



# RECONSTRUCTING THE PAST



Three centuries after they were destroyed by fire in 1704, five of early America's most important structures have been reconstructed at Mission San Luis in Tallahassee, Florida. Mission San Luis, a National Historic Landmark, was the principal village of the Apalachee Indians and the site of Spanish Florida's westernmost military, religious and administrative headquarters.

## The Council House

The council house is the largest historic period native building archaeologists have found to date in the Southeast. At 125 feet in diameter and five stories high, the council house commanded the Mission's hilltop location which now overlooks Florida's modern-day capital, Tallahassee. Both the council house and the smaller chief's house (70 feet in diameter and planned for future reconstruction) were associated with the paramount leader of the Apalachees and stood as a physical expression of his power.

The council house was the focus of daily life among the Apalachee people and the site of political, administrative and ceremonial activities. Here the Apalachees prepared for war, held ceremonial dances and displayed recently taken scalps in a space that could hold between 2,000 to 3,000 people at a time. Located prominently on a central plaza, the Apalachee structure faced its spiritual counterpart across the circular space—the Spanish Franciscan mission church, with its friary. Reconstruction of the Council House was completed in Dec. 2004.



## The Religious Complex

Of European design, the impressive mission church at San Luis was constructed by the Apalachees. The 50-by-110 foot plank and thatch building was equal in size to the main church at St. Augustine. The focus of religious life, the church contained some of the most elaborate furnishings sent to the province. Apalachees and Spaniards alike attended evening prayers, Sunday mass, holiday services, choir practice, baptisms and marriage and funeral services. Reconstruction of the Spanish Mission church was also completed in Dec. 2004.

Adjacent to the church stands the friary, or convento, which housed the Franciscan friars and religious visitors. In keeping with their vows of poverty, the friars had few personal possessions in contrast to other







Hispanic residents. The friary housed visiting clergy, and there were rooms used for storage, dining and offices. A private chapel was also used by the friars for religious and musical instruction. A separate kitchen building, or cocina, is connected to the friary by a covered pathway.

## The Spanish Village

By the 1670s, the number of European settlers grew with the establishment of cattle ranches, busy shipping operations and other business enterprises. Located on the northeast side of the central plaza, the Hispanic village at San Luis was described by a 1695 traveler as having the appearance of a Spanish city, with as many as 50 houses. On the central plaza, there is a reconstructed two-room Spanish house built of wattle and daub.

## El Castillo de San Luis

*El Castillo de San Luis*, the military complex which provided protection for Spanish interests, both from external raids and internal disorder, opened to visitors in May 2007. The fort at San Luis is the only area of the site visually recorded in a historic document. In 1705, the year after San Luis was burned and abandoned, Admiral Antonio Landeche's reconnaissance party prepared a map containing a descriptive legend of the fort. The map provides considerable detail on the final military complex constructed in the 1690s, including a two-story blockhouse, a palisade and a dry moat.

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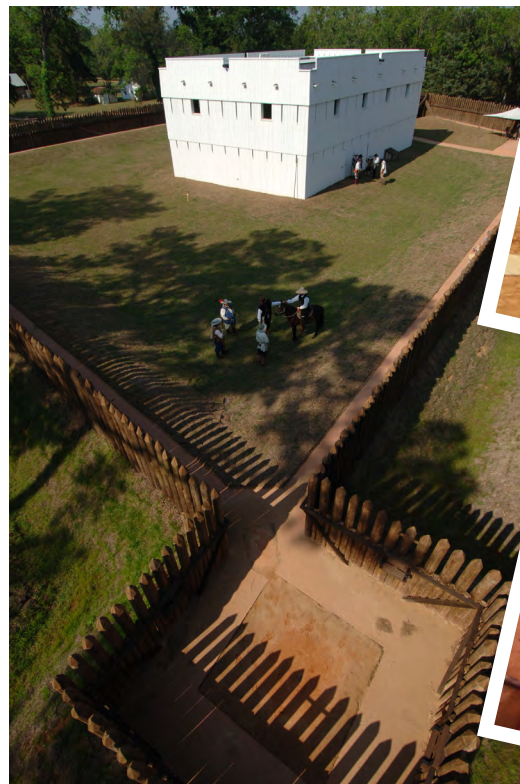
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