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THE FRANCISCANS IN FLORIDA
A review of three volumes of Maynard Geiger

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The Early Franciscans in Florida and Their Relation to Spain's Colonial Effort. Revised digest of a historical thesis. By Maynard Geiger, O.F.M., (Paterson, N. J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, Franciscan Monastery, 1936. Pp. 21. Illus.)

The Martyrs of Florida (1513-1616) by Luis Geronimo de Ore, O.F.M. Translated, with Biographical Introduction and Notes by Maynard Geiger, O.F.M. (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1936. Pp. xx, 145)

Biographical Dictionary of the Franciscans in Spanish Florida and Cuba (1528-1841). By Maynard Geiger, O.F.M., Ph.D. (Paterson, N. J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1940 Pp. xii, 140)

For more than a century and a half after 1573 the intrepid members of the Franciscan Order labored in Spanish Florida. But it has remained for a modern scholar of the Church to picture for us today the life and activity of these religious pioneers who engaged in what was really the "Conquest of Florida" in the 17th century. The three works here listed are the product of historical scholarship on the part of a member of the Order who has spent many long but interesting hours examining the contemporary documents of the period.

Note - It will be of interest to Floridians and to many readers elsewhere to know that Dr. Geiger was indebted to Dr. James A. Robertson for some of his material, for counsel, and for invaluable other assistance—just as most writers of Florida history for a decade received aid from that source. *Ed.*

The first work is in reality an essay which surveys the missionary activities of the Franciscans in Florida from 1573, about where Woodbury Lowery ended his second volume, to 1616, at about which time Fray Francisco Pareja observed of his fellow workers: "We are the ones who are bearing the burden and the heat and we are the ones who are conquering and subduing the land."

Florida, as Dr. Geiger points out, was an outpost of the Spanish Empire. He writes:

Poverty and depression are the constant theme song that runs through all the records of this early period. From the governor down to the meanest soldier, the perennial complaint was insufficient pay. The unmarried soldier might get along, but what of those with families? Moreover, the soldiers' pay was often in arrears. And what of the widow and the orphan? The friars received their daily sustenance, but at best it was a starvation basis. The presidio of St. Augustine was poorly located. The bar allowed entrance only to the smaller ships. The town suffered inundation from the sea, while fire was an ever-present scourge. Houses were built of the rudest material. Swamp land abounded. There was little or no agriculture or cattle-raising. No mines were located in the vast region. Florida was entirely dependent on the outside-Mexico and the islands of the Caribbean-for the very necessities of life. Prices were enormous and travel was slow and insecure. It took about a week to get to Havana under favorable conditions. Most of the traveling in Florida itself was done by frigate or canoe. There was a notable lack of skilful pilots for the dangerous coast, with a consequent loss in lives, ships,

and cargo. Repeatedly in the documents there occurs the refrain: The land is poor and off the beaten track of commerce. Hostile Indians took their toll of human lives among soldiers and missionaries-five of the latter were killed in 1597, while another was held in captivity for a period of ten months. Dread of the foreign corsair made Florida fearful in her loneliness-witness the destruction of St. Augustine by Drake in 1586.

The Spanish Crown, together with the Roman Catholic Church, was most anxious to convert the natives of its vast domain to Christianity, and frequently, as in Florida,, large sums of money were spent to this end without direct financial returns. Certainly many missionaries were sent to this region; and not all of their efforts were in vain.

Among the Franciscans who visited Florida was Father Luis Geronimo de Ore (1554-1629), a Peruvian who went to the West Indies and the Florida peninsula first in 1614 and again in 1616, arriving at St. Augustine on November 16 of the latter year. During the next two months he visited the Indian missions in that province. Upon his return to Spain he published his *Relacion*, an excellent translation of which is to be found in the second work listed above. This treatise by Father Ore, as Dr. Geiger points out, is divided into two parts. The first portion deals with Spanish Florida before 1565 and is "sketchy and contains a number of errors". The second portion deals especially with Florida in the years from 1595 to 1616, and is valuable for its details concerning the missionary work of the Franciscans. The *Relacion* is a mine of information regarding early Florida, and it frequently constitutes the sole source of information for certain facts regarding the period. The author was a

careful observer, and he recorded what he saw or what he believed that others had seen.

One of the contributions left by Father Ore was a collection of biographical sketches of Franciscans who went to Florida in 1587 and in 1595. Since the 16th century other compilers have tried to make lists of members of the Order who went to the Province, but all attempts have resulted in extremely incomplete lists. It, therefore, became evident to Dr. Geiger that there existed a need for a biographical dictionary of Franciscan missionaries in Florida. In consequence he set about to compile such a list. The third item given above is the result. Dr. Geiger says:

In it appear the names and biographies of over seven hundred Franciscan friars who were intimately associated with the earliest missionary field in our nation's history: the territory of Spanish Florida. Most of these friars were members of the *Provincia de Santa Elena de la Florida*, which comprised the present states of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, and the island of Cuba. For over two hundred years (1528-1763) they trod the sands of Georgia and Florida, and it should not be said of us that we failed to recognize their footprints. It matters little that of many a friar among them we know hardly more than his name and station. If he was a pioneer and a crusader, that is sufficient title to recognition.

This veritable "Who's Who" of early Florida discloses many interesting facts which can only be appreciated when studied in detail and in relation to each other.

As one reads these three works, one feels that Dr. Geiger, who became interested in these problems while writing a Ph.D. dissertation at the Catholic

University on "The Franciscan Conquest of Florida", has accomplished an undertaking of great importance for historical scholars interested in Spanish Florida. Eventually, when other researchers have brought to light similar materials and information for other portions of the Spanish empire, we shall be able to see for the first time in a broad yet detailed panorama the interesting and often exciting story of the development of the missionary frontier in Spanish America.