



*By Bonnie G. McEwan • Photography by Ray Stanyard*

# Castillo de San

*Mission San Luis* IN TALLAHASSEE WAS THE WESTERN CAPITAL OF SPANISH FLORIDA FROM 1656 TO 1704. THE MISSION CONSISTS OF 60 ACRES OF LARGELY UNDISTURBED 17TH-CENTURY ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS. THESE INCLUDE THE REMAINS FROM WELL-DOCUMENTED RELIGIOUS, SECULAR, PUBLIC, AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS OF THE SITE. APALACHEE INDIANS AND SPANIARDS FORGED A STRATEGIC ALLIANCE, DRAWN TOGETHER BY RELIGION AS WELL AS MILITARY AND ECONOMIC PURPOSE. † TODAY, MISSION SAN LUIS BRINGS THE 17TH CENTURY TO LIFE THROUGH LIVING





# Luis †

**HISTORY, PERIOD BUILDINGS, EXHIBITS, AND  
ARCHAEOLOGY. MODERN DAY VISITORS TO  
MISSION SAN LUIS DISCOVER A RE-CREATED  
COMMUNITY WHERE TIME STANDS STILL. THE  
RECENTLY OPENED CASTILLO DE SAN LUIS  
JOINS THE RECONSTRUCTED APALACHEE**

**COUNCIL HOUSE, FRANCISCAN CHURCH, FRIARY, AND THE SPANISH VILLAGE TO  
TELL THE STORY OF THE PLACE AND ITS PEOPLE. THE SITE IS A NATIONAL HISTORIC  
LANDMARK AND RECIPIENT OF A 2006 PRESERVE AMERICA PRESIDENTIAL AWARD.**





*This reconstruction provides an unparalleled glimpse into the final chapter of this frontier community.*



**ABOVE: ARTIFACTS RECOVERED FROM THE FORT INCLUDE AN ESCUTCHEON — PROBABLY FROM A CARTRIDGE BOX, A BUCKLE DECORATED WITH FACETED CRYSTALS, AND A RELIGIOUS MEDALLION. OPPOSITE: DRAWN IN 1705 DURING ADMIRAL ANTONIO DE LANDECHE'S RECONNAISSANCE OF THE SPANIARDS' FALLEN WESTERN CAPITAL, THIS MAP'S LEGEND IDENTIFIES THE CASTILLO DE SAN LUIS.**

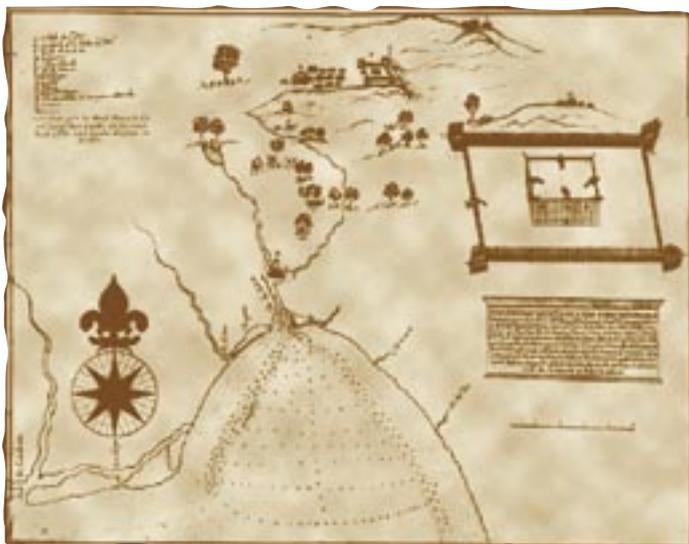


## HISTORICAL SETTING

For centuries Apalachee Province was home to one of the most powerful and advanced indigenous chiefdoms in the North American southeast. The Apalachees' historic alliance with the Spaniards was intended to reinforce the authority of their chiefs and provide a strategic alliance in the face of foreign incursions. Franciscan missions had been established in Apalachee Province beginning in 1633.

Deputy Governor Antonio de Sartucha selected the present day location of San Luis for his capital in 1656. It was situated on one of the highest hilltops in the region, affording views of the surrounding countryside. The fort was located at the north end of the town center, close to a ravine where springs provided water year round. San Luis's chief agreed to move his village to the site in order to be near the Spaniards, and he promised to build the deputy governor and his soldiers a substantial blockhouse. The fort was staffed by 40 Spanish soldiers by the 1680s, and sometimes more for special expeditions. Although there was always a relatively small garrison, San Luis's military strength rested with its native allies. Apalachee warriors received European

military training, served as sentries, held military titles, and often made up 100% of Spanish strike forces.



## THE MILITARY COMPLEX

The San Luis blockhouse was built between October 1695 and mid-1697. It was large enough to accommodate the garrison and San Luis's 1,500 residents. The outbreak of Queen Anne's War in 1701—known in Europe as the War of Spanish Succession—allied Spain and France against England. This ignited British hostility against Spanish Florida





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and its vulnerable hinterland settlements. It was not until October of 1702, in the wake of a disastrous defeat of a largely Apalachee force on the banks of the Flint River, that Spaniards attempted to turn the blockhouse into a proper fort. Despite the impact of a severe epidemic, work on the full military complex began in 1703 with the construction of a dry moat and stockade backed with a firing platform.

Although soldiers stationed at San Luis had homes nearby, they maintained a round-the-clock presence at the Castillo. From the time the stockade was built in 1703, it also provided shelter for the garrison and the inhabitants of the entire village when alarms sounded. On July 31, 1704, with the end clearly in sight, the Spanish garrison and their native allies destroyed San Luis. The Spaniards withdrew to St. Augustine, while most of the Apalachees from San Luis moved westward to Mobile and, eventually, Louisiana.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

The general placement of the fort within the San Luis village was probably determined from the earliest Spanish reconnaissance of the area. It has been an area of intermittent archaeological testing since the 1940s. Archaeologists who have made their mark there include three founding fathers of Florida archaeology: John W. Griffin in 1948, Hale G. Smith in 1950, and Charles H. Fairbanks in 1956 and 1957. Each of them attempted to locate and define basic features of the Castillo. Following purchase of the site by the State of Florida, the archaeology staff conducted systematic excavations in the military complex from 1990 to 2002, investigating the entire blockhouse and portions of the palisade and moat.

### CASTILLO DE SAN LUIS TODAY

The recently reconstructed fortification at San Luis is testament to the strong military presence sought for Apalachee Province by Spaniards as early as 1657. The native chiefs' reluctance to accept an expanded garrison and fort undermined this development. In many respects, military personnel assumed more of an administrative and fiscal role in the province, securing labor tribute and provisions for St. Augustine. Some soldiers eventually withdrew to the active reserve and sought wealth as ranchers, ship owners, and merchants.

While *Castillo de San Luis* provided a military presence on the frontier, its small garrison and limited supplies were insufficient to deter invading forces. This reconstruction provides a unique glimpse into the final chapter of this remarkable frontier community. 🏰

#### To Learn More

Mission San Luis is located at 20 Mission Road in Tallahassee. The site is open Tuesday to Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and closed on Mondays, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Admission is free. Call 850.487.3711 or visit [www.missionsanluis.org](http://www.missionsanluis.org).

