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ADDRESS BEFORE THE FLORIDA HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The history of Florida is more interesting than the most entertaining novel. Sir Walter Scott, Bulwer Lytton and J. Fennimore Cooper might have collaborated in its making. It stirs at times like a beautiful poem. Kipling and Edgar Allen Poe could have combined in its production. It thrills again with all the emotions of a Shakesperian tragedy. There are deep impressions of wild adventure, sordid motives and terrible ordeals in the earlier days. On the other hand, there is found tender romance, as in the search for the Fountain of Youth, the beautiful palms, the flowers, the tropical green, the calm sea and the rippling waves of bay and rivers. There are times of exquisite pathos, like unto the last notes of the dying swan, and I have in mind the treatment of those who were found here in possession, particularly to the orders to execute by the bayonet, if they failed to leave their homes and take up their abode in a strange land beyond the Father of Waters.

Fanaticism, persecution and religious intolerance were exemplified in the earliest days to a degree inconceivable in human beings. All in the name of the King and the Church of God.

Witness the slaughter of the Huguenots at Fort Caroline by Menendez in 1565. Witness again the acts of De Gourgues in 1567, when he hung prisoners "not as Spaniards but traitors, thieves and murderers".

Some came in search of silver, gold and pearls ; others for slaves. Mingled with thugs and ruffians were a few men of the best blood. Missionaries, desirous of introducing Christianity to the savage mind and heart also came.

From religious persecution, some found a refuge-

such as Ribaut and Laudonniere - only to be slaughtered in the name of religion.

Explorers like de Narvaez, de Vaca and discoverers like Hernando de Soto, were attracted to this favored land and traversed it.

Examples of courage, such as displayed by the French Huguenots, by Juan Ortiz, by de Soto, by Don Tristan de Luna, and the Franciscan missionaries, during the period from 1539 to 1560, stand out as unsurpassed.

We can scarcely realize that such a record of cruelty and vindictiveness could be possible as that made from 1513 to 1580, and the most of it by professedly Christian people, invoking the blessings of Deity upon their acts. We must, to understand it, recall that at that stage of civilization and development, certain differences of faith were considered a crime punishable by death. In these days of liberty of conscience and freedom of worship it is difficult to get the viewpoint of these pioneers.

When reflecting upon the fact that on April 12, 1513, on Palm Sunday (Pascua Florida) Ponce de Leon planted a cross, unfurled the royal banner of Spain and took possession of the land in the name of the King of Spain and named it Florida, the name of the locality where he landed being subsequently given by Menendez, August 28, 1565, as St. Augustine; that the founding of St. Augustine occurred forty-two years before Jamestown, in Virginia, was settled by the English, in 1607, and fifty-five years before the Plymouth Colony landed on the shores of New England, in 1620; that at the beginning of the seventeenth century no European colony existed on the Atlantic Coast of North America except at St. Augustine; that from 1620 to 1670 settlements were made on the coast by the French, English, Dutch and Swedes from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Port Royal, South Carolina; that in 1696 Pensacola was occupied by a Spanish force which built and garrisoned a fort there; noting the rapid strides made by these other

settlements and portions of the country, we are inclined to wonder why this oldest in point of discovery and settlement seems now to be the newest in development. But Florida never got fully started on her career until 1876, - less than fifty years ago, which is a brief time in the life of a state.

Mexico, Peru and the Spanish Main had been occupied and exploited in search of gold, silver and pearls, but for fifty years after Ponce de Leon, not a single settlement of the white race, appeared from Mexico to the Polar Seas or from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Let us get a glimpse of what occurred.

The French expedition fitted out and sailed February 1562, under command of Captain Jean Ribaut, entered the river they named the May, because they reached it May 1st, landed and put up a stone, on which was engraved the Arms of France. This was at the entrance to the St. Johns River. Their purpose was to extend the possessions of France, found a new empire and afford a place of refuge for oppressed Huguenots. They sailed away. On June 29, 1564, came Laudonniere with three vessels and built a fort on a high bluff a little farther up the river, and named it Fort Caroline. You recall his fate and that of his associates.

You recall the work of the avenger, de Gourgues, in September 1565.

By treaty between England, Spain and France, in February 1763, the Provinces of East and West Florida were ceded to Great Britain and Havana was restored to Spain. The Spanish flag had floated over St. Augustine for one hundred and ninety years. It was now changed to British. English colonies extended along the Atlantic seaboard, comprising a population of nearly three million, while the population of Florida was then, 1763, not counting Indians and slaves, about seven thousand, Spanish inhabitants, principally in St. Augustine and Pensacola. In the midst of wars, conflicts, desperate,

cruel, unceasing attacks, raids among contending nationals and between them and the Indians - there could be no development, no-growth, no expansion, beyond small, precarious settlements.

When General James Grant became the first English Governor of East Florida in 1763 and Commodore George Johnson of the British Navy became the first Governor of West Florida in 1764, the one located in St. Augustine and the other at Pensacola - there was promise of some progress in development. Immigration for the first time was invited and settlers encouraged. The King's road was constructed in 1765 - from Fort Barington on the Altamaha River, to St. Augustine, by subscription of several public spirited gentlemen. Dr. Andrew Turnbull, a Scotchman; brought from Smyrna, the Greek Islands, Italy and Minorca, about fifteen hundred people and formed a settlement they named New Smyrna, in 1767. Royalists in Georgia, South Carolina and elsewhere, were invited to Florida and some seven thousand came, in 1776.

But the American Revolution was now upon us and adversely affected the Colony of Florida. September 3, 1784, a treaty was promulgated ceding by Great Britain East and West Florida to Spain. In 1795 Spain ceded to France all that portion of West Florida lying west of the Perdido River. In 1803 France ceded the territory of Louisiana to the United States for fifteen million dollars, being the last of her possessions in North America-at the end of two hundred and thirty years.

The war of 1812 came on. In August 1814 a British fleet entered the harbor of Pensacola, placed troops in garrison and with the assent of the Spanish governor, Maurique, the British flag was raised. General Jackson promptly moved against Pensacola and captured it and the forts. Pensacola was restored to Spanish authorities in September 1818.

In February, 1819, a treaty of peace was negotiated

between Spain and the United States, ceding the Floridas to the United States in consideration of five million dollars. The treaty was ratified February 19, 1821. The change of flags took place at St. Augustine, July 16, 1821, and at Pensacola, July 21, 1821. The military authorities conducted affairs until the Act of Congress, March 3, 1822, establishing a territorial government. General Andrew Jackson was the first military governor. Wm. P. Duval of Kentucky was appointed the first civil governor.

In the Congressional Cemetery at Washington a stone monument nine to ten feet high, rough and darkened by age and elements, marks the resting place of his body. The only inscription thereon is, in legible sunken letters, on the east side of the middle section, simply the name, "William P. Duval." It is located on Site Five, Range Forty-six, of the cemetery as platted.

Is it not now in order to give some attention to the monument and add the date of birth and death and the words, "First Governor of the Territory of Florida, 1822-1834".

The first legislative council was held at Pensacola in June, 1822, and West Florida was divided into two counties, Escambia and Jackson, and East Florida into the counties of St. Johns and Duval. The second session was held in St. Augustine in June 1823.

Messrs. W. H. Simmons and J. L. Williams were appointed Commissioners to select a location for the seat of government, "Which they chose near the old Fields of the Tallahassee". This choice was approved and here, in a log cabin, on November 8, 1824, met the next session of the Legislative Council. The first house was erected in 1824 and the Capitol was begun in 1828. The first building, was torn down and a new Capitol completed in 1841.

The Miccosukee Indians were the original occupants

of Florida. The Seminoles, runaways from the Creeks, lived mainly along the Apalachicola River.

A treaty was made with the Indians at Payne's Landing, whereby certain chiefs were to go with the agent, Major John Phagan, to examine a location in Arkansas and make a selection of lands to which the Indians were to remove, in 1834 and 1835, in consideration of \$15,400.00 and \$3,000.00 per annum for ten years. The chiefs went to Arkansas and made selection and agreed to go, but many younger Indians were opposed. The treaty was ratified by the Senate and proclaimed by President Jackson, April 12, 1834.

At a council April 6, 1835, the Indians were notified that force would be employed if they did not go by July 1, 1836. It was estimated the whole number of Indians in Florida at that time was 2,000, of whom 500 were warriors. Billy Bowlegs in an interview at New Orleans January 12, 1858, said that there were 4,000 Indians, with 800 negro slaves. This is more nearly correct. They refused to carry out the treaty because the slaves refused to go to Arkansas. Micanopy became the Chief, succeeded by Osceola, then Billy Bowlegs.

War ensued and lasted for seven years. It cost \$40,000,000 and 3,000 lives. The Indians who removed to Arkansas and those killed numbered, it was reported, 1,500. The war was declared ended August 14, 1842.

On December 3, 1838, a convention assembled at St. Joseph for the purpose of adopting a constitution and finished its work January 11, 1839.

Application for statehood was postponed by reason of the war with the Indians and the subject remained quiescent until 1845. Florida and Iowa were admitted as states of the Union, respectively, by Act of March 3, 1845.

A supplemental act gave Florida a grant of eight entire sections of land to establish a seat of Government, also the sixteenth section in every township or its equi-

valent for the support of public schools and two entire townships, in addition to the townships already reserved, for the establishing and maintenance of two seminaries of learning, one to be located east and one west of the Suwannee River, and 500,000 acres for internal improvements, besides five per cent. of the net proceeds of the sale of public lands within the state and to be devoted to the purposes of education.

At the election held under the new constitution in 1845, William D. Moseley was elected governor and a legislature was also elected, which convened at the Capitol in Tallahassee the 23rd day of June, 1845. David Levy had been elected Member of Congress. He subsequently resigned and was elected to the United States Senate for the long term and James D. Westcott for the short term. In December 1845 Mr. Levy's name was changed to Yulee, his ancestral name.

By Act of Congress, September 28, 1850, all the swamp and overflowed lands belonging to the United States in Florida, were donated to the State for the purpose of being reclaimed, estimated at twelve million acres. This was an underestimate. They amounted to about twenty million acres.

With the exception of twenty miles from Tallahassee to St. Mark's, there was not a railroad in the state in 1855. But by 1857 a railroad was completed between Fernandina and Cedar Keys, one graded between Waldo and Ocala and another completed between Jacksonville and Tallahassee. By 1895, we had 2,736 miles of railroad. We now have 9,500 miles and are adding more.

There was an Indian outbreak in 1857 which the state had to suppress, and its claim against the Federal government was subsequently paid, amounting to \$692,948.00.

On January 10, 1861, the Ordinance of Secession was passed, declaring "The State of Florida is hereby declared a Sovereign and independent Nation". Later

Florida joined the other states in the formation of the Southern Confederacy.

Florida sent more soldiers into the field to maintain its position, than it had registered voters. This evidences its sincerity and heroism. I add nothing but to quote from the inscription on the monument to the women of the Confederacy at Rome, Georgia, written by Woodrow Wilson-

“To the Women of the Confederacy whose fidelity, whose purity, whose courage, whose gentle genius in love and ‘in counsel, kept the home secure, the family a school of virtue, the State a court of honor; who made war a season of heroism and of peace a time of healing; the guardians of our tranquility and of our strength.”

The Supreme Court of the United States sustained, in the name, the principles contended for by those who sacrificed and suffered in defending what was called “the Lost Cause.”

On May 20, 1865, the Confederate forces made formal surrender to General McCook.

The Florida of the early Territorial days was sparsely settled, was unsafe for domicile or travel, there being no highways or means of transportation. Compare that condition with the realities of today and we can understand why Florida has become the most inviting area under the bending sky. When we contemplate what the next century will show, the imagination is taxed.

From a population of a hundred million north of us, people are coming in ever increasing numbers to make Florida their home, having found that this climate means comfort and joy, this sunshine health and pleasure, this air rejuvenation and prolonged life. They have but recently discovered the hills, lakes, bays, rivers and springs with their wealth, the forests with their rich semi-tropical and tropical growth; the treasures of clays, rock and phosphate underneath the surface; the great variety of soil, yielding freely abundant products of every kind,

from staple crops to choicest fruits and vegetables, as well as opportunities and conditions favoring multitudinous industries and successful enterprises. Bountiful nature, including the favorable seasons, have blessed this land, whose shores are bathed by the heaped waves of the Atlantic on the East as they follow the moon and by the calmer blue waters of the Gulf on the West and South.

As this choicest portion of the earth becomes better known and appreciated, and intelligence and energy supplement the work of Providence by making fruitful use of what is laid before us and by beautifying and improving and developing where indicated, our vision thrills as we glimpse "a future splendid and the glory that is to be".

History will continue to be a recital of human behavior. Upon that record will depend the prosperity of the state, the happiness and welfare of the people.

If we keep our face ever towards the sunlight the shadows will fall behind.

DUNCAN U. FLETCHER