickens, cattle, hogs, deer, rabbit, squirrel, bear, turkey, ducks, cranes

The Chesser's had to be resourceful, using what was around them to make many of their tools, toys and products to use and to sell.

What were two items that they made out of palmetto and how were they used?

- Brooms to sweep the house, and fans to keep themselves cool.

What were two products the Chesser's made that they sold or traded?

- Cane syrup, turpentine, canned vegetables, honey, furs

To help out the family, children often had chores to do around the homestead.

Why did the children sweep the yard?

- To reduce the chance of fire spreading to their buildings, to keep down insects, and to make poisonous snakes easier to see.

What were two other chores that the Chesser children did around the homestead.

- *Boys: plowing, hunting, chopping firewood, cleaning pens, tending cattle and horses*
- *Girls: cooking, house cleaning, collecting eggs, collecting berries, tending chickens, milking cows, swept porch, churned butter*
- *All children: Sweeping the yard, planting,*

Before there were radios and cell phones to communicate in the swamp, swampers would communicate over long distances by "hollerin'". This is a unique type of yodeling, often used as a hunter's signal to his family that he was bound for home or sometimes just as an expression of happiness.

Find a partner, decide what your "holler" will sound like, then stand in one line with your partner in another line about 30 feet apart. Taking turns with the other students, yell out your "holler" then have your partner yell back the "holler". Tell your fellow students why you chose to "holler" the way you did. Now try to spell-out your "holler" below.

Almost everything the Chesser's owned had a use.

Draw your favorite thing that you have seen at the Chesser Homestead and describe how it was used.



**Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge
Environmental Education Program**

