

DESTINATION

Mission San Luis takes visitors to Florida's Spanish past

Vickie Lillo
Gadsden County News Service

The date is September 8, 1565.

Pedro Menéndez de Avilés and 800 Spanish settlers have just landed at Ste. Augustine in Spain's 'La Florida'.

Once ashore, the landing party rejoices with a Thanksgiving Mass, inviting the local Selyo Indians to join in - 56 years before the Pilgrims' similar feast.

"The celebration was due to a safe crossing, not related to the harvest," explains Arielle O'Hara, a staff-member in period dress at Mission San Luis. "There was plenty of food, though. Dried meats, olives, venison, lots of corn."

The time depicted at Mission San Luis is a world in which the Revolutionary War between the American colonies and King George III's British aristocracy is still nearly 140 years away - however, conquistadors from Spain had already plundered their way through South and Central America.

By 1656, they have arrived at Mission San Luis, firmly entrenched in what becomes Spanish-Florida's 17th-century western capital.

Since the conquering Spaniards failed to find any gold or spices in the New World, they had to settle for their third objective - saving souls.

Thus, La Florida became a place for 'souls', namely Apalachee Indians, to be converted.

Catholicism is brought

to the local tribes; Franciscan clergymen baptize thousands into the faith.

Presently, this historic Tallahassee misión remains the only reconstructed religious settlement for proselytizing Native Americans to Christianity in the Southeast.

Conversion had its requirements, though - Spaniards and indigenous alike were expected to attend Saturday night vespers and Sunday morning Mass together, and other perfunctory occasions.

Nevertheless, daily life went on, pursuant to custom.

Apalachee households cluster about small hamlets in the pastoral heartland; men hunted in the woods, angled in the rivers and cleared the fields. Besides child-rearing, grinding corn and preparing skins, women gathered field crops - a viable task in the Florida breadbasket.

Initially, the Apalachees lure Spain's countrymen to their province through the wealth attributed to their agrarian lifestyle.

The Spanish maintained over 100 settlements throughout Florida from the 1560's to the 1690's, with Mission San Luis being their westernmost outpost.

When a formidable Apalachee chieftain offers to construct a blockhouse (casa fuerte) for the Spanish troop's garrison, the Tallahassee hilltop becomes a military, religious and administrative

headquarters for the Spaniards.

Even while in a 'new world', the Spanish too live day-to-day not much differently than they did back on the European continent.

Farmhands raised cattle, pigs, and chickens, providing protein for the mission. Cobblers mended shoes, tailors sew, blacksmiths forged agriculture implements, utensils and weapons in their smithies - plying their trades in typical fashion.

"This is not a hands-off site, so anything you want to handle, feel free to do so. Just make sure it's not hot," warns the mission's modern-day metalsmith Santiago de Campo. "We're here to educate and entertain, not injure."

Visiting children are delighted to work the bellows.

In the military ranks during this time, off-duty soldiers drank homemade spirits, engaged in card-games or dice, and strummed guitar-like instruments called vihuelas.

With few latina women at San Luis, most of whom - like the deputy-governor's wife - hold contemptuous attitudes toward the Apalachees, many Spanish men took Apalachee brides.

For Apalachee women, European marriage was viewed as an upward path for themselves and their children.

Spanish families (or mixed Spanish-Apalachee families) lived in pueblo households, and there were chores for everyone.

The youngest children cleaned chamber pots while the older offspring gathered water - a drudgery that involves toting buckets attached to a shoulder yoke.

Besides the clay pueblo homes inside the compound, there are other important buildings.

"The Council House, the Apalachee 'sleeping quarters'," notes Chujuta Juan, a Mestizo of mixed Spanish and Apalachee bloodlines, "Are for merchants, visitors and Apalachee residents."

Near the center of the Apalachee council house's prodigious bonfire, are raised benches.

"The lower level in the middle of the circle is for warriors, the outer second level is for council



PHOTOS BY VICKIE LILLO

School children gather around Mission San Luis' blacksmith, Santiago de Campo's blacksmithing demonstration while he hammers out nails and other building materials over his smithing fire and iron.

members, and the highest bench is for the chief," Juan explains.

Thatched by thousands of palm fronds, with only two small doors, no windows and an apex opening to allow smoke from the conflagration to waft out, the council house swelters in the summer, but becomes quite cold in the damp, Florida winters.

Currently, the thatch roof has been removed, as it was beginning to rot.

"It's actually healthy for the building," confides Rebecca Woofter, the mission's Education Manager. "It lets the wood breathe."

Across the way sits The Plaza, the hub of all mission activities.

A wide-open, football field-sized, treeless courtyard of packed red earth.

Soldiers would hold marching drills on these grounds while merchants ply their trades, and the infamous Apalachee ball game would be played here.

In this game, 50 competitors partake in a violent, sometimes-bloody, sometimes-deadly, ball game that was dedicated to the gods of rain and thunder.

While the game was integral to the indigenous way of life, the tournaments of 'heathen' sport were not sanctioned by the mission's Spanish friars.

As for the Franciscan missionaries themselves, they lived in el convento (the convent), where they lived simply, having taken vows of poverty.

The friars perform all of the liturgical ceremonies at the Franciscan Church, which is equal in size to St. Augustine's huge

rectory - putting to rest the notion that all Florida missions were primitive outposts.

In fact, there's nothing 'primitive' about el Castillo de San Luis, the Spanish Fort established as a full-scale 1690's citadel upon the threat of British incursion.

Between 12-45 Spanish soldiers lived in the dual-level blockhouse, hunkered down behind a fence-line with four bulwarks, surrounded by a cacti moat.

There were also an indeterminate number of civilians on call (reformados), in case of military strike.

The majority of the garrison's might, however, is borne by the Apalachee militia, trained in the use of firearms and gunpowder artillery.

For this morning's Mission San Luis guests, the mission's modern-day Sergeant-at-Arms Martín de León, clad in empirical conquistador style, guards the armory.

From his sentry post near the palisade fortification wall, he can observe adjutant Diego Jimenez, training with his musket.

The mission's re-enactments are authentic, right down to the burst of black powder from the muzzle-loaded long-guns.

On property, Southern live oaks draped in Spanish moss outline an Apalachee wireframe house.

Sabal Mexicana trees sprout near the Franciscan church. Youpon hollies flank the walkways. Tall bushes of crimson berries, whose leaves were brewed into the favored cassina tea, which was popular three centuries ago.

In 1702, with the onset of a full-scale attack against Spanish-Florida by Carolina's British governor James Moore, the writing was on the wall; two years later, Moore began his campaign against the Apalachee with a force of 50 Englishmen and over 1,000 Creek warriors, allies of the Crown.

Sensing the onslaught, Spaniards and indigenous abandoned the mission... not, however, before razing it to the ground.

By 1704, the Apalachee who were not killed or forced off to the North, relocated to Pensacola or eastward, to St. Augustine.

The Spanish faction migrated within Florida, and by the end of the American Revolution - 79 years later - the Spanish still controlled much of the territory.

But, early into the new century, Spain will be usurped by pirates and the continual barrage of 'unsavory types' storming the New World from Central and South America.

Today's outbuildings - the Council House and Hispanic village, friary and Franciscan houses of worship, and the fortress - have all been meticulously replicated from on-site archaeological excavations.

A testament to the significant contributions of Native Americans and Spaniards, working and living together to fight a common enemy - the British - during early America's colonization.

*Mission San Luis
2100 West Tennessee
Street, Tallahassee
(850) 245-6406
missionsanluis.org*



Spanish Sergeant-at-Arms Martín de León, played by Winston Brock, guards the entrance of the Mission San Luis fort, in Tallahassee.

NOTICE OF INTENT: PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN to all concerned that the Board of County Commissioners of Gadsden County, Florida, intends, at a Regular Meeting, at the Gadsden County Governmental Complex, 9-B East Jefferson Street, Quincy, Florida, at 6:00 p.m. on the 7th day of December 2021, to consider adoption of an ordinance entitled:

ORDINANCE RELATING TO IMMIGRATION SERVICES; CREATING ARTICLE XX, SECTION XX-XXX OF THE CODE OF ORDINANCES OF GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA; PROHIBITING THE UNLICENSED PRACTICE OF LAW FOR THE PROVISION OF IMMIGRATION SERVICES; REQUIRING NOTARIES PUBLIC WHO ARE NOT ATTORNEYS TO INCLUDE CERTAIN LANGUAGE IN ADVERTISEMENTS, AND PROHIBITING ADVERTISEMENTS FOR NOTARIAL SERVICES THAT INCLUDE THE LITERAL TRANSLATION OF "NOTARY PUBLIC" INTO A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH; ADDING SECTION XX-XXX OF THE CODE OF GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA TO IMPOSE CIVIL PENALTIES; PROVIDING SEVERABILITY, INCLUSION IN THE CODE, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE

INTERESTED PARTIES MAY APPEAR AT THE MEETING AND BE HEARD WITH RESPECT TO THE PROPOSED ORDINANCE. IF A PERSON DECIDES TO APPEAL ANY DECISION MADE BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WITH RESPECT TO THIS MATTER, HE WILL NEED A RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS, AND FOR SUCH PURPOSE, HE MAY NEED TO ASSURE THAT A VERBATIM RECORDING OF THE PROCEEDING IS MADE, WHICH RECORD INCLUDES TESTIMONY AND EVIDENCE UPON WHICH THE APPEAL IS TO BE BASED.

The proposed ordinance is available for public inspection in the Gadsden County Administrator's Office, located at 9 B E. Jefferson Street, Quincy, Florida and on the County website at gadsdencountyfl.gov.

If you are a person with a disability who needs any accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding, you are entitled, at no cost to you, to the provision of certain assistance. Persons needing assistance in obtaining any information from the County or attending the public hearing must contact the Gadsden County Administrator's Office, 9B E. Jefferson Street, Quincy, Florida, (850) 875-8650, at least 48 hours prior to the hearing; if you are hearing or voice impaired, call 711.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

By: _____
Nicholas Thomas, Clerk

Published one time
November 25, 2021
Gadsden County Times,
Havana Herald, and
Chattahoochee News

NOTICE OF INTENT: PUBLIC HEARING

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN to all concerned that the Board of County Commissioners of Gadsden County, Florida, intends, at a Regular Meeting, at the Gadsden County Governmental Complex, 9-B East Jefferson Street, Quincy, Florida, at 6:00 p.m. on the 7th day of December 2021, to consider adoption of an ordinance entitled:

AN ORDINANCE OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA, AMENDING AND ADOPTING RULES OF PROCEDURE AND DECORUM FOR OF THE GADSDEN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS; PROVIDING DEFINITIONS; PROVIDING A TITLE; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

INTERESTED PARTIES MAY APPEAR AT THE MEETING AND BE HEARD WITH RESPECT TO THE PROPOSED ORDINANCE. IF A PERSON DECIDES TO APPEAL ANY DECISION MADE BY THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS WITH RESPECT TO THIS MATTER, HE WILL NEED A RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS, AND FOR SUCH PURPOSE, HE MAY NEED TO ASSURE THAT A VERBATIM RECORDING OF THE PROCEEDING IS MADE, WHICH RECORD INCLUDES TESTIMONY AND EVIDENCE UPON WHICH THE APPEAL IS TO BE BASED.

The proposed ordinance is available for public inspection in the Gadsden County Administrator's Office, located at 9-B E. Jefferson Street, Quincy, Florida and on the County website at gadsdencountyfl.gov.

If you are a person with a disability who needs any accommodation in order to participate in this proceeding, you are entitled, at no cost to you, to the provision of certain assistance. Persons needing assistance in obtaining any information from the County or attending the public hearing must contact the Gadsden County Administrator's Office, 9-B E. Jefferson Street, Quincy, Florida, (850) 875-8650, at least 48 hours prior to the hearing; if you are hearing or voice impaired, call 711.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF GADSDEN COUNTY, FLORIDA

By: _____
Nicholas Thomas, Clerk

Published one time
November 25, 2021
Gadsden County Times,
Havana Herald, and the
Chattahoochee News