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Jeannette Thurber Conner

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THE NINE OLD WOODEN FORTS  
OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Part II

After Drake burned the fort at St. Augustine in 1586, the settlers gave the name of San Marcos to the wooden building which took its place - Fort Number Seven. They had long wanted and asked for a fort of stone, and it would seem as if the discovery of coquina by Pedro Menendez Marques, in 1580<sup>19</sup>, should have helped to bring about the realization of their wishes; but always, something came up to prevent it.

Gutierre de Miranda was Governor and Captain-General of Florida from 1589 to 1592. His temper, his conduct to the soldiers, and the sufferings and injustice they endured, caused another rebellion at St. Augustine, so that the project of erecting a substantial fort of stone did not take definite shape before the King and the Council of the Indies until Hernando de Mestas made two voyages from Florida to Spain in 1593 and 1595. Governor Domingo Martinez de Avendano sent him in 1595, with a memorial and plan advocating an eighth fort, this time to be built of coquina. The map or plan, which is anonymous, is nearly as interesting as Boazio's and less well known. Its description of the fort the colony then had, reads as follows: "This is the old fort which is in St. Augustine, called San Marcos. It is entirely of wood, propped up by thirty-two supports which are indicated. All of it is in danger of collapsing, inside and out, and it is on the

<sup>19</sup> Menendez Marques to Philip II, St. Augustine, December 27, 1583, A. G. de L., 54-5-9.

site of the one which is marked for the new fortification, 140 paces nearer the town. The guns on its walls are not to be fired because it is feared all the curtains will tumble down.”<sup>20</sup>

The petition asked, among other favors, for ten thousand ducats to build San Marcos of coquina and twenty negroes to help do the work. These requests were granted and a master stone cutter, a workman in stone cutting and a mason were to be sent from Havana. The only thing that happened, however, was the erection of Wooden Fort Number Eight. St. Augustine had more than three quarters of a century to wait before seeing the beginning of her fort of coquina!

Alonso de las Alas says, in his letter of January 12, 1600 : “On September 22 of the past year 1699 the tide came in with such fury that the town was entirely flooded and many houses were knocked down, among them the guard-house and part of the storehouse ; whereby a quantity of your Majesty’s supplies was destroyed, also part of the fort, as the waves swept away the wall and caballeros on the sea front; the said fort being built of wood, sand and flour sacks, its foundation not being strong enough to build it of stone, because in digging one cubit beneath the surface one finds sand and water.”<sup>21</sup>

Ten-twelve-years went by. San Marcos, which had been repaired after the flood, was again going to pieces, according to Governor de Olivera’s letters to the King, and contradicting Las Alas, he dwelt on “the ease with which a stone fort could be built”.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps the fundamental trouble was the state of mind of St. Augustine. Many people-particularly

<sup>20</sup> Memorial, letters and plan. Hernando de Mestas, February, 1595, A. G. de I., 140-7-37. (See frontispiece.)  
<sup>21</sup> Las Alas to Philip III, St. Augustine, January 12, 1600, A. G. de I., 54-5-14.  
<sup>22</sup> Juan Fernandez de Olivera to Philip III, October 13, 1612, A. G. de I., 54-5-14.

in that first part of the seventeenth century-thought the settlement and fort should be situated farther north where the harbors were better. Moreover, the arrival of the government's annual subsidy was often delayed for years, salaries remained unpaid, graft existed among those in power, and indifference and inertia often prevailed-when it was not despair!

The eighth fort must have been chronically dropping to pieces and being patched up, for on June 18, 1631, Governor de Villegas wrote to Philip IV: "I found the fort of this presidio defenceless and idle, by reason of its being built of a poor quality of timber which rots easily and is so dry and ready to burn that merely by using the artillery therein fire breaks out in many places."<sup>23</sup>

Barcia the chronicler tells us that in 1640 unruly Indians in the neighborhood of St. Augustine were punished by being condemned to "forced labor on the fortifications of the stronghold."<sup>24</sup> Yet Governor Benito Ruiz de Salazar says, in a letter to the King from St. Augustine, April 16, 1645, that the fort had not been repaired for years and that its wood was rotting.<sup>25</sup>

In 1647, the royal officials wrote that lately, after the rebellion of the Apalache Indians, twelve of them were put to death and twenty-six were set to work on the fort.<sup>26</sup>

We do not know when the ninth wooden structure was begun. The engraving after Arnoldus Mon-

<sup>23</sup> Andres Rodriguez de Villegas to Philip IV, June 18, 1631, A. G. de I., 54-5-10.

<sup>24</sup> Cardenas y Cano (Barcia), Don Gabriel de. *Ensayo Cronologico para la Historia General de la Florida*. Madrid, 1723, p. 204.

<sup>25</sup> Benito Ruiz de Salazar Ballecilla to Philip IV, St. Augustine, April 16, 1645, A. G. de I., 54-5-10.

<sup>26</sup> Francisco Menendez Marques and Pedro Benedit Horruytiner to Philip IV, St. Augustine, July 27, 1647, A. G. de I., 54-5-20.

tanus<sup>27</sup>-fanciful as to details but probably trustworthy as to the fort-shows a very large, rickety building with two massive round towers, a smaller one with a poivriere - pepper-pot-top, enough houses within the fort to make it a town in itself, and nearly as many props or buttresses as a centipede has legs.

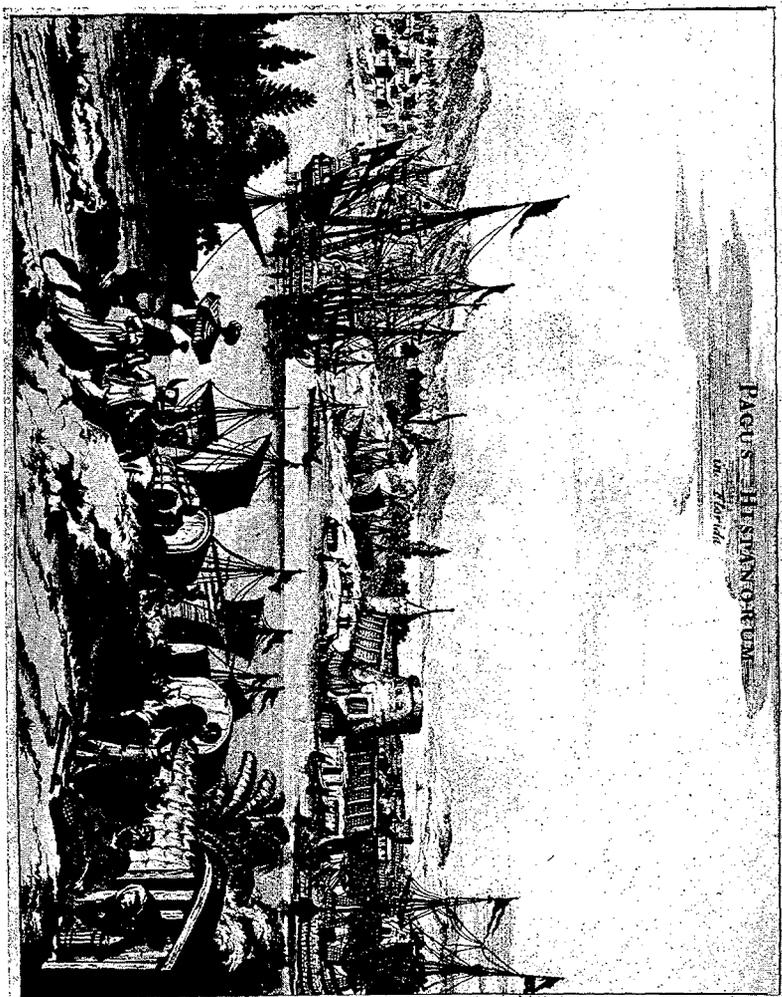
Where the fort was concerned all the governors had been careless, unscrupulous-or discouraged. In compliance with royal decrees, a long official letter and report on many matters connected with the town of St. Augustine was sent to the King in 1655 by one of the royal officials, the Accountant, Don Pedro Beltran de Santa Cruz. Diego de Rebolledo was governor and captain-general at the time, and was disliked by everybody. He was one of the worst Spanish governors that Florida has had, an exceptionally disreputable individual. Santa Cruz, in the course of his report, gives a scathing arraignment of dishonesty and inefficiency in the matter of the fort, which, "because of being constructed of wood, they have allowed to decay. It is crumbling at many points, and none of the artillery pieces have gun-carriages that can be used, for they can scarcely support the guns that rest upon them, as, of necessity, if the guns be fired the carriages collapse because the wood is rotten. Besides, none of the said artillery rests on planks on which the wheels could be set; they are entirely buried in the sand. And such is the condition when your Majesty has, in the said presidio, slaves, convicts, carpenters and a *maestro mayor*<sup>28</sup> with a salary of fifteen hundred ducats, and a number of teams of oxen bought through

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<sup>27</sup> Montanus, Arnoldus. *De Nieuwe en onbekende wereld*. Amsterdam, 1671. There is a copy of the work containing this map in the Division of Maps and Charts, Library of Congress; and there are two in the Reserve Room of the New York Public Library. (See reproduction on opposite page.)

<sup>28</sup> A *maestro mayor* was a commissioner of public works.





THE MONTANUS MAP, 1671

the Royal Exchequer to draw the lumber for the repairs."<sup>29</sup>

In 1668 - not 1665; the date generally given - John Davis, that genial and sprightly Boucanier from the island of Jamaica, fresh from his piratical triumph in Nicaragua and "feeling his oats", attacked St. Augustine one night, having been put up to it by a Frenchman who had a well-founded grievance against Francisco de la Guerra y de la Vega, the Governor. The fort was tottering more than usual. Strange to say, it did not fall on John Davis, but the good townspeople were frightened out of their wits and acted the part. That raid was a lively one.

Four more years went by before the King and the Council of the Indies, far away in Spain, finally bestirred themselves and made it possible for St. Augustine to start the building of its long-talked-of fort of stone-the present one - the great fort of coquina quarried on Anastasia Island. It was still called San Marcos and not until the nineteenth century did it receive the fine name of Fort Marion. Its Spanish personality still longs for its old Spanish name, held for so many years, from the time immediately following the coming of Drake.

*San Marcos, as we know it, was begun in 1672.* I hope this actual date of the commencement of the undertaking will be borne in mind, as nearly every history and guidebook is fond of asserting that the fort of St. Augustine was started in 1638. Barcia is probably responsible for this deep-seated error, as he is for many others. He wrongly gives the year 1638<sup>30</sup> as that of the rebellion of the Apalache Indians, which took place, according to the royal officials (as we have just seen), late in 1646 or early in 1647. Fair-

<sup>29</sup> Pedro Beltran de Santa Cruz to Philip IV, Havana, November 20, 1655, A. G. de I., 54-5-18, 48.

<sup>30</sup> Cardena z Cano, *Ensayo Cronologico*, p. 203.

banks copies this mistake, adding that in 1640 the Apalache were brought to St. Augustine to work on the fort.<sup>31</sup> Barcia had made the statement that in 1640 the Indians of the vicinity of St. Augustine (not the Apalache) rose in mutiny, but I can not find his authority for this in any of the records.

Perhaps the coquina fort would not have been begun even in 1672 had it not been for the menace of the English settlements to the north, which, for nearly a century, were to advance unceasingly on the Spanish colony with the relentlessness of tidal waves. As to the forgotten and important date, 1672, I quote the affidavit of Juan Moreno y Segobia, the government notary at St. Augustine at that time:

"Today, Sunday, the second of the present month of October of the year one thousand six hundred and seventy-two, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, the Senor Sergeant-Major Don Manuel de Cendoya, Governor and Captain-General of these provinces of Florida for his Majesty, in his royal name, being in the vicinity of the fortress of this presidio where the plan of the new fortress is marked out, accompanied by the judges, the royal officials, Sergeant-Major Don Nicolas Ponce de Leon and Captain Antonio de Arguelles, who fill these posts for his Majesty in the presidio, and by many other persons and retired soldiers of the garrison, began on this said day, spade in hand, [aided by] the royal officials and others associated with him, to break ground for the foundations, to commence the erection of the said castle."<sup>32</sup>

There are more affidavits ; one, of the ninth day of the month, "when the first stone was laid", Antonio Menendez Marquez, the Royal Accountant, being

<sup>31</sup> Fairbanks, George R. *The History and Antiquities of the City of St. Augustine, Florida*. New York, 1858, p. 121.

<sup>32</sup> Affidavit of Juan Moreno y Segobia, St. Augustine, October 2, 1672, A. G. de I., 58-1-26.

also present. The engineer for the construction of the fort was Ignacio Daza, a citizen of Havana and a military man, who declares in another deposition:

“The fort of this garrison is of wood, which [fort] I have examined not only because of the weakness and decayed condition of the timbers but because its lines have been changed by reason of the many repairs ; these have reduced it to a shapeless mass, out of all rules of fortification. On account of the lack of the necessary traverses and the deviation of the defence lines, I find that the fort is useless for defence or for any sort of resistance.” It is interesting to compare this description with the picture of the fort as it is shown in the engraving after Montanus. They curiously confirm each other. San Marcos could not be more ramshackly.

By December, Governor de Cendoya was full of enthusiasm for the inspiring task before him. On December 15 he wrote to Charles II of Spain that the work of preparing the foundations was going on “with all possible speed and had reached the old fort . . . built of wood, on account of which the stone could not be laid [there], the old fort occupying the space and being damaged from decay . . . Because of this, as well as because the site near the said castle is not only of equal strength, but possesses several advantages over any adversary who might dare to attack by sea as well as by land, I decided, [after] a council held in this presidio, and on the opinion of the engineer, which I am sending to your Majesty, to build on the place aforesaid. I send your Majesty the plan of the castle, the square of which is of the same size as the old one, save that it is larger where the bastions are thrown forward in order to follow the rules of good defence in the whole plan, adding

all the other parts and accessories of which there is need.<sup>33</sup>

Governor de Cendoya had more than one setback. Indian laborers paid by the day were employed to build the fort, but work of that kind had never suited them. The situation was complicated by the fact that they were also required in the fields and there were not enough of them adequately to assist the Governor. They had resented being taken from their own lands in the first place, and a recent violent epidemic had swept through the provinces and reduced their numbers to an alarming extent. Cendoya, nothing daunted, and determined that his English neighbors at "St. George" (as the infant city of Charleston was called) should not catch St. Augustine off its guard, infused his own ardor into the soldiers and wrote to the King that he was "working in person, with the infantry, in digging the trenches ; so that it appears to me it would be well to order, if your Majesty so please, that thirty negroes, by contract with Domingo Grillo, be sent from Havana to this presidio."<sup>34</sup>

For eighty-two years—from 1672 to 1756 - the little town was to busy itself with its signal achievement, the construction and completion of the coquina fort, the story of which would fill volumes. The surface of that fascinating part of our Colonial history has barely been touched.

The time to *feel* the charm of the old fort is in spring and autumn, when the weather is not too warm, and the credulous tourists are not in St. Augustine to tempt the beautiful city to forget that its preposterous Fountain of Youth should be a Fountain of Truth. Then it is that the fort belongs to the spirits of the men who fought and suffered and prayed

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<sup>33</sup> Manuel de Cendoya to Charles II. St. Augustine, December 15, 1672, A. G. de I., 58-1-26.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem.*

and died there. You should go there by yourself; climb the ramp - now a stairway - by which the cannon used to be rolled up to the platform, the terreplein of the ramparts, and look seaward. The breakers are rolling in far off in the distance. You are facing Matanzas Bay, Anastasia Island, North Beach (the peninsula opposite) and St. Augustine Inlet-la barra de San Agustin. You stand alone with the ghosts of the past. You see the soldiers of Menendez "digging with their finger nails the trench" around the communal house of Cacique Seloy. This was the very beginning of the fort of St. Augustine. Was there ever a great fort with a more inspired and picturesque beginning!

You see Florez, inspecting the cadalechos, or beds of tree branches where the soldiers sleep; the mysterious and disquieting secret postern "which is used to take people out that way"; the sentinel in the platform sentry-box, the soldiers of the guard standing at the principal door of the fort, with their fuses lighted night and day.

You see Sir Francis Drake's capture of St. Augustine in June, 1586 and Nicolas Burgoignon, the Frenchman, escaping from the Spaniards in his little boat and going to join the English, making his presence known by "playing on his piph the tune of the Prince of Orange his song".<sup>35</sup>

You see Drake's men leave their pinnaces, come on shore on Anastasia Island, discharge their cannon at the fort on the main land opposite, and burn the fort, and the town south of it.

You see all the long struggle of building the wooden forts that succeeded it and keeping them in a semblance of repair; the Indians and negroes at work, the lumber being hauled by the oxen, the Apalache

<sup>35</sup> Bigges, *A Summarie and True Discourse, etc.*

prisoners bending over their hated task, the Timucua in their canoes paddling up and down the river.

You see ships with the supplies and the subsidy for the colony coming in at long irregular intervals, although the subsidy had been promised to the settlers every single year. As the sentinel tells of the shallows at sea, you see them crying with joy and praising God at one more respite from starvation!

You see the surprise attack of John Davis in May, 1668 - you smile at the amusing and pathetic helplessness of the bewildered citizens. "The pirates did not get much booty," says an old writer, "for the people of this place are very poor."

You breathe a friendly sigh of relief when Manuel de Cendoya breaks ground for the present stately structure on that Sunday afternoon, October 2, 1672. But the Spanish government in Europe was a paternal government, growing steadily more dilatory and weak. **Manana** por la manana! And the Anglo-Saxon was gaining ground-coming nearer and nearer to the gates of St. Augustine! There could be no doubt as to the outcome. Yet, during the first half of the eighteenth century, St. Augustine twice had able men for the crises of the moment: Joseph de Zuniga y Cerda and Manuel de Montiano, two great and wise Spanish governors. They are tempting subjects to enlarge upon. So are all the sieges of St. Augustine. This paper, however, is merely intended as an outline sketch-perhaps a preliminary one-of the beginnings of the institution known for three hundred and sixty years as the fort of St. Augustine-the symbol, key and center of Spain's power at the southeast end of the vast region now included in the United States.

JEANNETTE THURBER CONNOR.