

Century-Old Florida Sanctuary for Sale

24-Acre Private Island on Lake Marion Available for \$12 million

For nearly 150 years, Bannon Island has remained largely untouched – a private island providing safe harbor to its forests, freshwater shoreline, citrus groves, wildlife, and a beautifully maintained historic homestead. Surrounded by the spring-fed waters of Lake Marion and accessible only by boat or plane, the 24-acre island offers complete privacy, ecological rarity, and an authentic connection to Old Florida's pioneering past.

As of July 30, 2026, for the first time more than a century, [Bannon Island is available for purchase](#) for \$12 million. The sale includes the 24-acre private island and a 14.11-acre additional mainland parcel.

Equal to its remarkable environmental legacy is the island's rich and enduring history. In the 1880s, Irish immigrant Patrick Bannon established a homestead on the island, beginning a legacy of land stewardship that remains today. Over the course of five generations, Bannon's descendants have worked within the landscape, building from its timber, farming its sandy soils, preserving its canopy, and allowing the island's natural character to endure.

Today, mature live oaks, towering cypress trees, native palms, open meadows, ancient citrus groves, and abundant fish and wildlife surround extraordinary architecture. A well-constructed pioneer homestead was thoughtfully restored by Southern Living architect William H. Phillips in the 1990s. This massive undertaking included a contemporary addition which is exquisitely punctuated by a striking, glass-walled L'Orangerie that captures panoramic views of the island.

Bannon Island is more than a private estate. It is one of the last remaining legacy properties of Old Florida where nature, architecture, conservation, and history still coexist.

Bannon Island Throughout Time

- **Early Native American Settlements:** Creek Seminole Chief Chipco and his tribe held a camp on what later became known as Bannon Island.
- **1881:** Irish immigrant Patrick Bannon moves from New York to Central Florida after seeking a warmer climate for his health. He secures the island on Lake Marion from Chief Chipco and establishes a homestead for his family, becoming the first known Catholic settler in Polk County.
- **1886:** A hard freeze destroys Bannon's first agricultural crop of string beans, prompting a transition toward citrus cultivation, which would shape the island's future agricultural significance.
- **Late 1800s:** The family establishes productive citrus groves and gardens while transporting harvested fruit by wagon to the lake's edge, where wooden barges ferry produce to the mainland.
- **Circa 1900:** A carpenter by trade, Bannon completes construction of the island's distinctive octagonal home, designed in the form of a Celtic cross and built largely from timber sourced from the island.
- **Early 1900s:** The Bannon family helps establish Catholic life in Polk County. Patrick Bannon would travel nearly 60 miles by horse and wagon to attend Mass in Tampa before churches existed locally. The family later played an important role in the formation of St. Ann Catholic Church in Haines City.
- **1990s:** Southern Living architect William H. Phillips envisions a comprehensive restoration of the historic home while introducing contemporary structures to complement the island's historic character.
- **1996:** Electricity reaches Bannon Island for the first time, more than a century after the original homestead was built.
- **2004:** Bannon Island suffers a direct hit from Hurricane Charley, yet the historic homestead remains remarkably intact. Rather than removing storm-damaged trees, the family brought a portable sawmill to the island and repurposed storm-felled live oaks and native trees into lumber to support continued restoration and construction, extending the island's tradition of building directly from its own landscape.
- **2026:** Bannon Island is recognized as a Florida Century Pioneer Family Farm.

**Archival documentation of key historical milestones can be made available upon request.*

An Ecosystem Preserved

Bannon Island lies within one of Central Florida's richest freshwater ecosystems, creating a haven for wildlife. The island supports an extraordinary mix of resident and migratory species throughout the year, from bald eagles, limpkins, anhingas, and great blue herons to bobcats, river otters, white-tailed deer, and alligators. Freshwater turtles nest along the island's sandy roads, while the surrounding waters provide a critical feeding habitat for wading birds and waterfowl. Lake Marion, a 3,021-acre spring-fed, freshwater lake, has long been recognized as one of Florida's premier bass fisheries, attracting anglers from across the country and serving as the site of nationally televised fishing tournaments.

Bannon Island's Notable, Native Wildlife

Birds	Mammals	Reptiles & Aquatic Life
- American bald eagle - American coot - Anhinga - Barn owl - Barred owl - Belted kingfisher - Carolina wren - Cormorant - Great blue heron - Great white egret - Limpkin - Mockingbird - Mallard - Purple gallinule - Red-shouldered hawk - Snowy white egret - White ibis - Wild turkey - Wood duck - Vultures	- Armadillo - Bobcat - Marsh rabbit - Raccoon - River otter - Squirrel - White-tailed deer (known to swim between the mainland and island) - Wild boar (rare)	- American alligator - Bluegill - Catfish - Florida softshell turtle - Gar - Largemouth bass - Speckled perch (crappie) - Shellcracker - Snakes - Tilapia (rare)

A Legacy of Land Stewardship

Agriculture has been woven into the fabric of Bannon Island since its earliest days. After first cultivating vegetables in the 1880s, the Bannon family established thriving citrus groves that benefited from the island's unique microclimate. Surrounded by the waters of Lake Marion, the groves were naturally buffered from the hard freezes that affected many mainland orchards, producing abundant harvests of Valencia oranges and Duncan grapefruit for generations. Three irrigation wells continue to support the groves today.

Like many citrus growers across Florida, the island has faced challenges with citrus greening over the past decade. Rather than abandoning the landscape, the family has remained committed to long-term land stewardship. Mature guava trees now provide broad canopies for resident and migratory birds, while avocado, peach, and pineapple plantings continue a tradition of seasonal harvests that has endured for more than a century.

As of 2026, Bannon Island has been recognized as a Florida Century Pioneer Family Farm, honoring its history of agricultural stewardship.

Architecture Rooted in the Landscape

From the original pioneer homestead to the later additions, the architecture on Bannon Island has evolved with the land that grounds it.

The Historic Homestead

Built in the 19th century by Patrick Bannon, a carpenter by trade, the island's original octagonal residence remains its defining landmark. Constructed from timber from the island, the home reflects both practical craftsmanship and innovative architectural ambition.

From above, the house reveals a distinctive Celtic-cross layout. Its eight-sided rooflines rise toward a central cupola, a design that was intended not only for beauty but also to stabilize the structure against high-speed winds. More than a century later, that craftsmanship proved remarkably resilient: the home survived Hurricane Charley despite the loss of surrounding centuries-old Live Oak trees.

Restoration & Contemporary Additions

Beginning in the 1990s, the family undertook a comprehensive restoration led by James Patrick O'Leary II, preserving the historic home while thoughtfully introducing contemporary structures. Architectural renderings for the principal addition were created by late Southern Living architect William H. Phillips, best known for his timeless Southern designs.

In 1996, electricity was brought to the island, and modern HVAC systems were introduced in the 2010s to all living spaces on the island. Today, the historic residence and addition encompass 5,645 total square feet, including 5,034 square feet of living space.

L'Orangerie

The centerpiece of the contemporary addition is a glass-walled kitchen and dining L'Orangerie that serves as the social heart of the island. The pavilion intentionally mirrors elements of the historic home, including its cupola parapet roofline. Designed to blur the line between indoors and out, it opens to the landscape through seven exterior doorways and captures panoramic views across the property.

Overhead hangs a custom blown-glass chandelier created by St. Petersburg-based [Zen Glass Studio & Gallery](#) and conceived by Patrick and Mabel ("Sam") O'Leary. Composed of 100 frosted and clear glass droplets, the 89-inch installation is suspended from an aluminum wheel with stainless steel wire to create the illusion of a thunderstorm. Air

currents from concealed climate-control systems keep the glass in constant, gentle motion.

Just off the L'Orangerie, a dramatic two-story library with a suspended glass floor creates one of the island's most remarkable spaces. The floor is supported by structural cables anchored to the roof trusses, giving the impression that the library floats above the room.