

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 66
Number 3 *Florida Historical Quarterly, Volume
66, Number 3*

Article 6

1987

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Recommended Citation

Schwaller, John Frederick (1987) "Nobility, Family, and Service: Menéndez and His Men," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 66: No. 3, Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol66/iss3/6>

NOBILITY, FAMILY, AND SERVICE: MENÉNDEZ AND HIS MEN

by JOHN FREDERICK SCHWALLER

THE conquest of Florida by the Spanish has been described by Eugene Lyon and other important scholars.¹ Nevertheless, it is sometimes forgotten that Florida was only a small and relatively unimportant part of Spain's vast American empire. Yet those conquistadors and their followers who came to Florida are an interesting lot. This is particularly true of these men who served with Menéndez in Florida, a group of whom ended their lives and careers in Mexico. An examination of their activities reveals the ties of family, the status of nobility, and the importance of royal service.

A leading member of this group was don Diego de Velasco who was closely associated with Pedro Menéndez both through family connections and work. Velasco was Menéndez's son-in-law and had served under the adelantado in the 1565 occupation of Florida and the settlement of St. Augustine. Velasco was married to Menéndez's illegitimate daughter, and he was also lieutenant governor of Florida on and off for some five years (1571-1576).

Neither Menéndez's ties to the Castillian aristocracy nor aspects of his career within the military-religious order of Santiago are well known.² He legitimized his daughter shortly after her marriage to Velasco, who was himself the illegitimate offspring of the condestable de Castilla, the duke of Frias, count of Haro, one of Castille's most noble houses. Pedro Menéndez occupied

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1. Eugene Lyon, *The Enterprise of Florida* (Gainesville, 1976); Eugenio Ruidíaz y Caravia, *La Florida: su conquista y coloniazcion par Pedro Menéndez de Avilés*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1893-1894); Alfonso Camín, *El Adelantado de la Florida* (Mexico, 1944).
2. Lyon, *Enterprise*, 16; Ruidíaz y Caravia, *La Florida*, II, 739-801.

a poorly defined position within the Spanish nobility. He lacked two important trappings of nobility: he neither carried the honorific "don" before his name nor did he hold a hereditary title. This latter shortcoming was overcome when he received the title of *adelantado* as part of his contractual reward for his service in Florida, and the lack of "don" was redeemed by his membership in the order of Santiago.

The military-religious order of Santiago was founded in the Middle Ages by knights errant to protect the important pilgrimage routes across northern Spain. Starting in France, the "Road of Saint James" wound its way to the holy shrine of Santiago de Compostela, in the province of Galicia, where, according to legend, the mortal remains of the apostle Saint James had been mystically transported. This site was second only to Rome in medieval times in its importance as a pilgrimage. The rampages of highwaymen, brigands, and heretics made the pilgrimage route dangerous. Devout knights allied themselves with monks to provide safe accommodations for the travellers. The alliance of the two branches of the order—military and religious—worked together very satisfactorily for many years.

By the sixteenth century the order, due to the pacification of the countryside, had lost its ministry to protect the pilgrims, and it became an important Spanish social institution. It was very exclusive in its membership, and only persons of proven nobility and absolute lineage would be admitted to membership. By the time of Philip II, to become a member one needed to be recommended by the Council of the Military Orders to the monarch. Representatives of the order conducted secret investigations into the aspirant's nobility and purity of lineage. No one with the slightest trace of being a Muslim or a Jew was acceptable as a member of the order. Illegitimacy posed serious problems for acceptance. Anyone passing all the tests received the habit of the order, but still could not enjoy full membership until he had served for six months in the royal galleys and lived another six months in the monastery of the order at Uclés, in New Castille.

Menéndez's genealogical file which was presented to support his membership is found in the papers of the order of Santiago, Archivo Historico Nacional in Madrid, along with other royal

decrees.³ The decree formally granting him membership, however, is not contained in the registry book of such decrees. Nevertheless, several important documents pertaining to his membership in the order are extant. The earliest is a license to dress in colorful clothes.⁴ The order required members always to wear its insignia, the special red sword-shaped cross. Furthermore, dress had to be black and include the traditional cloak. To vary from this uniform, a special license was required, which Menéndez received in 1559. Further documents indicate that by 1559 he had not yet fully complied with the requirements for profession in the order. In 1561, Menéndez received a royal license to serve his religious retreat at the monastery of Santiago de la Espada in Seville.⁵ This was more convenient for him than to pass one-half year at Uclés. Yet the license was demanding in another way; he would have to spend a full year at the monastery. For Menéndez, a whole year in religious retreat while the Indies fleet sailed without him would have been insufferable. That he refused to comply with this directive is indicated by later decrees.

In 1567 Menéndez received a maintenance grant.⁶ Fully-professed members of the order enjoyed an annual stipend of 12,000 *marevedises* for wine and bread. While it was a relatively insignificant amount of money—some forty pesos—it served symbolically to tie the knights to the order. A triennial report from Uclés in 1569 lists Menéndez as having spent only two days at the monastery during the period 1566-1569.⁷ Clearly the monarch had modified Menéndez's license authorizing a two-day retreat at Uclés rather than one-half year there or one year in Seville. Likewise, due to the *adelantado's* military service to the monarch, the requirement to serve on the royal galleys was waived.

The career of Pedro Menéndez as a member of the order of Santiago culminated in 1568 when he was entrusted with the administration of the estate of Santa Cruz de la Zarza, with the

3. Archivo Histórico Nacional (hereafter AHN), Santiago, exp. 5212. The entire genealogical file has been published in Ruidiaz y Caravia, *La Florida*, II, 739-801.

4. AHN, Ordenes Militares, Lib. 51-C, f. 86, July 14, 1559.

5. *Ibid.*, Lib. 51-C, f. 252, August 24, 1561.

6. *Ibid.*, Lib. 54-C, f. 55v, September 29, 1567.

7. *Ibid.*, Lib. 55-C, f. 5, August 26, 1569.

right to enjoy its rents.⁸ The income it provided was approximately 300,000 marevedises per year—about 1,000 pesos—although later in the century the rents had increased to some 525,000 marevedises.⁹ Unfortunately, the regulations of the order also required the comendador to reside on his encomienda. By 1571 Menéndez had received permission to have someone else administer the encomienda for him for a period of three years.¹⁰

Menéndez's death is confirmed in the records of Santiago. On March 28, 1575, the encomienda of Santa Cruz de la Zarza was conferred on the royal secretary, Francisco de Ybarra.¹¹ While this was probably a coincidence, Pedro Menéndez had been closely tied to don Luis de Velasco, a kinsman of Ybarra. Shortly before his death, Menéndez had given his power of attorney to Velasco.¹² Don Luis de Velasco was the son of the second viceroy of New Spain, also called don Luis de Velasco. The younger don Luis, also a member of the order of Santiago, was often in Madrid on family business, although his permanent home was Mexico.

The power of attorney granted by Menéndez authorized the younger don Luis to act on his behalf before viceregal authorities in any suits which questioned the adelantado's jurisdiction in northern Mexico and Florida. Young don Luis de Velasco was also the brother-in-law of Ybarra's relative, Diego de Ybarra, the discoverer of the rich mines of Zacatecas. Moreover, the Mexican Ybarras had vestigial claims against the adelantado's jurisdiction over the northern Gulf coast of Mexico, since their other relative, also named Francisco de Ybarra [Ibarra], had been the first governor of New Biscay, Nueva Viscaya, and claimed the Gulf coast from Tampico to Florida as part of his territory.¹³ New Biscay was later defined as lacking jurisdiction along the Gulf coast, which was granted to New Leon, Nuevo Leon.¹⁴

8. *Ibid.*, Lib. 54-C, ff. 126v-28v, January 25, 1568.

9. AHN, Ordenes Militares, 4366, "Santa Cruz de la Zarza, 1568."

10. *Ibid.*, Lib. 56-C, f. 6, November 23, 1571.

11. *Ibid.*, Lib. 57-C, f. 251v, March 28, 1575.

12. Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Madrid, Protocolo 605, ff. 73-73v, February 16, 1574.

13. Guillermo Porras Muñoz, "Diego de Ibarra y la Nueva España," *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* 2 (1968), 49-78.

14. Peter Gerhard, *The North Frontier of New Spain* (Princeton, 1982), 165-66.

Pedro Menéndez de Avilés was involved in still other family relationships. His son-in-law, don Diego de Velasco, was a distant relative of young don Luis de Velasco. Earlier, in 1554-1559, while serving Philip II in England and Flanders, Menéndez had known don Luis's elder brother, don Antonio de Velasco.¹⁵ These coincidences were a result of various policies and practices of the Hapsburg monarchs and of the noble houses of Spain. In order to control the nobility, the monarchs granted them important offices and the nobility, eager to increase their own power and wealth, openly sought positions within the royal patronage. In addition, members of the noble families tended to intermarry, thereby concentrating power within a few lineages. Thus, many of the leading figures of Castilian history in the sixteenth century held mutual ties of kinship.

The concept of family in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was broader than it is in recent times. An example is don Luis and don Diego de Velasco. By modern genealogical standards they were barely "related"; they were fourth cousins, once removed, since don Luis came from the generation before don Diego. They shared a common great-great-great-grandfather (for don Diego add another great), Juan Fernández de Velasco, the founder of the Velasco clan and father of the first count of Haro. Yet, by this same measure of kinship in the Velasco clan, six of the viceroys of Mexico in the sixteenth century, of which there were nine, could be considered "kin," and if one includes the Mendoza family, which was closely intermarried with the Velascos, all but two viceroys were related.

Don Diego de Velasco was the illegitimate son of don Juan de Velasco. Don Juan, in turn, was the illegitimate son of the constable of Castille, don Pedro Fernández de Velasco, the third duke of Frias and fifth count of Haro, who died in 1559, with no legitimate offspring. Don Pedro had married his first-cousin, and there were no offspring from this union. Shortly before his death, don Pedro secured a royal decree which legitimized his son, don Juan, and his grandson, don Diego.¹⁶ Despite their "tainted" birth, both carried the honorific title "don," and enjoyed unquestioned respectability. Unfortunately, as a result of

15. *Calendar of State Papers. Negotiations Between England and Spain, vol. XIII. Phillip and Mary* (London, 1954).

16. Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), Mexico, 224, Ramo 1, Num. 1.

their irregular birth they were not able to join the order of Santiago, although with sufficient support they might even have acquired that honor.

The marriage of don Diego to Pedro Menéndez de Avilés's illegitimate daughter has posed a series of questions. The match has seemed curious to some scholars in that the scion of an important family would marry the illegitimate offspring of a man whose own nobility was only rather recently confirmed. Nevertheless, don Diego's possible career options, as an illegitimate grandchild of even a most influential man, were very limited. To complicate matters, don Diego's own birth status was even more precarious than most illegitimates since his mother was married to someone other than his father. Thus he was the issue of an adulterous relationship and should probably not have been legitimized at all. The Velasco clan seems to have tried to take care of its own, but in don Diego's case the life of an adventurer serving as a conqueror in the retinue of a famous captain probably held out far more immediate rewards.

As the documents published by Jeanette Thurber Connor show, Velasco's role in the governance of Spanish Florida was important.¹⁷ He first served under Menéndez in the Atlantic fleet, and then joined the Florida expedition, ruling as lieutenant governor from time to time for his absent father-in-law. Velasco had taken control in 1571, and then returned to Spain. He and Hernando de Miranda, also a son-in-law of Menéndez, returned to Florida with their wives in 1573. Velasco sent reports to the crown in April 1574 and August 1575, detailing matters of the colony. As was common, he ran into trouble for some of his actions during that period.¹⁸ Major charges involved fiscal malfeasance. He explained that it was a result of his trying to collect on an 11,000 peso dowry, in addition to a 1,000 ducat per year stipend from Menéndez. Clearly neither the adelantado nor Spanish Florida could produce that kind of money. In May 1577, don Diego was suspended from all administrative posts for the period of two years, and he was exiled from the Indies for three years. This suspension ended in July 1579, when the Council of the Indies commuted the sentence.¹⁹ In

17. Jeanette Thurber Connor, *Colonial Records of Spanish Florida*, 2 vols. (DeLand, 1925-30), I, 100-03, 136-45, II, 2-7.

18. *Ibid.*, I, 220-27; Amy Bushnell, *The King's Coffin* (Gainesville, 1981), 21.

19. Connor, *Colonial Records*, II, 228-31, 240-43.

addition to this information contained in published accounts, more remains to be studied about Velasco. Specifically the papers of the judicial process brought against him for alleged irregularities while he was acting governor may reveal more on his activities in Florida.²⁰

Don Diego de Velasco's career in the Spanish imperial service did not end after he left Florida. He was appointed alguacil mayor of Mexico City in 1580 for a five-year term.²¹ This office was like a sheriff's in the United States in the twentieth century. He was the most important law-enforcement officer in the city with a jurisdiction which covered much of central Mexico. Later, in the seventeenth century the crown often sold the office, since it carried high prestige and a comfortable income. Along with these other benefits, the office holder also enjoyed a seat on the Mexico City municipal council, which was valuable in terms of prestige.

Before his appointment as alguacil, Velasco had also secured the office of *gentilhombre de la casa del rey*, a largely honorific post which carried with it a modest salary. In order further to improve Velasco's financial status, the king had awarded him a one-time grant of 2,000 ducats to be paid from the Mexico City treasury.

Velasco claimed that the Mexico City office netted him almost no income. While he collected fees from the people he arrested and from the court, Velasco was forced to employ three assistants. These helpers each kept one-third of all fees they collected, the remaining two-thirds going to Velasco. As *alguacil* he also had to pay the *corregidor*, local royal magistrate of Mexico City, an annual salary of 500,000 *marevedises*, some 1,666 pesos.

According to the figures Velasco provided to the Council of the Indies in the period from September 1580 to October 1581, he should have collected 3,451 pesos in fees, but he only collected 2,041 pesos. His assistants received another 1,675. From the amount he collected, Velasco paid the magistrate 1,666 pesos, leaving him only 374 pesos for one year's work. That amount was not enough to live in Mexico City. Velasco stated that he had a small annuity—150 ducats a year (some 250

20. AGI, Justicia, 928, 9; AGI, *Escribanía de Cámara*, 153-A. to cite two specifics.

21. AGI, Mexico, 107, Ramo 4, Num. 27.

pesos)— from his grandfather, the constable. Velasco was holding a prestigious but poorly-paying position, yet he had asked that the Council of the Indies make his office a lifetime position. He probably believed that he could eventually turn it into a more lucrative post.

Don Diego and his wife had six children, including at least two sons— don Pedro and don Diego de Velasco— two daughters, doña Antonia de Velasco and doña Francisca Menéndez de Velasco.²² Only the elder daughter was listed as married— to don Lorenzo Ugarte de los Rios, the alguacil mayor of the Inquisition. The marriage was a union based on the office of alguacil, also held by her father. The don Diego family saw value in the marriage since it allied them with the Holy Office. Don Pedro de Velasco, don Diego's son, became a Jesuit. Born in 1581, shortly after the family's arrival in Mexico, Father Pedro served in Sinaloa from 1605-1619, and later at the colleges in Valladolid, Michoacan, and Tepotzotlan. In 1637 he went to Rome as procurator for the Mexican province, and died in Mexico in 1649.²³ Don Diego's wife, Menéndez's daughter, had died by 1595.

Don Diego de Velasco eventually received an appointment outside of Mexico City. Although the city was the center of power, a competent officer could be forgotten in a smaller post in the bureaucracy. In 1591 Velasco was appointed corregidor of the mining center of Zacatecas.²⁴ This was an important office with much potential for outside profit. Yet it seems unlikely that Velasco served in it for very long, if at all.

In 1592 he was promoted to the office of governor of the whole northern territory of modern Mexico, the area called New Biscay, Nueva Viscaya.²⁵ Because of the delay involved in the trans-Atlantic voyage, Velasco received the appointment to Zacatecas in the early spring of 1592, and the New Biscay appointment in the fall of 1593. He had taken over as governor by January 1595, and continued to serve until 1597, when he

22. Ibid., 224, Ramo 1, Num. 1; Ruidiaz y Caravia, *La Florida* II, 590-624.

23. Francisco Zambrano, *Diccionario bio-bibliográfico de la Compañía de Jesús en Mexico*, 16 vols. (Mexico, 1961-77), XIV, 574-648; Thomas H. Naylor and Charles W. Polzer, *The Presidio and Militia on the Northern Frontier of New Spain, 1570-1700* (Tucson, 1986), 208-10.

24. AGI, Mexico, 113, Ramo 1, Num. 13, March 25, 1592.

25. Ibid., Ramo 1, Num. 49, October 6, 1593; Ibid., 114, Ramo 2, Num. 52, June 28, 1595.

was appointed governor of Yucatan, an office he held until 1606. In 1602 he filed a petition for further reward for services. In 1606 don Diego became governor of Cartagena de Indias, a post he held until his death.²⁶

The period of don Diego's service in Mexico corresponded rather closely with the time his "kinsman," don Luis de Velasco, was active in Mexico. Don Luis served on the Mexico City council until 1586, during which time he was a leading figure in the city and one of the most important ecomenderos in the kingdom. From 1589 until 1595, and again from 1607 to 1611, don Luis ruled as viceroy of Mexico, with an intervening term as viceroy of Peru from 1595-1603. Then he became president of the Council of the Indies, serving from 1611 to 1617.

The further impact of family can be seen in the subsequent governors of New Biscay. Following don Diego de Velasco, don Rodrigo de Vivero, a second-cousin of don Luis de Velasco, was appointed in 1603. Later in the seventeenth century, don Luis's great-grandson, don Hipolito de Velasco Ibarra, also served as governor. In this latter case the two family lines of Velasco and Ybarra had finally come together. It was Francisco de Ybarra, an ancestor of don Hipólito, who had been the first governor and adelantado of that district.

Captain Diego de Solís served as lieutenant governor of the fort of Punta Santa Elena for several months, shortly after Velasco's departure.²⁷ It is possible that Solís was a kinsman of Menéndez, through the adelantado's marriage to Maria de Solís. Alonso Solís was killed in Florida when Indians attacked and burned the settlement. Solís's wife, doña Catalina Barbon, and their two sons escaped, along with other settlers, in three ships. When she arrived in Havana, she had to depend on the kindness of strangers to help her and her family reach Mexico City. There she petitioned the viceregal authorities for a pension, noting the service of her husband and that of her father who also had died in royal service in Spain. The records do not indicate what subsequently happened to doña Catalina.²⁸

26. Antonia Heredia Herrera, *Catálogo de las comultas del Corsejo de India, 1605-6609* (Seville, 1984), 150; David P. Henige, *Colonial Governors* (Madison, 1970), 316, 346.

27. Connor, *Colonial Records*, I, 200-01, 238-41; AGI, Contaduría, 941.

28. AGI, Patronato, 75, Num. 1, ramo 4.

Another official in Menéndez's Florida expedition was Felipe de Valdés. Despite the large number of Menéndez kinsmen with the surname Valdés, Felipe was probably not related, or at least he claimed no relationship. In testimony presented in Mexico in 1577, at about the same time that doña Catalina Barbon arrived there, Valdés outlined his participation in the Florida enterprise. He was a supply officer (*proveedor*) for the armada to Florida and for fortifications in the colony. Part of his duties included recruiting and provisioning settlers for Florida. After the establishment of St. Augustine, Valdés served as a captain for one of the frigates sent to New Spain and Tierra Firme. He ultimately took news of the Florida enterprise back to Spain where he helped secure concessions for the settlement. He then returned to New Spain. For at least two years Valdés was the provisions officer in Mexico for the Florida settlement. At some point in his career he had served as a junior officer in the Indies fleet.

After settling in Mexico, and while working on the provisioning of Florida, Valdés married doña Antonia de Perales. Both of her grandfathers had served in New Spain. Her paternal grandfather had fought under Cortés in the conquest of the Aztecs, and her maternal grandfather had been a secretary of government in the second *audiencia*. Valdés petitioned the crown for compensation for his own service and that of his wife's family. The viceroy and *audiencia* agreed that he was a competent individual and that he had honorable relatives.²⁹

Lucas Pinto also had participated in the enterprise of Florida as a procurement officer. Prior to going to Florida, he had served in the Spanish imperial armies in Europe. According to his testimony drawn up in Mexico in 1581, he was a member of the Florida expedition and had fought against the French there in 1565. After Jean Ribault's defeat, Pinto was sent to Havana to purchase supplies for St. Augustine. While still serving in Florida he had commanded a party sent into the interior to capture three slaves who had escaped and were living with the Indians, somewhere between Mexico and Florida. This expedition, and others, had familiarized him with the Gulf coast of Florida.³⁰

29. *Ibid.*, Num. 1, ramo 5; AGI, Mexico, 213, Ramo 1, Num. 2.

30. Florida is used in the sixteenth-century connotation meaning the entire Gulf coast from Tampico, Mexico, to Florida, and north to the Carolinas.

According to Pinto's testimony, in 1574 he was sent to Santander to organize colonists planning to go to Florida. He left Florida for Mexico carrying with him a recommendation from the acting governor. He also secured a royal recommendation for the Mexican officials. On the basis of these recommendations, he received a viceregal appointment as governor of the province of Panuco. Royal treasury records show that from 1576 to 1578, he was corregidor of Xilitla, and from 1578-1579, corregidor of the mines of Ixcateopan.³¹ He claimed also to have fought English pirates off the Pacific coast of Mexico. On the basis of his service in Florida and Panuco, he stated that he had full knowledge of the whole Gulf coast. His petition to the king requested that he be granted the governorship of either Honduras or Nicaragua, or one of several treasury offices for the Atlantic fleet, or the captaincy of one of the galleons. There is no indication in the records of his success in gaining any of these posts.³²

Pinto was one of the better known veterans of the Menéndez expedition living in Mexico. He served as a witness for another veteran, Cristóbal Villegas Fajardo, who had called on others with Florida experience to corroborate his testimony. An interesting feature of Fajardo's testimony is the details it provides of the Menéndez expedition, especially the assault on the French at Fort Caroline in 1565. According to witnesses presented by Villegas Fajardo, when Menéndez arrived off the Florida coast, he sighted Ribault's ships. The French fleet quickly sailed away. Menéndez then landed some of his men. The Spanish spent the next three days slogging through the marshes and swamp until they arrived at Fort Caroline on the St. Johns River. In a surprise attack the Spanish captured the unsuspecting fort and nearly all of the French. A few days later, Jean Ribault and a large contingent of his men, whose ship had been wrecked in a storm, were captured at Matanzas Inlet south of St. Augustine. Except for a few who professed to be Catholics, all the French were executed. Villegas Fajardo served two years in Florida. From there he went first to Havana and then to Mexico where he settled in the district of Michoacan and married doña Juana de Miranda, the granddaughter of a conqueror. He petitioned

31. AGI, Contaduría, 679 and 681, Data-Corregidores.

32. AGI, Contaduría, 941; AGI, Mexico, 216, Ramo 1, Num. 5.

the crown for recompense for his own services and those of his wife's family.³³

Gonzalo Sánchez was another Florida veteran. While he did not participate in the initial campaign against the French in Florida in 1565, he and his family were living in St. Augustine sometime before 1568. Sanchez was a native of Villa del Era in the kingdom of Castille. He lived in Santa Elena for some eight years, along with his wife and four children.³⁴ In Florida he had participated in two expeditions, one to Oristan with Menéndez and the other, under the leadership of Antonio de Solís, to pacify the Guales. Sanchez also claimed that he had been involved in at least one action against the French. He departed Florida in 1577, with a license from Governor Hernando de Miranda, for Mexico. When testimony was presented in 1580, the *audiencia* reported that he seemed to be a rustic and was not known locally.³⁵

Martín de Heredia and his brother, Toribio, were natives of Oviedo, the capital of the principality of Asturias. Martín was a student at Salamanca. Along with others recruited by Menéndez in his home area, they participated in the expedition against the French, and were at Santa Elena and St. Augustine for three more years. Sometime during that period Toribio died before he could collect his pay. Heredia settled in Mexico where he entered the priesthood and studied Nahuatl, the Aztec language. He served as curate in the village of Izcatlan in the diocese of Oaxaca, and succeeded in securing a royal recommendation to the curacy of the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe. He began his service there in 1579.³⁶

These biographies demonstrate several important features of early colonial Florida. While the ties between Florida and Mexico were important, another selection process could show similar relationships to Yucatan, Central America, Cuba, or Hispaniola. Florida served an important function for the central regions of the empire. It was a patrimonial state, where individuals were rewarded for service to the crown. Florida functioned in many ways like the Philippines, New Mexico, and other frontier regions in providing opportunities for royal service.

33. *Ibid.*, Ramo 3, Num. 33.

34. AGI, Contaduría, 941.

35. AGI, Mexico, 215, Ramo 1, Num. 24.

36. *Ibid.*, 2705.

Family ties were also important. For these Florida veterans, especially don Diego de Velasco, family ties played a central, if not decisive, role in the formation of their careers. The composition of the enterprise of Florida manifests the importance of family, since Menéndez drew heavily upon his kinsmen to recruit his expedition. After many of the veterans arrived in Mexico, they began to forge local ties of kinship there. Some married into the families of the conquerors and early settlers of Mexico.

Nobility was another important facet of Spanish society. Only a few nobles ever went to Florida. Those who did served an important function in transferring the social structure of Spain to the New World. Likewise, the role of nobility in the imperial government was important, serving as an additional tie to help bind the far-flung empire. Thus nobility, family, and service are features which gave stability and continuity to the Spanish empire in America, and formed the basis of Spanish society in early Florida.