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500 Years of Florida History-- The Seventeenth Century

by Connie L. Lester and Daniel Murphree

Seventeenth-century Florida little resembled the region Ponce de León first visited in 1513. Various indigenous peoples still dominated the peninsula but their numbers had dramatically declined over the years due to disease, warfare, and migration. Thousands of Europeans visited the locale during the 1600s, many of them planning to stay permanently, few of them actually doing so, and most failing to realize their economic, religious or imperial goals there. Africans and African Americans also lived in the region and its hinterlands, though the majority did so under circumstances they would not have chosen. Partially as a result, by 1700 Florida had become a representative community of the progressively diverse and complicated Atlantic, Caribbean, and American Worlds. Ponce's Florida no longer existed.

Modern scholars increasingly have investigated seventeenth century Florida to better understand these dynamics. While much of Florida's past during this period remains unknown, a great deal has been revealed. The intermingling of Native, European, and African peoples fostered resistance, accommodation, and hybridity. Religion functioned as both a bridge and chasm for cross-cultural interaction. Environmental conditions produced profits, despair, and uncertainty for the region's inhabitants. Warfare became more frequent and deadly as imperial rivalries intensified. Images and perceptions of Florida evolved, enticing and confusing residents and non-residents alike. While professional historians and others have not reached consensus on all of these issues, they have created

sophisticated interpretations that improve our understandings of both the region and period.

This issue of the *Florida Historical Quarterly* is the second of the planned six *Special Issues* devoted to an examination of Florida's five centuries of history. Dr. Sherry Johnson, Professor of History at Florida International University, will be the guest editor for the 2015 issue on the Eighteenth Century. Subsequent guest editors are Dr. James Cusick (1800-1865 scheduled for 2016), Dr. John David Smith (1865-1920 scheduled for 2016), and Dr. Gary Mormino (1920-2000 scheduled for 2017).

Publication of this series would not be possible without the continued support of the Florida Historical Society and its members. The editors of this *Special Issue* are especially grateful to Dean José B. Fernandez and the University of Central Florida College of Arts and Humanities for partially underwriting the 2014 *Special Issue* on Seventeenth-Century Florida.

The following essays present a window into current scholarly perspectives on seventeenth century Florida. Guest editor Jane Landers provides both an overview of historiography related to the topic and analysis of Florida's role in geopolitics during the era. Bonnie Mcewan offers an anthropologist's evaluation of the peninsula during the 1600s and a specific examination of life (and archaeological reconstructions of it) at Mission San Luis. St. Augustine, the capital and principle city of Spanish Florida, is the focus of two contributors. Susan Parker addresses the development of the settlement economically and demographically over the course of the century while Diane Reigelsperger highlights the global imperial struggles engulfing the city in reference to the 1688 Searles' Raid. Long-time colonial Florida historian Amy Turner Bushnell offers a new assessment of native-Spanish relations during the period, an assessment that challenges conventional interpretations and illustrates the continued richness of Florida as a topic of historical research. Combined, these efforts demonstrate the multiple approaches scholars are currently taking to better understand a land that is distant in time, but still fresh in historical memory.

This *Special Issue* is the second in a six part series dedicated to commemorating Ponce de León's first exploration of Florida and each century that has passed since then. Our goal is to provide readers with a sampling of the best scholarship being produced on Florida's past today. Its contributors do not claim to have the last word on the subject and different interpretations will surely

surface in future years. Nevertheless, the scholarship presented here represents a milestone in our knowledge of the seventeenth century. Never before have historians enjoyed as many tools for deciphering the past as they do today. Rarely before have the results of scholarly investigations been as readily accessible to academics and the general public. We believe that this *Special Issue* of the *Florida Historical Quarterly* reflects these developments and hope that it becomes a permanent fixture on the bookshelves of all those interested in the state's seventeenth century past.