



Mission San Luis, where this thatch-roofed church now sits, was the capital of a string of Spanish missions.

DEMOCRAT FILES

Something for the Irish and Catholics

This will help get you ready for FSU-Notre Dame

Saturday will mark the eighth time Florida State has played a football game against Notre Dame.

But this will be only the second time Notre Dame has played in Tallahassee. For those too young to remember 2002 — or those who just want to forget that 34-24 Notre Dame victory — Saturday will be a special day.

Notre Dame is the most storied program in college football. Notre Dame invented the forward pass. Notre Dame has won 11 national championships and seven Heisman Trophies. Notre Dame won one for the Gipper.

No other school has such a national following as Notre Dame. The school was founded by Catholic priests, and its sports teams are nicknamed the Fighting Irish. Thus, Notre Dame is the favorite team of Catholics and Irish descendants everywhere.

So in honor of the Notre Dame visit, our list of "20 Great Moments In the Catholic and Irish History of Tallahassee."

» Dec. 25, 1539: Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and his Army spend the winter in Tallahassee. The army's half-dozen Catholic priests conducted the first Christmas Mass in America. No presents, no Christmas tree, lots of Latin.

» 1656-1704: Mission San Luis, on Tallahassee's west side, is the capital of a string of Spanish missions. Catholic priests convert the Apalachee Indians to Christianity — but can't persuade the natives to give up their traditional ballgame, a soccer-like game in which star athletes are treated like royalty. Hmm, even in the 17th century, huh?

» 1818: Andrew Jackson, the son of Irish immigrants, leads his army through Leon County, as part of the First Seminole War. Jackson returned

as territorial governor in 1821, was told not to kill anybody and bailed after only three months.

» March 3, 1845: On his last day in office, President John Tyler signs the bill to make Florida the 27th state in the Union. Tyler wasn't Irish. But if he had failed to sign, it would have fallen to his successor, Irish descendant James K. Polk.

» 1846: Tallahassee's first Catholic Church, St. John the Evangelist, opens. Burned down a year later, it is replaced by Church of St. Mary, forerunner of today's Blessed Sacrament Church.

» 1899: William McKinley, one of 22 U.S. presidents with Irish heritage, becomes first U.S. president to visit Tallahassee while president. Presidents Carter, George H.W. Bush and Clinton, also with Irish roots, also will visit while in office.

» 1905: The one Irish-named street in Tallahassee, McCarty Street, is renamed Park Avenue. The change is spearheaded by one of the street's residents who didn't want her son's wedding invitations sullied by an Irish name.

» 1952: Proudly Irish Tom Nugent becomes FSU's third football coach in history. Nugent invents the I-formation, leads FSU to an upset of Tennessee, coaches FSU's first game against Florida and persuades an injured Burt Reynolds to take up acting.

» 1962: Elaine Thorpe enrolls at Blessed Sacrament (now Trinity) Catholic School and becomes the first black child in a previously all-white Tallahassee school. More, by the by, will follow.

» 1965: The first homes are built in Killearn Estates — where the streets are given Irish names. The development is named for nearby Killearn Gardens, which is named for the ancestral home of owner Alfred B. Maclay — in Scotland. Maclay's widow protests Irish names until the state agrees to rename her late husband's property Maclay Gardens.

» 1967: The Co-Cathedral of St.

Thomas More opens on West Tennessee Street. After 30 years of meeting in campus buildings and homes, FSU's Catholic students, faculty and family have their own church. And they appreciate football: Saturday's usual 5 p.m. mass has been moved to 4:15 p.m. for the Notre Dame game.

» 1973: Good Shepherd Catholic Church becomes the third Catholic Church in Tallahassee. St. Louis Catholic Church becomes the city's fourth Catholic church in 1985.

» 1993: Charlie Ward becomes FSU's first winner of the Davy O'Brien Award for best college quarterback.

» 2000: Chris Weinke wins FSU's second Davy O'Brien Award.

» 2013: Jameis Winston wins FSU's third Davy O'Brien Award. And you thought we wouldn't get Jameis Winston's name in here.

» 1998: Ireland's "Riverdance" comes to the Civic Center for the first time. Talk about a good kicking game.

» August 2002: Tallahassee's first Catholic high school, John Paul II, opens. It remains the only Catholic high school between Jacksonville and Pensacola.

» December 2011: Tallahassee has gone 187 years without a visit from the pope. But a Cardinal, St. Louis baseball manager Tony LaRussa, speaks at FSU, where he earned a law degree.

» March 17, 2014: Tallahassee Democrat reporter Sean Rossman, a son of the Old Sod, celebrates St. Patrick's Day by making his family's traditional soda bread. Rossman makes it again in August when Penn State (the school he couldn't get into, though everyone else in his family did) plays in Ireland. You know what's coming Friday.

» Oct. 18, 2014: Undeclared Notre Dame visits undefeated FSU. The last time the two teams were both undefeated when they met was in 1993. Notre Dame won that game, but FSU won the national championship. Be hard to repeat that trick these days.

Contact senior writer Gerald Ensley at gensley@tallahassee.com or 850-599-2310.



Gerald Ensley
The View
From Here