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COLONIAL FLORIDA

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The extent of territory and the duration of time covered by a subject so broad as COLONIAL FLORIDA make an introductory note necessary. The name Florida once covered all the territory from the end of the Peninsula to Labrador. In Colonial times, before James Moore's destructive expedition, the name was confined to the present States of Florida and Georgia. Not until 1821 did the State acquire its present boundaries.

The Colonial history of Florida may be divided into four periods :

- I 1513-1565, the period of Beginnings.
- II 1565-1763, the period of first Spanish administration.
- III 1763-1783, the period of English domination.
- IV 1783-1821, the period of second Spanish occupation.

To trace the history of three hundred years within the narrow limits of three thousand words - ten words for each year - is no trivial task. Such small compass invites no adequate treatment of any single period, much less of four periods. Considering the vast possibilities of the subject, I thought it best to confine my account mainly to the colonial history of the territory now called Florida, over which five flags have flown successively, the Spanish, the French, the English, the Confederate, and the Star Spangled Banner. I shall touch only its most important events, and mention only its most interesting characters.

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The sixteenth century was a century of discovery and exploration. In discovery, in adventure, and in colonization, it was Spain that led the way. Her daring mariners, lured by the lust for gold, pushed their prows into uncharted seas, and her gallant cavaliers and missionaries, fired by religious zeal, penetrated into strange wildernesses where no white man's foot had ever trodden. Long before the ice-crustured pines of Plymouth heard the rugged psalmody of the Puritan, the sandalled foot of the Franciscan friar trod the solitudes and shadowy wilds of Florida.

Florida, a land of perpetual summer, began its historical existence wrapped in romance and adventure. Ponce de Leon, a bold Spanish mariner, came upon it in 1513, while he was searching for a fabulous Fountain of Perpetual Youth. Finding the fields covered with flowers, Ponce de Leon believed himself transported to an enchanted land. The whole country decked in the fresh bloom of spring charmed his senses. The trees, trellised with vines, gay with blossoms, and fragrant with delicious odors, first seen on Pascua Florida, or Easter Sunday, led him to call the country Florida. Though Ponce de Leon failed in his romantic quest, he gave us Florida, a name which, unwittingly, perpetuates his own.

The first attempt to plant a colony in Florida was undoubtedly that of Ponce de Leon himself in 1521. But the natives, hitherto friendly to Spaniards, quite naturally, resented their attempt at conquest and bravely re-

sisted de Leon. His expedition ended disastrously. An arrow wound forced him to retire to Cuba, where he died, leaving the colony unfounded and the Indians unconverted.

For fifty years, following its discovery, the history of Florida is studded with names of explorers, conquerors, and colonizers. Diego Miruelo (1516), De Ayllon (1520), Pedro de Quexos (1523), Panfilo de Narvaez (1527), Ferdinando de Soto (1539), and Don Tristan de Luna (1559) were but a few of the brave Spaniards who tried to plant colonies and to convert the savage Indians. All alike met with failure, disappointment and death, but not before their explorations had widened the geographical knowledge of interior Florida.

The record of the Spanish attempts to conquer and colonize Florida during this period tells a sad story of dishonesty and treachery. Very often the Spaniards betrayed the trust of the ignorant savages, and more than once they repaid their kindness and confidence with cruelty and deceit. Even De Soto, the most brilliant cavalier of that brilliant time, in spite of his great achievements, deserves censure for the cruelty with which he treated the natives.

Fairbanks in his HISTORY OF FLORIDA tells us that until 1562, the Spanish cavaliers, with the battle-cry of St. Iago, carried slaughter and devastation in their march through the wilds of Florida. Intoxicated by a desire for the gold and silver of Peru, they saw in Florida a land so devoid of wealth, so utterly unsuited for colonization, that all further attempts to settle it were regarded as visionary. The sad fate of Narvaez and De Soto, who found only graves in the wilds of Florida, added to the gloomy outlook, so that for a time all exploration of the interior of the Peninsula had ceased. The various expeditions had borne no fruits, no permanent settlements had been established, and Spain had not yet gained a foothold.

In 1562, however, an entirely different class of

people appeared upon the fields of the Floridian Peninsula, a class whose main object was not conquest but colonization and settlement. These were the French Huguenots, religious exiles, under the leadership of the courageous Jean Ribault. Having been successful in winning and retaining the affection of the savages, these Frenchmen founded a short-lived colony at Port Royal. The customary difficulties were encountered. Although the land was fertile enough, none were willing to cultivate it. Indolence brought on starvation, and mutiny followed. Two years later, Rene de Laudonniere, also a Huguenot, sent out by Admiral de Coligny, followed Ribault, and in 1564 established a colony at Fort Caroline on the St. Johns. But this colony fared no better, and the colonists were near starvation when Menendez appeared upon the scene in 1565.

Both attempts of the French to establish a colony ended tragically. The arrival of Menendez sealed the fate of the colonies. The failure of a surprise attack upon his men provoked him to a merciless slaughter of the French colonists. The brilliant pages of Parkman's *THE PIONEERS OF FRANCE* recount at length the struggles between the colonists of Ribault and Menendez. No historian of Colonial Florida fails to mention the tragic fate of the French or the unpardonable cruelty of Menendez.

The hanging of Ribault's men by this explorer casts a black stain on an otherwise noble character. But we must bear in mind that he lived in the sixteenth century, a century of religious intolerance and bigotry. The sinister revenge of Dominic de Gourgues, a self-constituted champion of his countrymen's wrongs, in 1568, offers a parallel of cruelty and vindictiveness no less sad. His retaliatory act was not less bloody and cruel than the deed of Menendez.

With the landing of Menendez in 1565 and the founding of St. Augustine, the oldest city in the United States, begins the period of the first Spanish administration, a

period extending over almost two centuries. The history of St. Augustine now becomes the history of Florida. The birth of St. Augustine, a quaint, romantic, straggling, and, as Sidney Lanier puts it, "dear and clearer growing" city, was signalized by the firing of cannon, by the sounding of trumpets, and the display of banners. The "Te Deum Laudamus" was chanted, while Adelantado and all his company kneeling kissed the crucifix in the presence of assembled Indians who gazed at them in solemn wonder.

The site of St. Augustine was an Indian village, and the colony consisted of but 600 Spaniards. The chronicle of its early history reveals nothing unique. Low provisions, wars with Indians, mutinies within the garrison itself, desertions through disaffection caused by increasing distress - all these constitute a part of its early history. Had Menendez been a man of less perseverance, energy, and fortitude, the colony would probably have shared the same fate as its predecessors. Its success was due mainly to the resolute leadership of its courageous governor.

The first Spanish administration of Florida is of religious rather than political importance. A missionary spirit underlay all attempts to colonize the Peninsula. Fairbanks, emphasizes this fact by saying that Menendez did all in his power to advance the cause of religion. Secular and regular priests accompanied every expedition. As soon as St. Augustine was established, zealous Franciscans began their toils among the savages. Theirs was the first church, theirs the first school on the continent. At first their efforts met with but feeble results. They found the Indians stubborn and unresponsive, Nevertheless, within eighteen months from the landing of Menendez, the entire coast from Cape Florida to St. Helena had been explored and forts had been built at St. Augustine, San Mateo, Avista Guale, and St. Helena. Block-houses were erected at Tequesta, Carlos, Tocobayo and Coava, and chapels dotted the land.

Some thirty years later, in 1592, twelve Franciscans landed in Florida, and, in less than two years, established twenty missionary houses. But in 1598 occurred the massacre of the saintly sons of St. Francis. One of the friars reproached a dissolute son of the Indian chief of Guale for his licentiousness. The revengeful young savage incited a general conspiracy, which was known as the Yamasee uprising. The heroic death of Fathers Corpa and Rodriguez at this time offer examples of Christian fortitude equalled only by the martyrs of pagan Rome. The Indian marauders went up and down the coast and almost exterminated the missionaries. The Spanish governor, Canco, however, to avenge the death of the fathers, made inroads into the country, slew the Indians and burned their villages and granaries.

The fate of the martyred priests served only to stimulate the missionary zeal of the Franciscans ; for fourteen years later we find in Florida thirty-two sons of St. Francis, headed by Geronimo de Ore, recently arrived from St. Helena. The fathers began their pious labors at once. An Indian catechism had already been written and soon the missionaries began to see some fruits from their blood and toil. Twenty missions were established in the principal Indian villages and the friars preached to the natives with great success.

The opening of the seventeenth century found no European colony on the Atlantic coast except St. Augustine. Although the recipient of government aid, its progress and settlement had been extremely slow. By 1647 the number of families or householders of the town had reached three hundred. It boasted, however, a hall of justice, a parish church with a full staff of ecclesiastics, and a monastery with fifty Franciscans. Shea estimates that at this time there were over 30,000 converted Indians.

The settlement of Carolina by the English in 1663 and the moving of certain colonists to Port Royal caused the colonies to fall into hostilities, which lasted for a

century. The Spanish settlements in Florida at this time suffered disturbances from the buccaneers and free rovers that filled the seas. Only two years after the founding of Carolina, John Davis, a famous pirate, sailed into the harbor of St. Augustine and pillaged the town.

The political history of Florida during the whole seventeenth century is a record of feeble and spasmodic efforts at colonization. Until 1692 the Spaniards had been content to fortify St. Augustine and carry on the work of the missions among the Indians. The success of La Salle, however, in exploring the Mississippi River roused the Spanish government to new energy. The spirit of enterprise and discovery that had practically died out came to life again. The re-awakening led to the colonization of the western coast of Florida, and in 1696, the Spanish colony of Pensacola was planted. This is the second oldest colony in the State.

The new town passed through numerous vicissitudes. The French, under De Bienville, by a skillful stratagem, captured the fort and destroyed everything in 1719. Three-years later, the Spaniards rebuilt it on Santa Rosa Island, but in 1754 it was swept away by a hurricane. Many inhabitants lost their lives; the few survivors settled on the northern shore, the site of the present city.

Petty changes in government, accompanied by little real progress, and difficulties between the neighboring provinces of Florida and Carolina characterize the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Governor Moore's destructive expedition opens the century and furnishes an example of cruelty and wanton destruction hardly paralleled in history. Entire tribes of Indians were completely annihilated. For two years men were tortured, mutilated, or burned at the stake. Though governor of a Christian colony, Moore made no distinction between priest, colonist, or Indian. Besides horribly butchering seven Franciscans, he destroyed the humble chapels, where the sandalled fathers were wont to gather their dusky flocks for instruction in the knowledge of the true

God. He snatched the light of faith from the natives and pulled down their altars, thus demolishing in less than a decade the work of more than a century. The ruins of the edifices can still be seen along the old Spanish highways from St. Augustine to Pensacola.

After Moore's depredatory campaign there was question of abandoning the colony altogether. A constant source of worry to the monarch and an expense to his treasury, it seemed an undesirable possession. He retained it, however, because of its strategic position - it was an outpost protecting Cuba, Santa Domingo, and Puerto Rico - and because it had furnished thousands of converts to the Catholic Church.

Georgia was founded in 1732. Although it formed a barrier between the Indians and Spaniards of Florida and the colonists of Carolina, it became a source of constant friction between the English and the Spanish settlements. A growing feeling of enmity incited Governor Oglethorpe of Georgia to attempt the capture of St. Augustine in 1740, but after months of fruitless battering, the Georgians finally gave up the attempt and returned home. At this late date, the population numbered only 2,143.

The Spanish labors of more than two centuries and a half produced only two small settlements of St. Augustine and Pensacola, and a few Indian missions in the interior of the country. The province was still almost all wilderness and the inhabitants, at the time of its cession to Great Britain, did not exceed six thousand. The Spanish system of colonial government advanced none of the material interests of the country. The government never considered the inhabitants capable of self government. Around the garrisoned posts there gathered a crowd of military and civil parasites, dependents who drew fat salaries for petty official positions. The agricultural population, the backbone of the country, was exceedingly small, as the inroads of the English and the repeated outbreaks of the Indians discouraged all attempts at culti-

vating the soil. St. Augustine remained little more than a garrison town until Florida, by the Treaty of Paris, was ceded to England in 1763.

Under English rule, which lasted nearly twenty years, Florida, infused with a more vigorous life, prospered rapidly. Immigration was invited and liberal grants of land were made to the soldiers of the late wars upon condition of settlement and quit rents after ten years. Literature descriptive of the colony was distributed; the production of indigo was stimulated by means of bounties; the public roads were so well constructed that they remain to the present day the best roads in the State, still known as the "King's Roads." Commerce developed, and, for the first time, something like a representative government was established. Every effort was made to develop the country, and, consequently, unexampled prosperity attended Great Britain's attempt at colonization. Indeed, for the first time in over two centuries, the colony became self-supporting. But these material gains were more than offset by the irreparable religious losses. While Spain had nourished the soul of Florida, England fed only her body.

At the time of the English occupation, Colonial Florida, embracing the coast of Alabama, Mississippi, and a part of Louisiana, was divided into East and West Florida. The former comprised the territory of the present State, with St. Augustine as its capital. The latter embraced roughly what is now Louisiana and portions of neighboring States, with Pensacola as its capital. General James Grant was the first English governor of East Florida.

Many new settlements were made by the English at this time. Beresford, Spring Garden, Rollestown, and Mosquito belong to this period of colonization. Forty families from Bermuda went to Mosquito to engage in shipbuilding. Its fine groves of live oak had attracted the attention of the British government, and the abundant supply of ship timber was considered one of the most

valuable assets of the acquisition of Florida. Sir William Duncan and Dr. Turnbull, with 1,500 Minorcans, founded New Smyrna. In the last three years of English occupation the government spent \$580,000 on the two provinces.

Florida was still a part of the British kingdom when the American Revolution was fought, but it took little or no part in the conflict. The transfer to Great Britain had been too recent for the growth of disaffection, although some of the inhabitants sympathized with the colonists. The territory was used largely as a refuge for loyalists who fled from other States. The news of adoption of the Declaration of Independence was so distasteful to the English loyalists of St. Augustine that they burned Adams and Hancock in effigy on the Plaza. An invasion of Florida was also contemplated at this time by the patriots of Georgia, but it was never effected. If it had been, it would probably have met with entire success, as the English forces were weak in numbers and divided in council.

After the close of the American Revolution, Great Britain, deprived of the other American colonies, found Florida of little importance, and, by the Paris treaty of 1783, formally receded it to Spain. The evacuation was to take place three months after the ratification of the treaty. The unfortunate- inhabitants, placed in a wretched predicament, suffered intensely. The fine estates of the thrifty Englishmen mouldered into decay. Only a few settlers had come from Spain, and the activities of the State were mainly confined to trading with the Indians.

The period of the second Spanish occupation of Florida (1783-1821) is of no great interest. A series of incursions of the United States troops ruined the agricultural interests of the country which had begun to revive. The State itself was not at this time a pleasant place of residence. Indian warfare and the irregular conflicts of adventuring parties with ill-advised republican

frontiersmen kept the inhabitants in a state of anxiety. For St. Augustine alone, these thirty-seven years were comparatively peaceful. Its inhabitants, though poor, were generally light-hearted. They loved music and dances ; they celebrated the carnival each year with masking and frolic.

July 10th, 1821, saw the formal ratification of the treaty which ceded Florida to the United States. On that day the guns of the forts thundered a departing salute to the Spanish flag, as the garrison marched out over the drawbridge. The same guns roared forth a rousing welcome to the Stars and Stripes now waving triumphantly over the colony. Florida had at last been made a territory of the Union. Its birth as a territory of the United States closes the history of its colonial period, and opens a new and more glorious era in the life of the State.