

# MISSION SAN LUIS DE APALACHEE



*A Teacher's Guide*



## A Florida Heritage Publication

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The acknowledgements for the second edition of this guide should be read in conjunction with the thanks extended in relation to the first edition. The former thanks remain relevant and are listed below.

Acknowledgements for the 1998 edition of this guide:

This booklet is part of a comprehensive interpretive project made possible with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (GM-24665-92 & GM-25295-95), the Florida Legislature, and Florida's Conservation and Recreation Lands Program. George Percy, Director of the Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources, was a constant source of encouragement throughout the four years of project development and implementation.

We are particularly grateful to Museum of Florida History staff member Steven Little, under the direction of Jan Wiley and Steve Oakley, who designed the layout of this booklet. Synergy Design Group, under the direction of John LoCastro and Mary Frances Weathington, designed and produced the original panel layouts and digital art. Edward Jonas produced five spectacular paintings for the project and Museum of Florida History artists Robert Deaton, Lynn Rogers, and Bill Celander created many of the complex graphics and design elements. The principal authors of the text were Bonnie G. McEwan, John H. Hann and James J. Miller, with significant contributions by Richard L. Ehrlich and Jane G. Landers. We thank all of the project participants for their time and enthusiasm.

Bonnie G. McEwan and James J. Miller  
Project Directors

Acknowledgements for the 2020 edition:

This booklet is part of a comprehensive interpretive project made possible with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (GM-24665-92) & GM-25295-95), a Cultural Endowment Grant from the Division of Cultural Affairs, Florida Department of State, and the Florida Legislature.

We remain grateful to all of the project participants for all of their hard work on such a worthy project.

Jonathan C. Sheppard  
Executive Director

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# Mission San Luis de Apalachee

Mission San Luis was one of more than 100 mission settlements established in Spanish Florida between the 1560s and 1690s.

Between 1656 and 1704, more than 1400 Apalachee Indians and Spaniards lived at the mission. San Luis was a principal village of the Apalachee Indians and home of one of their most powerful leaders. San Luis was also the Spaniards' westernmost military, religious, and administrative headquarters.



◀ Admiral Antonio de Landeche conducted a survey of Apalachee Province in 1705, one year after the missions were abandoned. This map, drawn during Landeche's visit, is the only cartographic evidence of San Luis and the surrounding area.

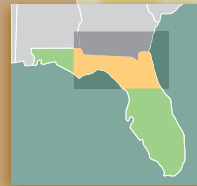


# The Land of the Apalachee

The agricultural wealth of Apalachee Province made the native inhabitants one of the most powerful and prosperous tribes in Florida. The fertile soils and dense population were also what attracted Spaniards to the region and led to the economic success of the mission community.



The most important foods in the Apalachee diet were corn, beans, and squash, supplemented by maypop, sunflower, acorn, wild grapes, hickory nuts, blackberries, fish, and wild game.



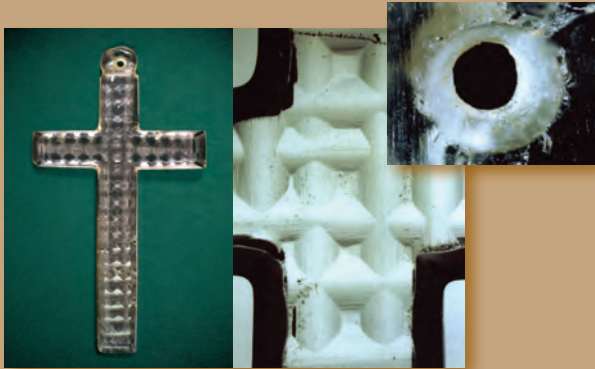
This map shows Apalachee Province and its tribal neighbors at the time of European contact. Apalachee occupied an area bounded by the Aucilla River to the east and the Ochlockonee River to the west and extended from approximately the Georgia state line to the Gulf of Mexico. In addition to the fertile lands, the many lakes, ponds, swamps, and coastal waters provided abundant aquatic resources.



# New Faces, New Ways

Apalachee rulers requested Spanish friars as early as 1607 when epidemics and the threat of foreign attacks brought about a loss of faith in their traditional customs and leadership. From 1633 to 1635 at least 5,000 Apalachee were baptized by two friars, Pedro Muñoz and Francisco Martínez.

Both Spaniards and the Apalachee were forced to alter some of their customs in order to coexist. Some traditions were more easily changed than others.



▶ This quartz crystal cross was found in the church at San Luis. Photomicrography of the cross reveals how the cross was made and suggests that it could be the work of a native artisan. This may be evidence of the Apalachee's religious conversion and their adoption of Christian symbols.





# A Stronghold at the Top



In 1656, the Spaniards chose this hilltop because of its clear view of the countryside. A powerful Apalachee chief offered to build a blockhouse for the Spanish military garrison and moved his village to San Luis. The blockhouse added a formal military component to the mission and preceded Spanish civilian settlement of the province.

▲ This bird's-eye view shows San Luis looking east circa 1700, more than four decades after the mission was first established at this location. (The kitchen behind the friary was discovered after this artist's conception was drawn.)



# Trade Bolsters San Luis' Economy

Relatively easy access to the St. Marks River port of call enhanced San Luis' trading industry.

Supplies could be unloaded at St. Marks River and, using small boats, could be brought to within 1.5 miles of the mission. Similarly, surplus goods produced at the mission were transported by boat or over land to St. Marks for export. Imported goods found at San Luis originated from Europe, Mexico, South America, and the Orient.

Artifacts found at San Luis provide clues to the daily lives and activities of the mission residents. Large amphora-shaped containers stored olive oil and other Mediterranean foods such as wine and olives. Other frequently found artifacts include European-tradition utensils, pottery, and various iron tools and hardware.



## DIEGO DE FLORENCIA

Diego de Florencia was one of the wealthiest merchants to trade with San Luis. He owned several ships which transported hides, beef, corn, tallow, lard, hams, and chickens to Havana in exchange for goods coming in from Asia, Europe, and other parts of the New World.



# Christianity and the Apalachee

The introduction of Catholicism to the Apalachee at San Luis brought fundamental changes. From marriage to funeral practices, holidays to education, the church influenced nearly every aspect of daily life.

Throughout the day, the church bells tolled to mark many activities. Spaniards and Apalachee alike attended Saturday evening prayers, 11 a.m. Mass on Sundays, services on religious holidays, choir practices, baptisms, marriages, and funeral rites in the church.



▶ Baptisms began at the door of the church with the priest addressing questions to the child who was held by a godparent. The group then moved inside the church to the front where the priest completed the ceremony.

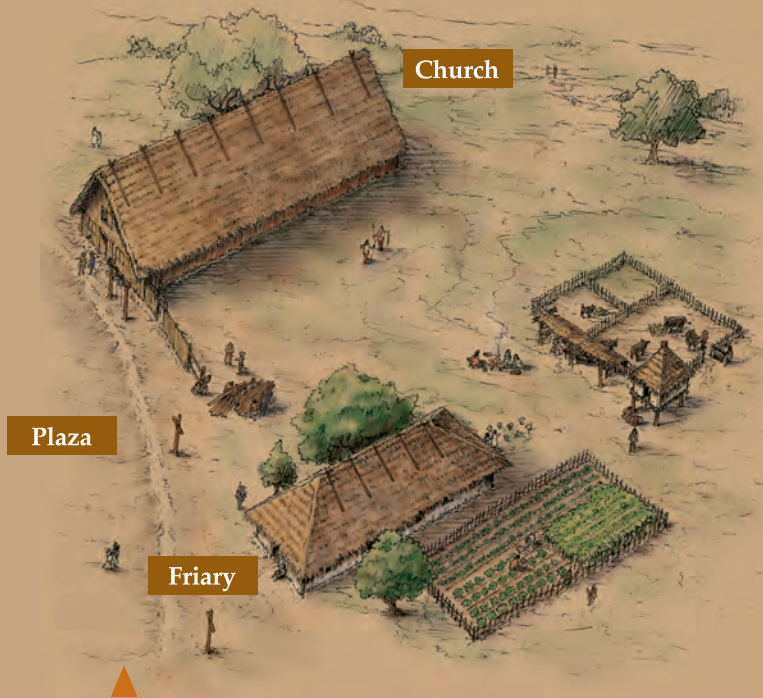


▶ The base of the limestone baptismal font was found inside the church at San Luis. It is the only baptismal font ever located at a mission in Spanish Florida.



# The Friars' Daily Life

The friars lived in the convento (friary) where they used their time away from the church to read and improve their knowledge of the Apalachee language through native interpreters. They also traveled to outlying villages that had no friars in residence.



▲ The friary compound included storage areas for food, a detached kitchen (not shown), gardens, and corralled animals. It is likely that Apalachee women did most of the cooking and laundry for the friars.



▲ In keeping with their vows of poverty, friars lived spartan lives, sleeping on mattresses in sparsely furnished rooms.



## FRAY MARZELO DE SAN JOSEPH

Pastor at San Luis in the 1680s, Fray Marzelo de San Joseph translated a letter written by the chiefs from Apalachee to Spanish. It was sent to King Charles II, the King of Spain. The letter declared the chiefs' loyalty to the king and the governor of Florida and acknowledged that the new governor righted the wrongs of his predecessors.

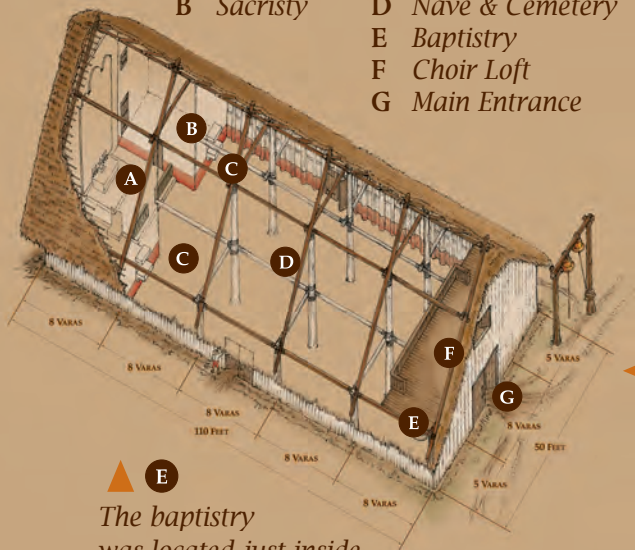


# The Cemetery at San Luis

The cemetery at San Luis is located beneath the floor of the church. Since all the residents of San Luis were Christians, a great number of them were buried in the church cemetery. As in other aspects of life, rank had its privileges. Important or wealthy people were buried closest to the altar.

## *The Church at Mission San Luis*

- A Main Altar
- B Sacristy
- C Side Altar
- D Nave & Cemetery
- E Baptistry
- F Choir Loft
- G Main Entrance



▲ E  
The baptistry was located just inside the main entrance, on the left or Gospel side, of the church.

▲ At 50 by 110 feet, the church at San Luis was equal in size to the church in St. Augustine.



▲ Family and friends usually attended religious services prior to the burial of the deceased in the church.

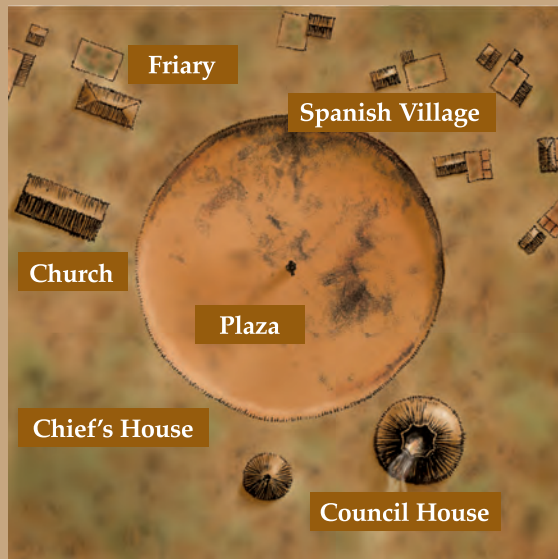


▲ Residents at San Luis recited the rosary nightly.

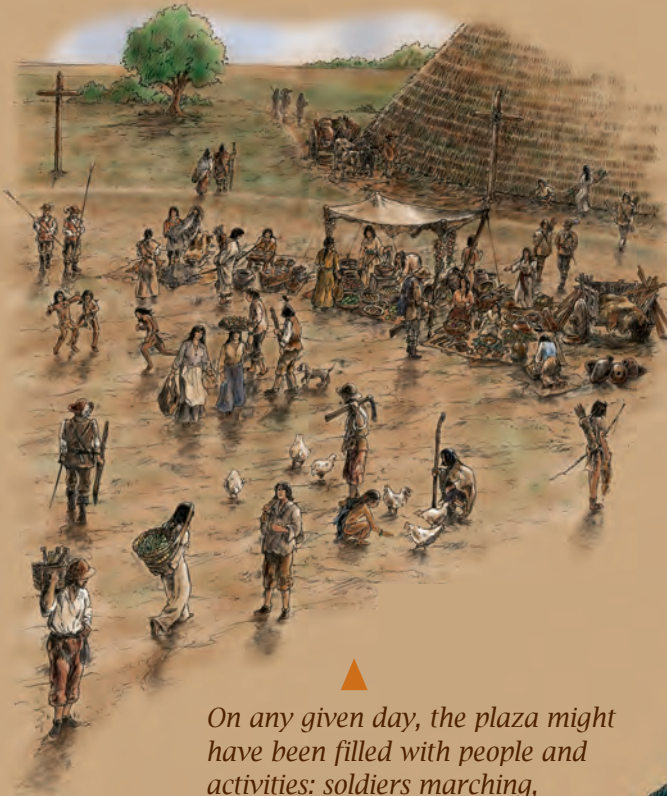


# A Community Gathers at the Plaza

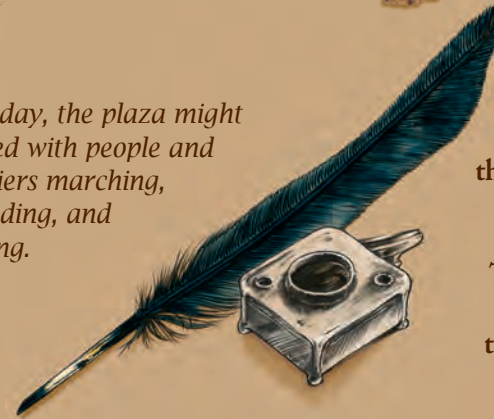
The plaza was the central hub of commerce and activities for the mission. Traditionally, both Spaniards and Apalachee built large, central plazas in their communities.



▲ At 410 feet in diameter, the circular plaza was about the size of a modern football field. An open and expansive area, the treeless, packed-clay plaza was the site of many community activities.



▲ On any given day, the plaza might have been filled with people and activities: soldiers marching, merchants trading, and children playing.



## JUAN DE PAIVA

Juan de Paiva, pastor at San Luis, wrote a description of the ball game and his perception of its evils as part of his campaign to stop the game.

Two native interpreters provided many of the details about the origins and religious practices associated with the ball game.



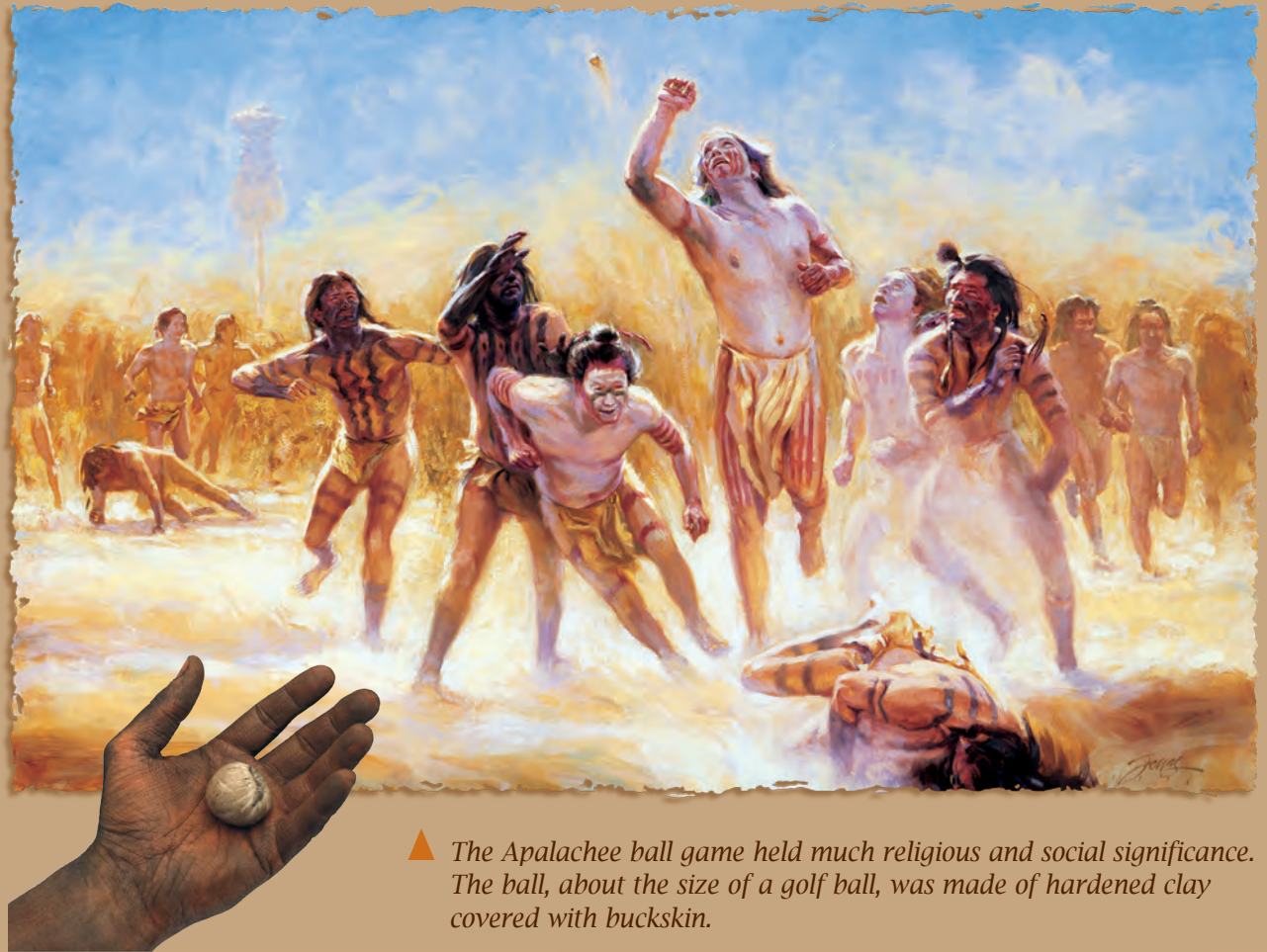
# A Daring and Dangerous Game

The Apalachee ball game was an integral part of native life. The game was dedicated to the native gods of rain and thunder and was played to ensure rain for crops.

The game involved 50 or more players and was quite violent, sometimes resulting in death. Superior ball players became pampered celebrities in their villages, much like athletic stars today.



◀ This historical drawing shows the goal post used in the ball game. It was crowned by an eagle's nest inside of which were shells and a stuffed eagle. Five sassafras pegs were attached to each side of the triangular framework.



▲ The Apalachee ball game held much religious and social significance. The ball, about the size of a golf ball, was made of hardened clay covered with buckskin.



# Apalachee Life

Living on the hilltop where the plaza and public buildings were located was an honor most likely reserved for the village's leaders. They attended daily meetings in a council house where community affairs were discussed and planned.

By contrast, most Apalachee lived and worked in outlying areas near their fields and only came to the mission center for Saturday evening prayers, Sunday mass, evening dances, ball games, and other special events. Apalachee living at San Luis ate a variety of foods introduced by the Spaniards, including peaches, sugar, and beef. They also adopted European agricultural practices and enjoyed limited access to imported goods such as firearms, cloth, and jewelry.



▲ At 120 feet in diameter, the council house could accommodate up to 3000 people.

Most Indian households at San Luis were clustered in small hamlets that extended for several miles around the mission center.



▲ Second in size were leaders' houses, generally about one-half the size (65 feet in diameter) of the council house.



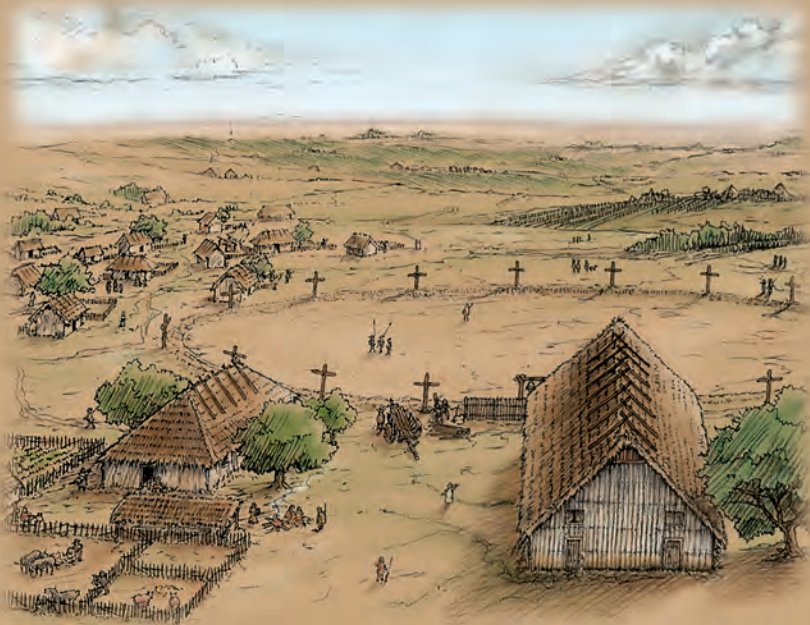
▲ A typical Apalachee home was only 18–24 feet in diameter.



# Traditions in Transition

Prior to European contact, the Apalachee used bone, stone, shell, clay, plant fibers, and wood for most of their needs. The Spanish traded manufactured goods to the Indians. Iron tools, popular among the Indians for their durability, replaced bone, stone, and shell.

Glass beads and cloth were also in high demand. Though Apalachee women continued making their traditional pottery, they imitated European pottery in a style archaeologists call “colonoware.”



▲ Shown here are a reconstructed Apalachee jar (left), a reconstructed colonoware pitcher (right), glass pendants, and beads recovered by archaeologists at Mission San Luis.

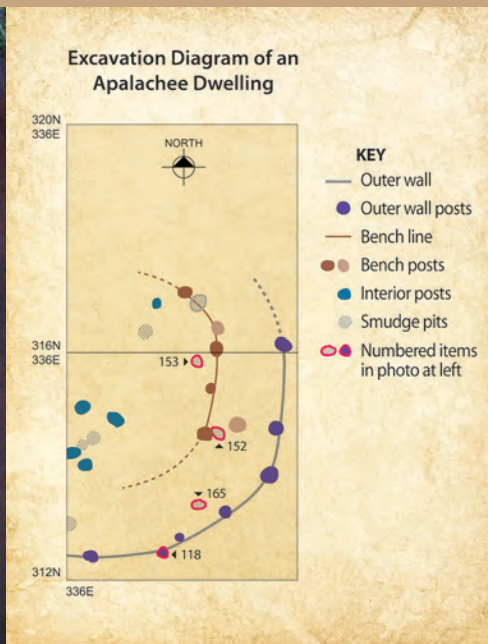
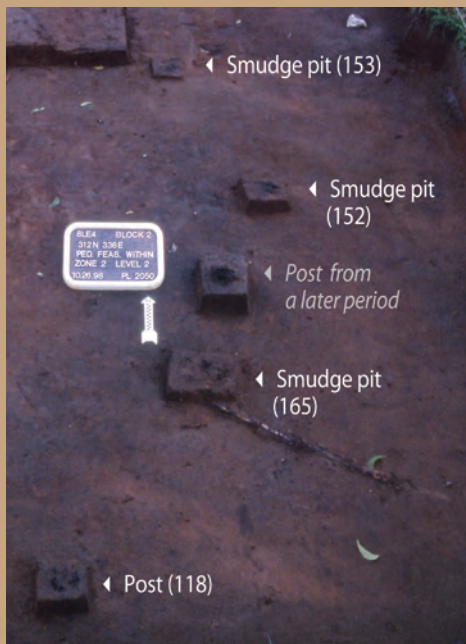
Smaller “satellite” villages were associated with many of the larger Apalachee missions. In the 1680s, San Luis’ friars served four named communities some distance from the mission. By 1703 San Luis was primarily a Spanish town. Disputes between the Indians and Spaniards caused many of the Apalachee to withdraw from the mission.



# Apalachee Home: Simple and Sturdy

Although the Apalachee were skilled carpenters, their own dwellings were relatively simple. Most activities were conducted outside, with homes reserved for sleeping and storage.

An Apalachee house was described in 1675 as small, round, and made of thatch with a low, narrow doorway and no windows. The only interior features mentioned were a central hearth and sleeping benches covered with pelts. Smudge pits beneath these benches provided smoke to repel insects. There may have been a small opening in the thatched roof for ventilation.



Nearby forests provided the materials for construction. The shelters were built by lashing together a frame of wooden poles and covering this frame with layers of palmetto fronds. Houses were easy to repair and new houses quickly built. This allowed the Apalachee to relocate settlements away from the mission.

▶ An Apalachee house was partially excavated between the friary and the Messer House. It was 21 feet in diameter and had a row of smaller posts for sleeping benches as well as support posts near the center.



# Apalachee Families

The Apalachee were a matrilineal society. Inheritance and authority were passed down through the mother's family. Related groups were also combined into clans with each member belonging to the mother's clan. After marriage, the husband relocated to the village of his wife.



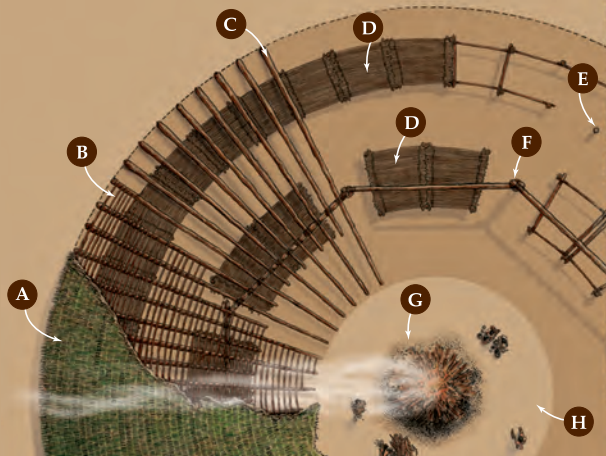
Gender roles were well-established. Men cleared fields for planting, hunted and fished, constructed buildings, and made various tools to help with these activities. Women tended the fields, gathered wild plant foods, ground corn, cooked food, prepared hides, and made pottery. Child rearing was the responsibility of the mother and her family.



# The Apalachee Civic Center

The council house at San Luis was one of the largest historic Indian structures in the southeastern United States.

Council houses were the focus of Apalachee religious and ceremonial activities, including dances, rituals, and preparations for war. They were also city halls where Apalachee rulers met every day to discuss community business.



▲ Bird's-Eye View of the Apalachee Council House

- |                            |                             |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| A Palm thatch              | E Bench support posts       |
| B Purlins (thatch support) | F Major support post & beam |
| C Roof rafters             | G Central hearth            |
| D Benches                  | H Roof opening (oculus)     |



- ▲ On the night before the ball game, specific rituals had to be performed in the council house. An elevated bench was reserved for the chief behind the players. New fires were started between the chief's and players' benches that were to be used only for lighting the chief's tobacco. In order to be ritually purified, the chief fasted from food and spent the night smoking tobacco and drinking cassina to the point of nausea.



# The Black Drink: A Southeastern Native Tea

*Cassina*, commonly called black drink, was a dark brew that contained caffeine. It was popular with Spaniards and Apalachee alike. Black drink could only be served in the council house unless the chief granted special permission to serve it elsewhere.

One friar was allegedly experiencing cassina-nerves or caffeine withdrawal when he stormed into the council house and broke some pottery jugs because he was not given his black drink on time.

The leaves of *Ilex vomitoria*, or yaupon holly, were used to make cassina. They were first roasted, then ground before being used to brew the black drink.



**BIP BENTURA**

As *inija*, or town manager, Bip Bentura was responsible for overseeing the preparation of the black drink. He was also in charge of native sentries and supervised the planting of the San Luis fields.



# A Comfortable Life on the Spanish Frontier

Daily life for Spaniards at San Luis was not unlike that in other Hispanic communities. Shoemakers and tailors plied their trades. Off-duty soldiers drank wine, played at cards or dice, and strummed guitars or similar stringed instruments known as *vihuelas*.

The village was alive with sounds and smells: roosters crowing, dogs barking, and stews cooking. Spaniards successfully introduced European plants and animals such as cattle, pigs, chickens, peaches, wheat, and peas. They also imported wine, olives, olive oil, and other basic Mediterranean foods that could not be locally produced.



◀ Spaniards set their tables with dishes from Mexico and Asia and adorned themselves with fine European clothing and jewelry.

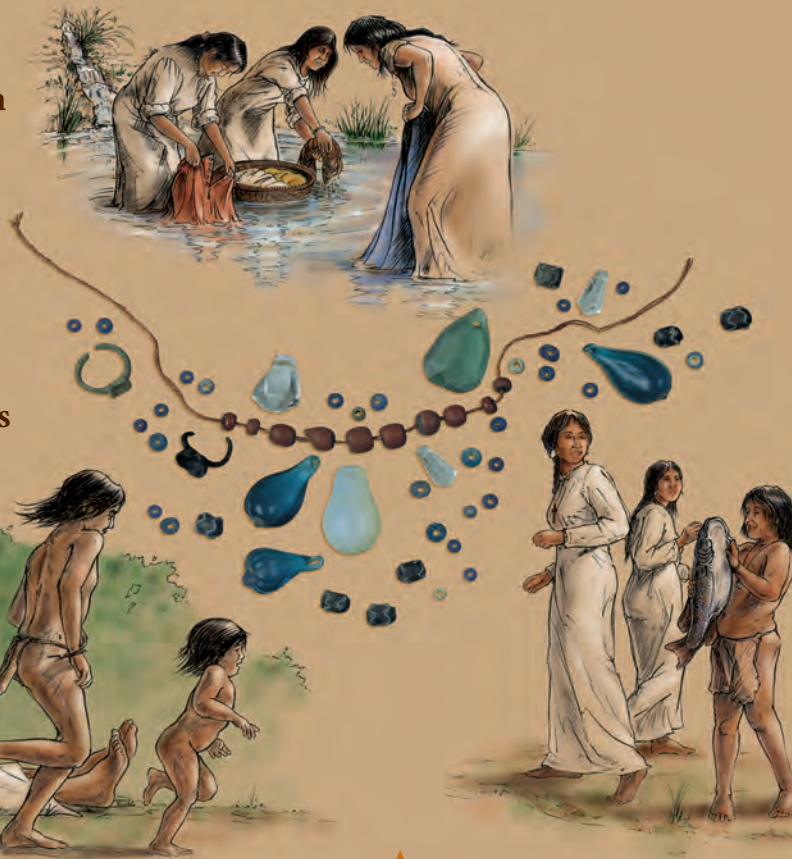


# Married Life in Spanish Florida

By outward appearances, life in the Spanish village was European in nature. However, since Spanish soldiers commonly married Apalachee women, native wives continued some Indian traditions in their homes. Apalachee women perceived marriage to Spaniards as a form of upward mobility for themselves and their children.



▲ In the Spanish village, Apalachee wives tended gardens, prepared foods, washed their families' clothes, and reared their children.



▲ Large amounts of imported jewelry made of glass, precious metals, and stone were found in the Spanish village at San Luis.



## JUANA CATERINA

Only a few Spanish women lived at San Luis, most of whom probably had Apalachee servants. Juana Caterina was married to the deputy governor and they had ten children. She was a bad-tempered woman who once slapped a leader in the face for not bringing her fish. Her actions were typical of the attitude of many Spaniards toward the Apalachee.



# The Spanish Fort at San Luis

From the 1650s when San Luis was first established, its military garrison had some type of *casa fuerte* or blockhouse. However, a full-scale fort was not constructed until the 1690s when the threat of English attack became imminent.

The number of Spanish soldiers stationed at San Luis ranged from 12 to 45. There were also an unknown number of *reformados* or civilians who remained on call in the event of a military strike.

*A variety of military and architectural artifacts, found beneath layers of red clay, provide critical clues about daily life in and around the military complex.*

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| A Trigger Guard       | E Nails   |
| B Window Latch        | F Musketball  |
| C Flintlock Mechanism | G Gunflint  |
| D Knife Blade         | H 17th-Century Spanish<br>Flintlock Musket (reproduction) |



▲ A team of oxen and handlers approach the entrance to the fort with their heavy but important burden — a new six-pound cannon.



# Apalachee Militia in a Spanish Fort

Apalachee militias provided the bulk of the province's military power. Apalachee received training in the use of firearms from Spaniards. They served as sentries, some held military titles, and they always outnumbered Spanish soldiers on raids.

*The Apalachee formed at least one native religious brotherhood, or confraternity, at San Luis, Our Lady of the Rosary. They carried their banner (with Our Lady of the Rosary on one side and a crucifix on the other) with them into war.*



▲ After completion of a new, two-story blockhouse in the 1690s, a palisade with diamond-shaped bastions was built. It was surrounded by a dry moat that may have been filled with cactus.



# Missions Abandoned after English Attacks



▲ The fort was the last building to be destroyed before San Luis was abandoned.

Beginning in 1702, English Carolina Governor James Moore began a full-scale attack on Spanish Florida aimed at St. Augustine and the missions along the Atlantic coast. Early in 1704, Moore mounted a campaign against Apalachee.

The strongly fortified San Luis was not a target of the initial raids of 1704. On July 31, just two days before the final strike force reached San Luis, the Spaniards and Apalachee burned and evacuated the mission.



▲ Women and children were the first to be evacuated from San Luis. Men stayed behind to burn the mission in order to prevent English forces from occupying it.

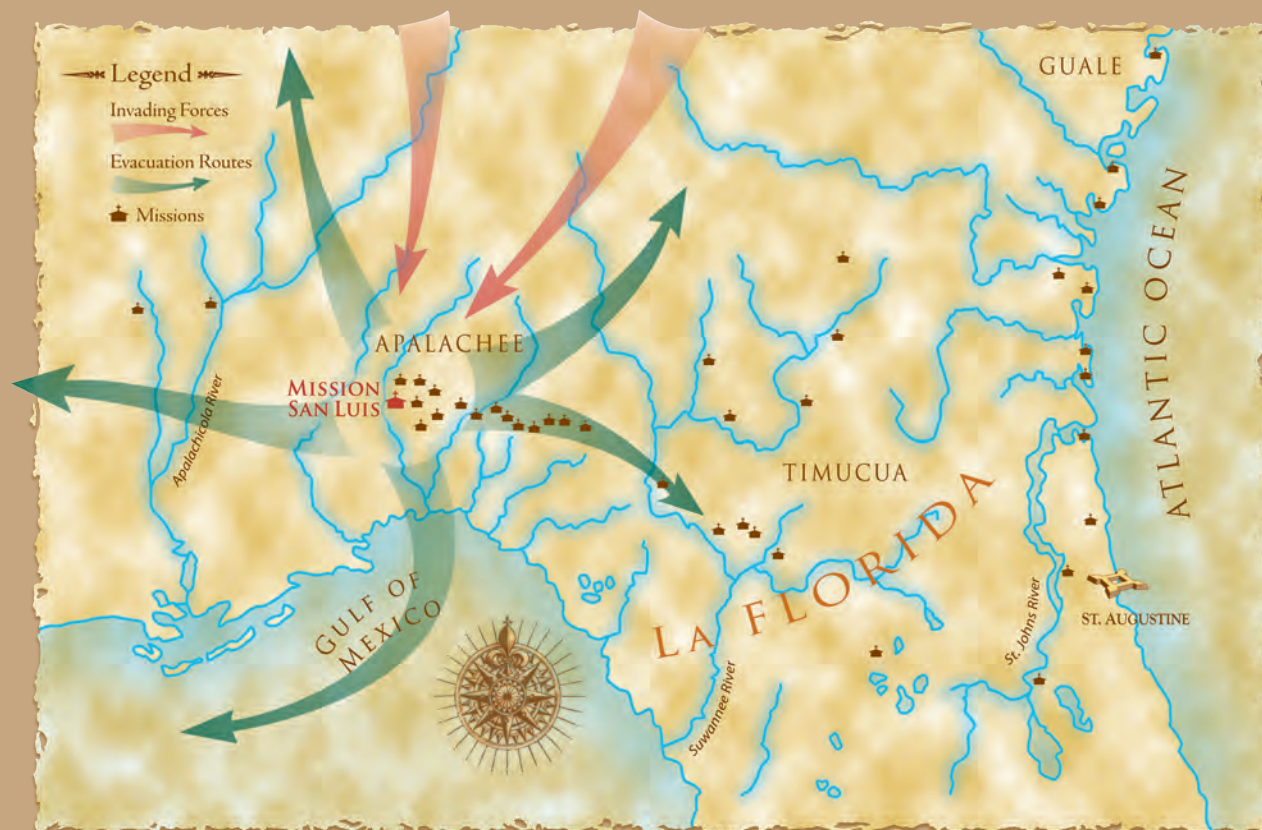


# Epilogue

Most of the Apalachee who were not killed outright or enslaved moved north into English territory. Others migrated west to Pensacola and Mobile. A small number moved eastward eventually settling around St. Augustine. Once dispersed in 1704, the Apalachee never repopulated their traditional homeland.



▲ The residents of San Luis probably took their most valuable possessions with them when they abandoned the mission. But heavy objects, such as the church bells, were buried with the intent of reclaiming them someday. Since only a few bell fragments have been found at San Luis so far, many more may still be buried.



▲ This map depicts the various evacuation routes used by the Apalachee and Spaniards.





# Mission Period San Luis Timeline

<b>1608</b>	Friars make the first friendly visit to Apalachee.
<b>1633</b>	Spanish friars arrive in Apalachee, where they establish the mission of San Luis de Jinayca.
<b>1645</b>	The first deputy governor of Apalachee is appointed.
<b>1647</b>	Non-Christian Indians stage an uprising in which seven of the eight existing churches are destroyed and the deputy governor, his family, and three friars are killed.
<b>1656</b>	San Luis de Jinayca and a large native population move to the present location of Mission San Luis. By this time, San Luis is recognized as the provincial capital.
<b>1670</b>	The English establish Charles Town and become an active threat to Spanish Florida. The Spanish respond by building the Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine.
<b>1675</b>	With a population of more than 1500 people, San Luis is the largest community in the province. A new name, San Luis de Talimali, first appears in Spanish documents.
<b>1702</b>	The outbreak of war in Europe gives England a plausible reason for open hostilities against Spaniards in Florida.
<b>1704</b>	Facing imminent raids from English and Creek Indian forces, Mission San Luis is burned and abandoned by its residents.



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MISSION SAN LUIS  
Florida's Apalachee-Spanish Living History Museum

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