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Florida's Spanish Missions

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FLORIDA'S SPANISH MISSIONS

There were two purposes in the coming of the Spaniards to America. One was the desire for gain ; the other the hope of making Christians of the natives. Unfortunately the two conflicted. The fierce desire for gold, that led to the inhuman treatment of the Indians, for a time rendered of no avail the efforts of the priests.

No gold was found in Florida and the country was practically abandoned by Spain after DeSoto's visit. One of the faithful sons of the Church however believed that it would afford a fertile field for Christian labor. Luis Cancer de Bastoro in 1536 went to Guatemala as a missionary, where he was successful in converting a fierce tribe of Indians. This work accomplished, his mind turned toward heathen Florida. He went to Spain in 1546 and asked the King for permission to establish a mission in that land. Charles V. consented, saying "Four tyrants (Ponce, De Allyon, Narvaez and DeSoto) have entered that land and done much mischief. I will now try the priests."

After considerable difficulty Fr. Cancer gathered a small band of three priests and a lay brother. A small vessel was hired to carry them to Florida, which they reached at or near Tampa Bay ten years after the coming of DeSoto. On the shore they saw Indians, and, near by, houses. One priest, the layman and an Indian woman who had been in Havana (probably one of the twenty sent to his wife by DeSoto) landed, but were immediately captured and taken to the houses.

A white captive among the Indians reported to the boat that the Spaniards had been slain. Nothing daunted, Father Luis commanded that he be rowed

to the land. The sailors refused to make a landing and when they would row no nearer the priest boldly sprang into the water and holding aloft his crucifix came to land but was immediately struck down. The others sorrowfully left Florida.

Let the name of Luis Cancer de Bastoro be remembered as the first Christian martyr in Florida. We honor those who came to the new world seeking wealth and fame. Greater honor is due the men who came to carry out the command of their Master "Go teach all nations".

Spain claimed all of North America by right of discovery and as a gift from the Pope. Menendez came in 1565 to drive out the heretics who had settled at the mouth of the St. Johns River and with him came four priests. He was a zealous Catholic, and wishing to convert the natives he built a chapel at St. Augustine, a second one at San Mateo on the site of the Huguenot Fort Caroline, and a third at Antonia on Charlotte Harbor. His success was small and he wrote his King that it was useless to try to convert the natives by the use of soldiers. During the twenty months Menendez was in Florida he established seven forts on the Atlantic coast and two on the west coast. Antonia was named after his Indian wife. Tocobago was located on Tampa Bay and received the name of the local chief.

In 1566 seven Jesuits settled on the Potomac River, where all were murdered by the Indians. The same fate befell the settlement at Tocobago. At Antonia the Indians upon whom the Spaniards depended for food deserted the settlement after it had been in existence for two years and it had to be abandoned.

Of the nine locations St. Augustine alone continued to exist, its inhabitants being largely supported by the home government.

The first priests were of the Dominican order; they were followed by the Jesuits who soon abandoned the field. In 1577 the Franciscans came, and the further history of Florida missions is the story of the Franciscans.

In 1592 the five of that order in the country had gained a foothold among the Indians. In 1593 twelve more were permitted to come. Their names are given in the record. One, Fr. Francis Pareja, reduced the language of the Timucans to writing and in 1606 published a catechism in that tongue. Another penetrated one hundred and fifty miles inland and established a mission called Ocute.

Three missions were established by five priests, whose names are given, along the coast north of St. Augustine. In 1597 four of the five met with death at the hands of the natives and the fifth was made a slave but was later exchanged for a captive Indian. By 1606 these stations were again established by the missionaries. At this time the Spanish King considered the abandonment of Florida and moving the Christian Indians to San Domingo. The country had cost the Crown a large amount of money since the days of Menendez, there had been no return and there was no prospect of any returns for the future. The missionaries earnestly protested and they were allowed to remain.

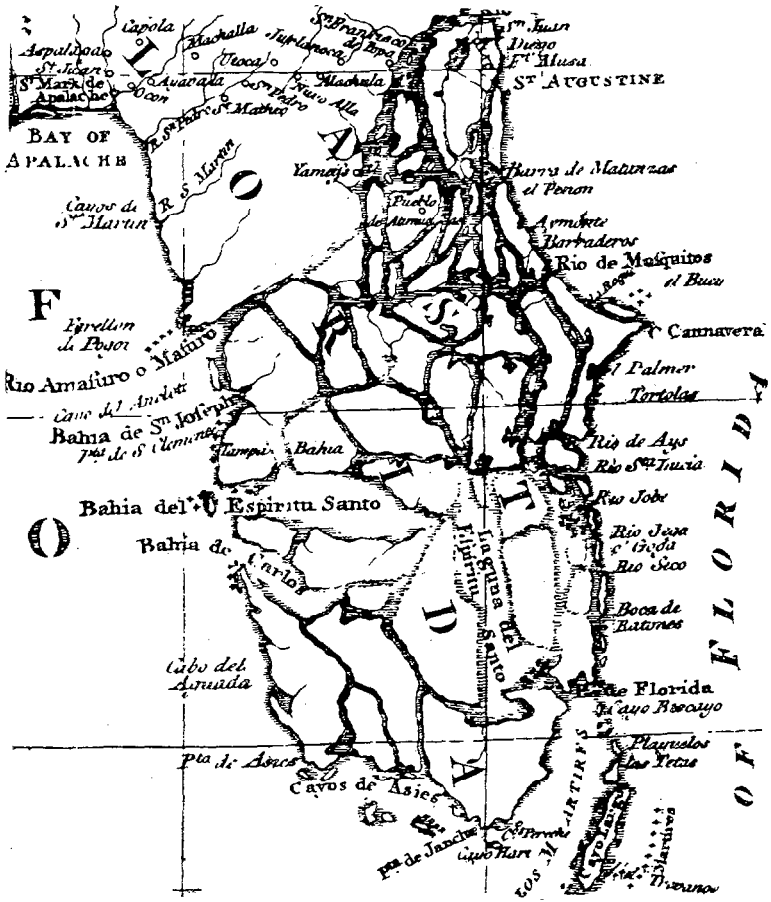
In 1612 twenty-four more priests came, in the following year eight, and in 1614 twelve. The new arrivals were divided between the Timucans and Yamasees. By this time the Indians had learned that the coming of the priests was to be of benefit to them and they were baptized in large numbers. Their progress toward civilization was such that the King ordered that a portion of the revenue from Mexico should be devoted to the Florida missions.

In 1633 the Apalaches, a tribe that lived between the Suwannee and the Apalachicola rivers, asked that missionaries might be sent to their country. In 1634 there were in all forty-four stations scattered over the present Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, and thirty thousand natives had been baptized. In 1635 it was reported that the first missionary to the Apalaches had baptized over five thousand of that nation.

About 1639 the missions in the western part of the peninsula, several of which appear to have been located upon the rivers, were supplied by ships that came to the west coast. Schools were established among the Indians by the priests and documents were signed by the chiefs writing their own names. The natives settled about the missions and the ways of the Indians were gradually being changed.

There follows a list of the stations in 1655: Nombre de Dios was about a mile without the City of St. Augustine. Our Lady of Guadalupe was ten miles away. To the north there were seven along the coast, the farthest being one hundred and fifty miles distant. The ruins of some of these sea coast missions can still be seen. "In another direction" were eleven ranging from seventy to one hundred and fifty miles from the Capital. In the Apalache country there were eight, and between Apalache and St. Augustine there were four. To the south there were four. This makes a total of thirty-six. Each mission had a church, a house for the priest, and a school was maintained at each for the children.

Diligent efforts have been made to locate these settlements in the Florida of today without much success. One, that of St. Luis, is definitely placed two miles west of Tallahassee. The *Pensacola Gazette of* April 11, 1825, contains an article on the ruins of St. Luis. Two brick buildings could then be outlined, one



THE FLORIDA PENINSULAR
(From Jefferys' map of the British Possessions in America,
London, 1763.)

60x40 feet and one 20x30 feet. Grapevines were still growing in lines, and a cannon taken from the ruins was fired in Tallahassee Jan. 8th, 1825, on the tenth anniversary of General Jackson's victory at New Orleans. A church bell was found in a pond about forty-five miles east of Tallahassee. This bell and a bronze candlestick found at New Smyrna are now in the possession of our society. A bronze helmet, exhibited at the Florida Centennial, was found at the ruins of St. Luis. I have been unable to learn of any other relics of the mission stations.

In 1740 a Frenchman named Delahaye was engaged in making maps. One of his elegant productions was a map of the Spanish countries bordering on the Gulf. A copy of this map belonging to Mr. G. L. Barnhill of St. Petersburg is here reproduced in part. Although the towns were all destroyed before its publication it shows their location, at least approximately.

In 1763 Florida was ceded by Spain to Great Britain. The same year a book was published in London entitled *An Account of Florida*, by Wm. Roberts. It purports to locate the towns as follows: "Beginning at St. Marks it was fifteen miles east to Ocono (St. Louis), ten miles farther to Ayuballa, twenty-four to Machalla, eleven to St. Matheo, the two last on Rio Vista River which empties fifteen miles below St. Marks, twenty-five miles farther to San Pedro on the San Pedro River, which empties into the Gulf eighty miles from St. Marks, seventy-one miles to Utoca, twelve to Movalla on the east side of the Carolina River, eight miles to Alachua, eight to Jurlanoca, twenty-six to a Spanish settlement on the St. Johns and thirty to St. Augustine, a total of one hundred and eighty-eight miles". The book contains a map of the British possessions in North America, of which the Florida portion is herewith reproduced.

Both England and Spain claimed the Atlantic coast. A settlement was made by the English at Charleston. A Scotch colony came to Port Royal in 1683, but in 1688 the Spanish, coming from St. Augustine, destroyed the Port Royal settlement. It was feared that Charleston would be attacked and Governor Moore of South Carolina determined to drive the Spanish from Florida.

In 1702 a force of four hundred Carolinians with some Indian allies travelled by land to St. Augustine, destroying the Spanish settlements on the coast. Moore with ten small vessels went by water and entered the harbor. The inhabitants fled to the well built fort. After a fifty day siege Governor Moore, seeing two large ships coming to the relief of the inhabitants, burnt his vessels and the buildings of the town and retreated to South Carolina. Moore was deposed as governor.

Not satisfied to remain under a charge of cowardice, in December 1703 he enlisted a force of fifty Carolinians and started for the Apalache country. On the way he gathered a thousand Creek and Choctaw Indians.

In January of 1704 they reached the Spanish mission of Ayuballa. The result of his expedition is told in a report he made to the Governor of South Carolina, and published in the Boston News of May 1st, 1704. I copy the main portions:

"We came to a town and fort called Ayuballa. We defeated the Spanish General and four hundred Apalaches. We broke into the church. The only white man in it, a fryor, came out and begged for mercy. We took about twenty seven men alive and fifty eight women and children. The Indians took about as many more of each sort.

"The next morning the Captain of St. Lewis came

to fight us which we did, beat him and took him and eight of his men prisoners. Two days after I sent to the Cassique of Ibitatachka, who was in a strong and well made fort, to come and make his peace with us which he did and compounded with his church plate and ten horses laden with provisions.

“After this we marched through five towns which had all strong forts and defenses against small arms which surrendered without conditions. I have in my company all the people of three towns and part of four more. We have totally destroyed all the people of four towns, so that we left in the Apalache but one town that compounded with us a part of St. Lewis and the people of one town that ran away altogether. The number of free Apalache Indians that are now under my protection and bound with me for Carolina is thirteen hundred and one hundred negroes.”

The Spanish records tell that General Mexia with four hundred Apalaches twice repulsed his assailants, but that his ammunition giving out he was obliged to surrender. Three priests, the general and many of the captive Christian Indians were burned at the stake. How “all the people of four towns” were destroyed is not told.

I know of no equal record of religious and racial hatred. The missions of Ybitatachka and St. Luis were soon abandoned. At the time of the siege by Oglethorpe in 1740 only the two towns of St. Marks and St. Augustine remained in that part of Florida.

A. H. PHINNEY.