

Castillo de San Marcos

NATIONAL MONUMENT

F L O R I D A



Castillo de San Marcos

NATIONAL MONUMENT

U. S. Department of the Interior, Douglas McKay, *Secretary*
National Park Service, Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*

Castillo de San Marcos, in St. Augustine, Fla., was built during the years 1672 to 1756 by Spain and was the most important military fortification on the Atlantic coast protecting the northeastern dominions of Spain in America and giving safety to the homeward-bound Spanish plate fleet sailing the Gulf Stream route.

CASTILLO DE SAN MARCOS is an ancient fortification dating from the Spanish Colonial period in America. It represents part of Spain's contribution to life in the New World, and is symbolic of the explorer and pioneer spirit—the will to build from the wilderness a new center of civilization and a haven against danger. In this historic structure, the Spanish people have left us a heritage that is an important cultural connection with the Latin-American nations to the south, as well as another means of understanding the diverse old ways that have contributed to the making of modern America.

Features of the Castillo

This castle, the oldest masonry fort existing in the United States, was started in 1672 by the Spanish to protect St. Augustine, the first permanent white settlement in this country. Castillo de (pronounced Kasteel'-yo-day) San Marcos became a focal point of Spanish colonial culture—Spain's last impregnable outpost on the shores of the North Atlantic. The castillo is a symmetrically shaped, four-sided structure, constructed in the fashion developed by the Spanish from earlier Italian engineers. Surrounded by a moat 40 feet wide, its only entrance is across a drawbridge. The great walls are from 9 to 16 feet thick, constructed of coquina blocks, a native marine shell-rock. The coquina blocks are cemented together by an oyster lime mortar. Beautifully arched casemates and interesting cornices testify to the workmanship and imagination of the Spanish

builders. The fort contains guardrooms, dungeons, living quarters for the garrison, storerooms, and a chapel. Nearly all the rooms open on a court, about 100 feet square.

Although the castillo was the most important fortification in colonial Florida, it was by no means the only defense. Earthworks and palisades extended from the castle to enclose the little town of St. Augustine, an area of less than a square mile. Far to the south, west, and north were military outposts. Sixteen miles to the south was the strongest of these, the stone Torre de Matanzas (now Fort Matanzas National Monument), which guarded the lower entrance to St. Augustine harbor. Matanzas, the Spanish word for "slaughters," derived its name in 1565 from the bloody incident that determined the ownership of Florida.

The Struggle for Florida

Impregnable Castillo de San Marcos was constructed because of international rivalry over Florida. Spain claimed this area both by papal grant and through the discoveries (1513) of Ponce de Leon, the romantic adventurer in quest of the fountain of youth. Past Florida shores sailed the Spanish fleets, homeward bound with fabulous cargoes—gold, silver, and precious stones from the looted treasuries of the Aztec and Inca. But, operating from the Florida coast, daring corsairs could seize the slow-moving galleons, and it was this threat to Spanish commerce that led to the founding of St. Augustine as the military outpost by

which Spain held Florida for more than 200 years.

In 1564, French Huguenots had built Fort Caroline on the St. Johns River, in Florida. The next year, Spain sent Pedro Menendez de Aviles to drive out these "French heretics" and as Menendez sighted Florida on August 28, St. Augustine's Day, the colony he established was named St. Augustine.

Menendez accomplished his mission by iron strategy. The superior force of French soldiers sailed from Fort Caroline to attack him, but they were shipwrecked and most of them later slain at Matanzas, including their leader, Jean Ribaut. The small garrison left at Caroline was taken in a surprise attack.

Even after the annihilation of Ribaut and the French in Florida, Spain was not destined to hold her position uncontested. England soon appeared as a powerful rival. Preying on the West Indies and Florida, English buccaneers caused endless trouble.

In 1586, Sir Francis Drake burned St. Augustine and its partially completed wooden fort.

In 1607, the English founded Jamestown and soon began to make settlements both to the north and south of it. Spain, with its small garrison in Florida, needed a stronger fort if she wanted to hold this territory. Two events forced her hand. In 1668, English freebooters sacked and plundered St. Augustine, and, in 1670, Charleston, only 200 miles from St. Augustine, was founded. As a result of the growing British menace, the present stone fort, Castillo de San Marcos, was constructed at the north entrance to St. Augustine harbor. The first baptism of fire of the new stone fort came in 1702, when South Carolinians under Gov. James Moore unsuccessfully besieged it. Another South Carolina attack in 1728 was likewise repulsed.

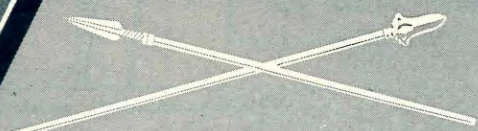
When Gen. James Oglethorpe founded Georgia in 1733, rivalry between the Spanish and English became even more acute.



Shot furnace



Visitors studying the chapel entrance



Gates to the
of St. Aug

Troubles arose on land and sea—runaway slaves, hostile Indians, pirates! Spain, expecting war, strengthened San Marcos and her other Florida defenses, and later built a fortified tower at Matanzas.

In 1740, Oglethorpe attacked St. Augustine. For 27 days, during the heat of summer, more than two thousand people were huddled together in the casemates and the 100-foot square court of the castillo.

The Spanish continued to hold Matanzas, and when the English carelessly loosened the blockade of that inlet, shallow-draft boats waiting off shore slipped over the bar, bringing desperately needed supplies and reinforcements from Havana. Sailing behind Anastasia Island, the supply boats reached St. Augustine.

The English finally became disheartened and gave up the siege. However, in 1763, they secured Florida by the terms of the Treaty of Paris.

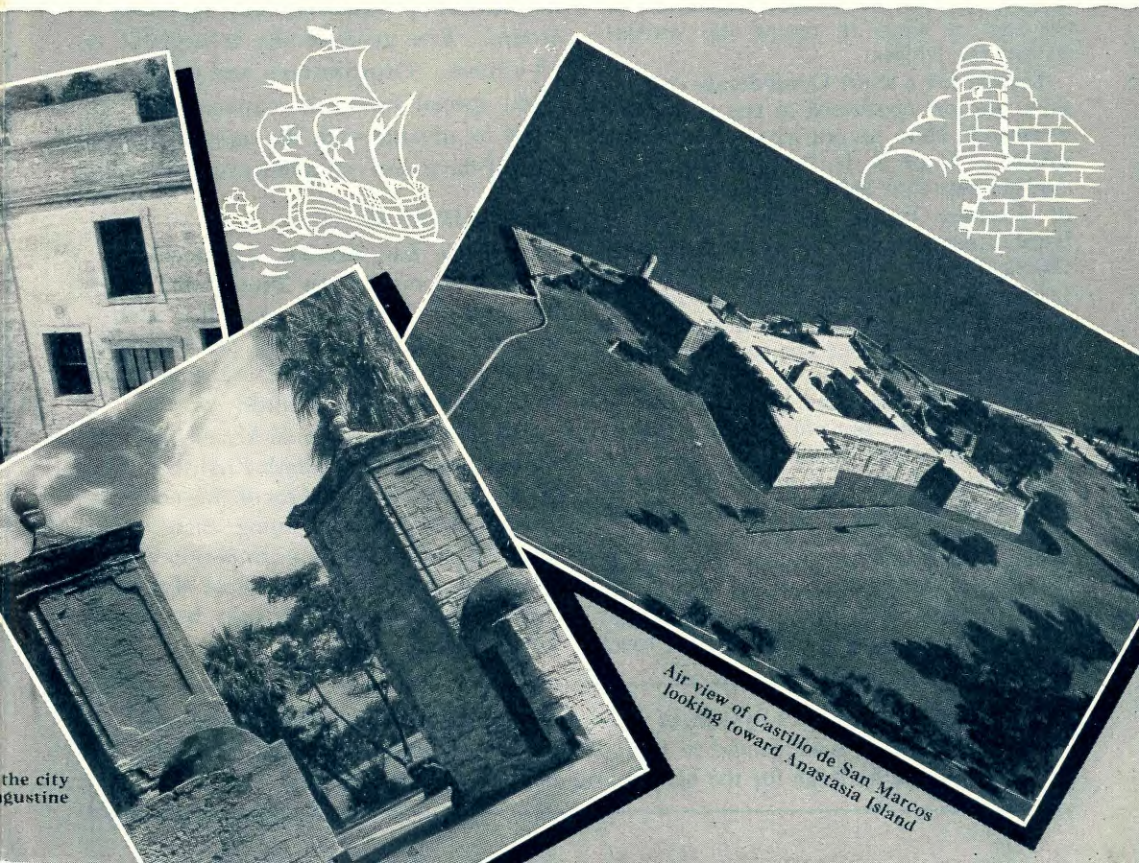
England held Florida for two decades, including the critical years of the American

Revolution. When Charleston, S. C., fell into British hands, prisoners, among them three signers of the Declaration of Independence—Edward Rutledge, Thomas Heyward, and Arthur Middleton—were taken to St. Augustine, and some of them were confined in the castle. By the Treaty of Paris, Florida was returned to Spain in 1783.

Florida Acquired by United States

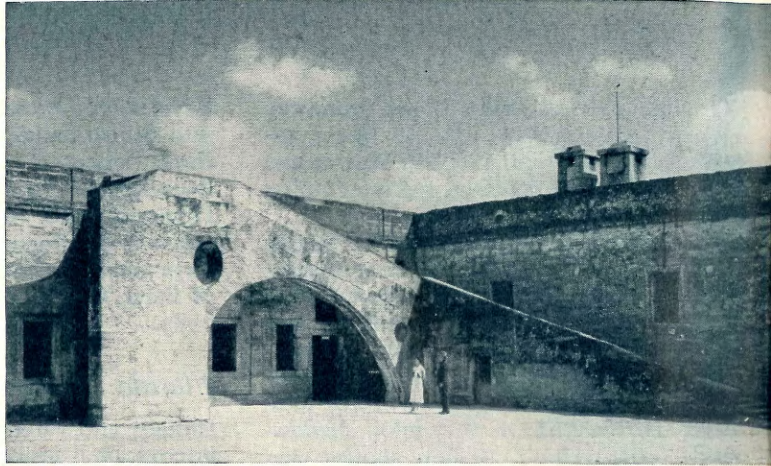
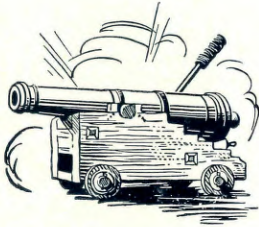
Indians and runaway slaves were still an international problem. These marauders made a practice of robbing Georgia plantation owners, who crossed the Spanish border to run them down. The difficulties were partially solved when the United States took possession of Florida in 1821, according to the terms of the Treaty of 1819 which had been negotiated with Spain for the cession of Florida.

Under the American regime, the castillo for over a hundred years was named Fort



the city of St. Augustine

Air view of Castillo de San Marcos looking toward Anastasia Island



The stairway leading to the terreplein, or roof, of the fort was originally a smooth ramp up which the guns were dragged.

Marion in honor of Francis Marion, the Revolutionary War hero. Meantime, trouble with the Indians increased. The Second Seminole Indian War broke out in 1835 and Fort Marion became a prison. The most famous of its prisoners at this time was Osceola, the Seminole Indian leader. The Indian prince Coacoochee, another prisoner, made a difficult escape from the fort in 1837 to renew the warfare against the whites.

Except for a short Confederate occupation, the fort continued in use as a prison or arsenal. Here, among his western Indian prisoners, Capt. R. H. Pratt conducted the experiments that led to his later founding of Carlisle Indian School. Geronimo's band of Apaches were prisoners during the 1880's. The Spanish-American War period (1898-99) marked the last active military use of the fort, with the confinement in its musty rooms of about 150 court-martialed American soldiers.

The castillo has lost its usefulness for military purposes but not its charm for the visitor. The secret dungeon, the shot furnace, guardrooms, and the chapel are of continuing interest. The old castle stands proudly on the banks of the Matanzas River, vested with its mantle of antiquity. From its massive walls are seen the old city gates (a part of the national monument) and the narrow streets of the quaint town

which it protected for more than two and a half centuries.

Service to the Public

Castillo de San Marcos National Monument is open daily from 8:30 a. m. to 5:30 p. m. There is a small admission fee, which is waived for children and educational groups. Free guide service is available to all visitors. Organizations and groups are given special service if arrangements are made in advance with the superintendent. One of the rooms contains a small museum.

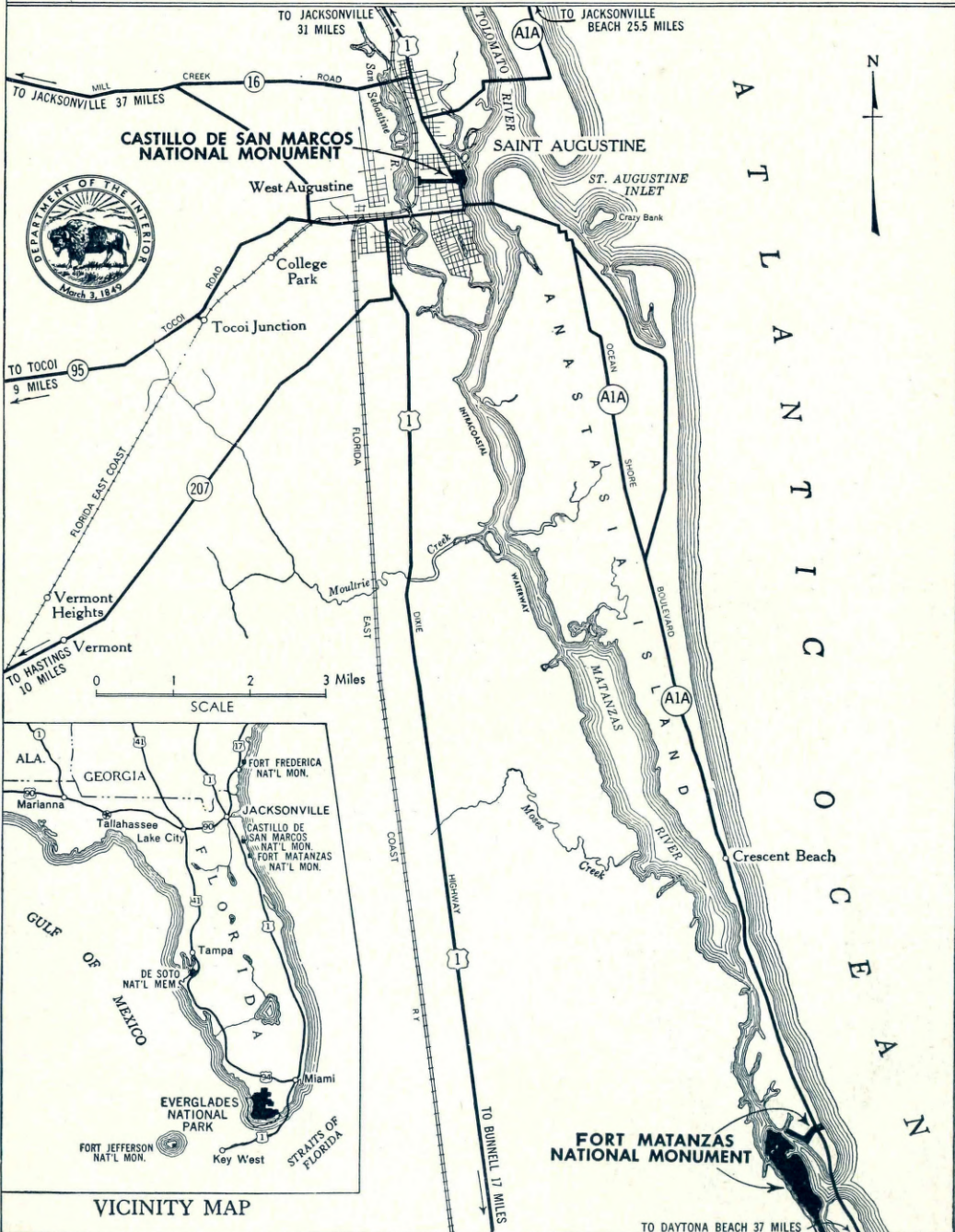
Administration

Castillo de San Marcos was declared a national monument by Presidential proclamation of October 15, 1924. It is administered by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior and contains 18.51 acres of Federal lands.

Fort Matanzas National Monument also commemorates the Spanish-English rivalry in the southeastern section of this country. Communications concerning these areas should be addressed to the Superintendent, Castillo de San Marcos and Fort Matanzas National Monuments, Box 1431, St. Augustine, Fla.

The National Park System, of which Castillo de San Marcos National Monument is a unit, is dedicated to the conservation of America's scenic, scientific, and historic heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.

CASTILLO DE SAN MARCOS AND FORT MATANZAS NATIONAL MONUMENTS FLORIDA



VICINITY MAP