

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 39
Number 3 *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 39,
Issue 3

Article 9

1960

Book Reviews

Florida Historical Society
membership@myfloridahistory.org



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Society, Florida Historical (1960) "Book Reviews," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 39: No. 3, Article 9.
Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol39/iss3/9>

BOOK REVIEWS

Juan Ponce de Leon. By Vincente Murga Sanz. (San Juan: Universidad de Puerto Rico Press, 1959. *Ediciones de la Universidad de Puerto Rico.* 386 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography and index.)

Juan Ponce de Leon (1460?-1521) is a vital figure in Florida's story. He started the written history of Florida. It was Juan Ponce de Leon who gave the land he discovered the name of Florida, yet the discoverer of Florida remains a rather obscure figure. Certain phases of his career remain vague. His biographies are scarce although he is venerated as the father of two important regions that belong to the United States, for he was also the colonizer of the island of Puerto Rico.

The dynamic University of Puerto Rico through its press has just published a 385-page biography of Ponce de Leon written in Spanish. This is the most detailed, most scholarly, and probably most accurate story of Ponce de Leon. It constitutes a vital addition to the history of Florida, even though Ponce de Leon's Puerto Rican doings are sketched at much greater length than are his Florida ventures. This is only natural since it is precisely the Florida phase of Ponce de Leon's career, especially his first voyage in 1513, that is shrouded in a veil of mystery. The author of this newest book has only been able to dispel a minimal part of this fog. But every little bit helps.

The book's author, Vincente Murga Sanz, who was chosen to go to Spain for research on a more definitive study of Ponce de Leon, sought in every possible place for Ponce de Leon records. His book is thoroughly annotated. Murga Sanz admits that he has failed to determine the exact genealogy of the father of Puerto Rico and Florida. The latter's birthplace and parents still remain in doubt. It is possible that he is the son of Count Don Juan Ponce de Leon of Spanish fame, a fighter against the Moors, who had twenty-one illegitimate sons. He could have had one more-or man of American fame. It is acceptable to place his birthdate in 1460; but, there is some doubt as to when he arrived in America. This latest biography sees no reason to doubt his arrival with Columbus on his second voyage in 1493. Ponce de Leon's Puerto Rican career starts in 1508 and is well accounted for.

[277]

Historians have questioned that Ponce de Leon discovered Florida in 1513; some say 1511, others, 1512. Murga Sanz has found incontrovertible proof that he sailed for Florida in 1513. He has discovered Ponce de Leon's registration of his ship before he set sail for Florida. This registration is dated January 29, 1513. There were three boats and the author has located the names of the crews of two of them. These were the men who discovered or were co-discoverers of Florida. We still lack the names of the men of the third boat.

These lists provide us with some revealing information. There was a woman on the first boat. Juana Ruiz was probably the first European woman to see Florida. Who was she? At least two Negroes were on these boats which fact brings Negro history of Florida back to 1513, something unknown until the present. No priest is listed on either boat.

Today's most controversial part of Ponce de Leon's Florida adventure is the location of the landing. Author Murga Sanz has found no primary records and none have probably survived. Ponce de Leon's journey from Puerto Rico to Florida is cited by one single source, which is the Antonio de Herrera history published in 1601. Herrera apparently possessed Ponce de Leon's diary or some other kind of source material. It is completely lost. Consequently we cannot identify the exact spot where the discoverer of Florida landed, except to say that it was on the northern Atlantic coast of Florida.

The author of this newest Ponce de Leon biography also discusses the question of the fountain of youth. He writes that "in documents known now there is absolutely nothing about it. On the contrary, a study of these [documents] will convince one that such fantasy never crossed Ponce de Leon's mind."

The book adds little new information to Ponce de Leon's second and final journey to Florida in 1521. This is not the fault of the author, for once again no new revealing documents have been located. One new source does, however, provide us with the names of two men who accompanied the discoverer on this journey: Juan Garrido and Alonso Martin de Jerez. Garrido was a free Negro.

In sum, the Murga Sanz biography of Juan Ponce de Leon deserves a good review. Naturally it has some weaknesses but they are greatly overshadowed by its merits. One must remember