

# Florida Historical Quarterly

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Volume 4  
Number 1 *Florida Historical Quarterly, Vol 4,*  
*Issue 1*

Article 5

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1925

## The Occupation of Pensacola Bay, 1689-1698

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### Recommended Citation

Dunn, William Edward (1925) "The Occupation of Pensacola Bay, 1689-1698," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 4: No. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol4/iss1/5>

THE OCCUPATION OF PENSACOLA BAY,  
1689-1698 <sup>1</sup>

One of the most notable results of the series of maritime expeditions sent out by Spain in search of La Salle's colony was the rediscovery of and revival of interest in Pensacola Bay, a region which had figured conspicuously in the early activities of the Spaniards in Florida. Barroto and Romero on their rediscovery of the bay in 1686 had been unanimous in praising it<sup>2</sup> as a most excellent and desirable port. It was considered to be far superior to Mobile Bay, which had been identified as the old Bay of Espiritu Santo. No suggestion for its occupation seems to have been made, however, until the discovery of the ruined settlement of La Salle proved beyond doubt that the French had actually begun their efforts to secure a foothold on the mainland of the Gulf of Mexico.

The name most intimately associated with the movement for the occupation of Pensacola Bay is that of Andres de Pez, leader of three of the voyages that had been made in search of the French colony. Always ready to take advantage of any opportunity for self-advancement, Pez saw in the Pensacola project an excellent chance to win wealth and distinction. By his persistent efforts he was to arouse the inter-

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<sup>1</sup> The source of this article is the author's monograph, *Spanish and French Rivalry in the Gulf Region of the United States, 1678-1702*, published as *University of Texas Bulletin* No. 1705, Austin, Texas, 1917, to which due acknowledgment is made. This monograph was a result of an extended investigation by the writer in the *Archivo General de Indias* at Seville, Spain.

Juan Jordan, the diarist of that expedition, describes it as "the best bay I have ever seen in my life". He tells also of a visit made to the village of the Panzacolas, an Indian tribe which was not long afterwards exterminated, and from which the name Pensacola was derived.

est of the indifferent royal officials of Spain in Pensacola Bay, and therefore deserves the credit of being considered the real originator of the movement which resulted in its occupation.<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after the news of Alonso de Leon's successful expedition of 1689 in search of La Salle's colony reached Mexico, Captain Pez presented to the viceroy a memorial in which he formally proposed the occupation of Pensacola Bay. He described the general advantages of the region, its abundant products of fruit, timber, and buffalo.<sup>4</sup> There was enough timber in the vicinity of the bay, he said, to build all of the fleets of Europe. It was in all ways the best harbor on the Gulf coast, and could easily be fortified, as two projecting points of land commanded the entrance of the channel. It behooved Spain to lose no time in establishing a fort and settlement there before the French renewed their activities. He believed that there could be no question but that the French would soon follow up La Salle's expedition by a more formidable one. If they had gone to great expense to found a colony at such a worthless place as San Bernado Bay, it was reasonable to expect that they would covet so desirable a port as Pensacola. That they already knew of its existence could not be doubted, since the many foreigners who had accompanied the various maritime expeditions would long since have spread the news of its discovery. Pez repeated the familiar warning that, if the French should occupy the bay, they would be able to attack at will the fleets and galleons, and, by opening up communication with their settlements in Canada,

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<sup>3</sup> *Relacion de servicios de Andres de Pez*, April 28, 1689; Pez to the king, undated (probably 1691).

<sup>4</sup> Pez's memorial, it seems, was not based entirely upon personal observation. The diaries of the voyages he had made in Gulf waters showed that he had not been able to enter the bay.

would be in a good position to invade the frontier provinces of New Spain.

Recognizing fully the exhausted condition of the royal treasury, Pez suggested a plan by which the expense of the undertaking might be reduced to a minimum. He proposed the radical step of abandoning St. Augustine, removing its presidio to Pensacola, and making the latter place the capital of the whole province of Florida. The port of St. Augustine, Pez argued, was of little benefit to Spain. Its harbor was a poor one and seldom frequented. Trade between Florida and Cuba was carried on chiefly by way of Apalache. The king simply spent 96,000 pesos annually for the upkeep of the presidio, and derived therefrom no returns whatever. With half that amount, or even less, a fort could be maintained at Pensacola, and a harbor of unspeakable excellence could be opened up. If the expense of such a project seemed too great, he would remind the viceroy that even greater sums had been spent on the Phillipines and California with no returns whatever; whereas many obvious advantages would be secured from the occupation of Pensacola, not the least of which would be the conversion of the Indians, who had already shown themselves anxious to receive the true faith.<sup>5</sup>

The viceroy, the Count of Calve, apparently did not question the truth of Pez's statements in regard to Pensacola. He agreed with Pez that a bay of such wonderful natural advantages would inevitably arouse the cupidity of the French, and would lead them to found a colony there unless steps were taken to anticipate them. He had serious doubts, however, as to the advisability of abandoning St. Augustine, and

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<sup>5</sup> The memorial of Pez has not been found, but its contents have been drawn from a number of documents which give summaries of his proposals: Viceroy to Council of the Indies; consulta of the Junta de Guerra, etc.

asked Pez if such action would not leave Florida exposed to invasions from Virginia. Pez assured him that there was no danger from that source. Despite the viceroy's confidence in Pez he was unwilling to authorize such momentous measures as were proposed in the memorial. Instead, he resolved to send Pez to Spain to present the project in person to the royal authorities. In order to keep the plans as secret as possible, an unusual procedure was adopted.

The viceroy made no official report on Pez's proposition, but wrote a personal letter to the president of the Council of the Indies, strongly endorsing the plan for the occupation of Pensacola Bay, and explaining his reluctance to take action on his own responsibility. Pez was entrusted with the delivery of this letter, and was instructed to confer privately with the president before submitting his project to the council as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

Captain Pez sailed for Spain in the summer of 1689, taking with him as ocular evidence of French designs two Frenchmen who had just been captured in Texas. At the same time a copy of Pez's memorial was sent to the king through the usual channel. Pez was in Madrid by January, 1690, but before he was ready to begin the promotion of his project, his memorial had gone through the regular routine, and had reached the hands of the *fiscal* of the Council of the Indies who drew up his recommendations. While he believed that Pensacola Bay was well adapted for settlement, and that its seizure by a foreign nation would endanger the king's colonial dominions, he opposed the measures suggested by Pez for two main reasons. First because of the chronic exhausted condition of the royal treasury ; and second, because he

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<sup>6</sup> The viceroy to the Marquis of Los Velez, June 29, 1689; the viceroy to the king, Jan. 13, 1693.

thought it would be extremely unwise to abandon St. Augustine. That post, he said, must be held on account of the proximity of the English. Far from being relinquished, it should be aided and strengthened in every possible way. Once allow the English to gain a foothold in Florida, they would spread rapidly over the whole province, and threaten New Spain itself. The *fiscal* noted, furthermore, that the viceroy had apparently not deemed Pez's proposition of sufficient importance to merit a special report. It would be impossible, he said, to take any action in such a serious matter on the strength of Pez's uncorroborated statements, and he therefore advised that no further consideration be given the memorial. The *fiscal* believed that Pensacola was too important a region to be neglected, however, and that some steps should be taken to strengthen Spain's hold upon it. He suggested 'the employment of the favorite Spanish method for this end—the founding of missions among the Indians. This plan would be not only the most economical, but also the most satisfactory from all other points of view. He then definitely recommended the sending of missionaries to the Pensacola tribe. In view of the reports, he said, further knowledge could be obtained, and further measures planned in a more intelligent way. He suggested that the same policy should be adopted in regard to the Texas nation. The natives of these two regions should never be bound out for service (*encomendados*), but should be placed perpetually under the protection of the crown, and allowed all possible rights and privileges. By such means, the *fiscal* (Martin de Solis y Miranda) believed, the Gulf region could be held against any foreign encroachment, and at small cost to the royal treasury.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Respuesta fiscal Feb. 22, 1690.

When Captain Pez delivered the viceroy's letter to the president of the Council the whole matter was placed in an entirely different light. In a report which Solis made about a month after his first opinion was given, he strongly recommended the adoption of the measures proposed by Pez, with the exception of that which related to the abandonment of St. Augustine. The bay should be strongly fortified, and a presidio must be erected there.<sup>8</sup>

The matter dragged and when a vote was finally taken only one member agreed with the *fiscal* and supported Pez's proposition, the other councillors steadfastly opposed any plan for the founding of a presidio and settlement at Pensacola. The place, they said, was more than three hundred leagues from the cities of New Spain, and in a region of the Gulf which could be navigated only with great idifficulty and danger. Furthermore, despite the fact that Pez had tried to convey the impression that he was the first to recognize the advantages of the bay, the information contained in his memorial was by no means new. The bay had been well known to the first explorers of Florida, and had often been mentioned in their memorials. Although the English and French had often visited the bay in their frequent invasions of Florida, they had never evinced a desire to hold it permanently. It was probable therefore that the soil was not so fertile as the "new Columbus" claimed. If the bay was found so desirable as claimed, the viceroy should proceed to close its harbor by sinking a few old ships in the entrance to the channel. The viceroy should be given to understand that under no

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<sup>8</sup> This *respuesta* has not been found. The general contents as given have been inferred from other documents which will be cited below.

circumstances was the presidio of St. Augustine to be weakened.<sup>9</sup>

The final report of the Junta de Guerra was made in March of the following year, and contained practically the arguments given. The viceroy should be ordered to adopt the most efficient measures to prevent the French or any other foreigners from establishing a settlement on the Gulf coast.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding the ardent opposition of the Junta de Guerra, King Charles II was pleased to adopt an unusual course of action. He exercised his own judgment, rejected the recommendations of the majority of the Junta, and concurred in the opinion of the *fiscal* and his sole supporter, to the effect that Pez's plan for the occupation of Pensacola Bay should be carried out, with the exception of that part which called for the abandonment of St. Augustine. The resolution of the king was duly published, and obedience promised by the Junta. But owing to the continued opposition of that body the formal *cedula* was not issued until June 26, 1692, and then in a modified form. The viceroy was definitely commanded to send land and sea expeditions to make a detailed examination of Pensacola Bay, and to explore the region westward as far as Espiritu Santo Bay. The Pensacola project had finally reached the stage of preliminary action.

Upon receipt of the royal dispatch, the Count of Galve took immediate steps to carry out the exploration which had been ordered. A junta general was held in Mexico on December 17 to discuss necessary measures. It was unanimously agreed that Andres de Pez, who by this time had been promoted to the post of admiral of the windward squadron, would be

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<sup>9</sup> "Voto del Sr. Granxa", undated.

<sup>10</sup> Consulta of the Junta de Guerra, March 22, 1691.

the logical person to place in command of the sea expedition. Dr. Carlos de Siguenza y Gongora, one of the most noted scientists and scholars of New Spain, was selected by the viceroy to accompany and assist Pez. Siguenza at this time was professor of mathematics in the Royal University of Mexico, and chief cosmographer of the kingdom. Laureano de Torres y Ayala, governor-elect of Florida, was chosen to lead the land expedition. Torres had only recently arrived in Mexico to take possession of his post.

Pez and Siguenza were furnished with separate sets of instructions. Pez was ordered to equip two war vessels for the voyage. Each was to have a complement of one hundred and twenty men and to carry supplies for eighty days. The departure from Vera Cruz was to be made at the end of March or early in April, and the course directed straight to Pensacola. Soundings should be made of the bay; the best sites for a presidio and settlement determined upon, the rivers of the vicinity explored, and investigations made in regard to stone quarries, the fruits and produce of the country, the nature of the Indians, and all other matters of interest. Siguenza's instructions were limited to the details of the work in which he was expected to engage. He was to draw maps of Pensacola Bay, the coast line of the Gulf, and to write an accurate and scientific description of the regions visited."

The two vessels sailed from Vera Cruz on March 25. Siguenza kept a journal which is a striking testimony to his reputation as a scholar, and constitutes the chief authority for the expedition. The Mississippi was sighted in seven days and in six more Pensacola Bay itself was reached. As the ships sailed

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<sup>11</sup> Instructions to Pez, Jan. 12, 1693; instructions to Siguenza.

into the broad expanse of water, Siguenza recalled the occasions on which it had been visited by explorers in the past: how it had been described by the Inca in his History of Florida ; how it had been the scene of the misfortunes of Narvaez and Cabeza de Vaca ; how it must be the same bay which Hernan de Soto had called Achussi; and the one which Tristan de Luna y Arrellano had attempted to colonize at the command of Philip II. Remembering that the bay had been entered by the last named leader with his great armada of fourteen ships on St. Mary's Day (August 14), and had therefore been named after the Virgin, Pez and Siguenza decided that it would be unjust to defraud it of such a great honor. They accordingly rechristened it "Bahia de Santa Maria de Galve"<sup>12</sup> the cognomen of the viceroy being added to the holy name of the Virgin. Admiral Pez ordered that the new name should be inscribed on the official map of the expedition. The *Te Deum Laudamus* was sung, and formal possession taken of the bay in the name of the king. While these ceremonies were in progress, the vessels had passed through the channel and at three o'clock anchor was east in the inner harbor.

The shallop which had been carried along was at once made ready for the work ahead. On the following day, April 8, an exploring party was organized, which included Pez, Siguenza, and the pilot Pedro Fernandez Cenrra, and Capt. Juan Jordan. Jordan had been with Barroto and Romero on the voyage of 1686, and since that time had been one of the most enthusiastic panegyrists of Pensacola Bay. He was to be closely associated with its later occupation. The entrance to the bay was first examined, in order to

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<sup>12</sup> This name was in later years corrupted into "Santa Maria de Galvez", probably because of the prominence of the great Galvez family.

learn where it would be possible to build fortifications that would command the entire channel. A trigonometrical calculation was made by Siguenza, and it was found that the distance between the nearest points was approximately three thousand *varas*. The point on the east was named "Punta de Siguenza". While the professor was engrossed in his mathematical problems, the other members of the party were enjoying the idyllic pastime of fishing, and marvelled at the great variety of fine fish which swarmed in the water. The channel was next sounded. Its greatest depth was found to be eight *varas* for a distance of about twelve hundred *varas*, gradually becoming less as the shore was approached on each side. The party then landed on the western extremity. A prominent bluff was named "Barranca de Santo Tome". Although the beach was covered with dazzling white sand, Siguenza praised it highly, and thought it would be an excellent site for a fort. During the succeeding days, the inner shores of the bay and the streams which flowed into it were explored. On the 11th the mouth of the first river was found. It was named in honor of Captain Jordan. As the boat was turned into the stream, several dark objects were seen on the banks, and their rapid flight proved them to be Indians. A landing was made, but only the deserted camp was found, guarded by a fiercely vociferous dog. A lighted fire was still burning, and over it hung half-cooked pieces of buffalo meat. The place was called "El Robledal" from the many oaks in the vicinity.' After erecting a cross and leaving a quantity of food for the natives the party continued up the stream, which Siguenza notes as being lined with majestic pines, suitable for ship masts. Soon several more Indians were seen, and an effort was made to communicate with them. But

the aborigines threw away the burdens which they carried, and retreated in headlong flight. Their camp was found nearby, surrounded by a multitude of articles, which the Indians had abandoned in their haste. Charred buffalo meat reduced to a fine powder, pottery, horn spoons, gourds, furs, red ochre, wooden combs, and as Siguenza says, "a thousand other little things" were noted. The place was called "El Baratillo", from its resemblance to a junk-shop. The river was ascended several leagues further, but the fallen trunks of trees barred further progress. On the return trip, the camps of the Indians were again visited. They were still deserted. The articles that had been left by the Spaniards, however, had been removed, and at El Robledal the Indians had erected another cross, leaving a buffalo skin on it as a peace offering.<sup>13</sup>

On the following day a much larger river was found, which was called 'Rio del Almirante', in honor of Admiral Pez. Siguenza said that he hoped that the name would perpetuate forever the memory of the man who was endeavoring to add a new kingdom to the royal dominions. The river was traversed for several leagues, and was judged to be easily navigable for ships of at least four hundred tons' burden. On the 13th a search was made for the village of the Pensacola tribe, but no signs of human habitation were found, except for a solitary hovel deserted by its former occupants. The active work of exploration was continued until the 17th, the whole compass of the bay having been examined by that time. A third river was found, which was named "Rio de Jovenazo", after the Duke of Jovenazo, one of the prominent officials of Spain. Nine days were then spent in mak-

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<sup>13</sup> From the appearance of their canoes, these Indians were believed to live a considerable distance away.

ing preparations for the continuation of the voyage. Wood and water had to be secured, and a new mainmast placed on one of the ships. When the old mast was removed it was found to be badly decayed. Only a miracle could have prevented it from giving way during the bad weather that had been experienced. To attest their gratitude to Providence, the explorers erected a mammoth cross on Siguenza Point, and it was duly consecrated amid the booming of the frigates' guns. Just as mass was beginning, a soldier died, and was later buried near the majestic cross. Two days later (April 26) the ships sailed out of the bay, having remained there just one day less than three weeks.

**WILLIAM EDWARD DUNN.**

*(In continuation, in the next issue of the QUARTERLY, there will be recounted the settlement of Pensacola by Andres de Arriola - the material for that narrative also having been found by Dr. Dunn in the Archives of the Indies at Seville, Spain.)*