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Book Review: Florida on Trial, 1593-1602

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Florida on Trial, 1593-1602. By Charles W. Arnade. University of Miami Hispanic American Studies, No. 16. (Coral Gables, University of Miami Press, 1959. 100 pp. Maps, illustrations, bibliography and index. \$1.00.)

It was indeed a fortunate day for the student of life in Spanish Florida when Irene Wright, with the financial backing of John B. Stetson, Jr., installed a photostat machine in the Archives of Seville and proceeded to duplicate most of the valuable records pertaining to Florida. This collection containing more than seven thousand documents ultimately found its way into the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History in the University of Florida Library where it is available today and being studied by scholars from many parts of the United States.

Florida on Trial is largely based upon these above-mentioned photostats in the Stetson Collection, documents found at the North Carolina Department of Archives, and the Lowery Collection at the Library of Congress. It relates how Spain in 1602 held a hearing which would decide, "if Florida should be abandoned and St. Augustine be dismantled." This hearing was held at St. Augustine and eighteen witnesses presented their testimonies. The one hundred and twenty-two pages of testimony including depositions by several Franciscans is the core about which *Florida on Trial* is woven.

This monograph which has been published in cooperation with the St. Augustine Historical Society gives an impressive account of Spanish life as it existed in Florida at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Witnesses testify as to missionary efforts among the Indians, Spanish knowledge of the Southeast, crops, food, fertility of the Florida soil, and morale at St. Augustine.

The chairman of the investigation, Fernando Valdes, son of Cuba's governor and acting as a substitute for his father, heard some divergent points of view expressed at the hearing. The soldiers, almost to a man, testified that the fort should remain at Matanzas Bay. The Franciscan fathers were the most critical witnesses and came out strongly against Governor Mendez Canzo, the Florida peninsula, and St. Augustine. Governor Mendez Canzo presented his account of the situation in a long letter de-

livered to Valdez just before he returned to Cuba. The consequence of all the testimony was that St. Augustine was retained as an outpost of the Spanish empire but Canzo was relieved of his duties.

Charles Arnade has presented another of his well-written and documented word pictures concerning life in the Latin-American scene. It is based upon extensive research and should help stimulate others to explore paths uncovered by *Florida on Trial*.

The monograph is highly recommended for acquisition by anyone interested in Florida.

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