

# Fort Matanzas

NATIONAL MONUMENT

FLORIDA





# Fort Matanzas

## NATIONAL MONUMENT



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

*Fred A. Seaton, Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, *Conrad L. Wirth, Director*

*Here, in 1565, Spain eliminated France's attempt to control Florida and in 1742 built the fortified Matanzas Tower to guard the south entrance of St. Augustine.*

Within and near Fort Matanzas National Monument occurred the deciding scenes of the Spanish-French struggle for Florida, when in 1565 about 300 French Huguenots were put to death. It was here that Spain achieved potential control of the entire continent of North America and actual domination of the southeast for some 200 years. During most of that period Matanzas was a typical Florida military outpost, strategically important as a defense for the south entrance to St. Augustine, the capital of Spanish colonial Florida.

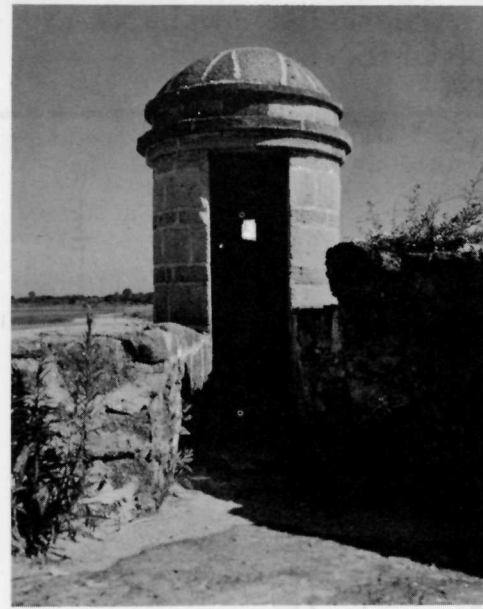
### Matanzas Is Named

It was in 1562 that Admiral Coligny, leader of the Huguenots in France, sent Jean Ribaut to the New World. Ribaut's colony was a failure and a second expedition set out in 1564 under René de Laudonnière, who built Fort Caroline

on the St. Johns River in Florida. This was a threat Spain could not tolerate. Her treasure galleons from the Caribbean sailed the Gulf Stream on a great circle route to Spain, and by the way-side of this lifeline was Florida. Pedro Menéndez de Avilés was charged by the Crown of Spain to drive out the French.

At Fort Caroline, Jean Ribaut arrived with reinforcements on August 28, 1565. Hardly a week later Menéndez found Ribaut's fleet, and after a preliminary skirmish he sailed to a harbor a few miles south of the St. Johns to establish the settlement of St. Augustine as a base of operations. Ribaut, with superior forces, decided to attack. It was a fateful maneuver, for a northeaster wrecked his vessels far down the coast. Menéndez, suspecting Fort Caroline to be weakly defended after Ribaut's departure, marched through the storm and captured that enemy supply base.

*Past the dunes to the Atlantic.*



*Shelter for the sentry.*

But Ribaut's forces, though shipwrecked, were not destroyed. In two groups the French began a return march up the coast, only to be halted by the swift-flowing waters of the inlet south of Anastasia Island, about 14 miles from St. Augustine. Menéndez, with 40 men, made his way down the island to the shore opposite the French. There, at dawn, he so placed his soldiers that it looked to the Huguenots as if he had many men. The Huguenots, famished and weary, decided to surrender. Ten at a time they were ferried across the inlet. They were fed, then led behind the dunes and their hands bound behind their backs with the matchcords from their harquebuses. The date was September 29, 1565.

At a distance of a crossbow shot toward St. Augustine, Menéndez drew a line in the sand. The prisoners were herded together for the march—then, at the mark in the sand, they were put to the knife. Only 8 of 208 were spared.

About a week later, Menéndez got word of the second band of Frenchmen, likewise halted at the inlet. Again there was a parley—this time with Ribaut himself. Ribaut saw the gruesome evidence of the first incident. That night 200 of the French marched back south, but the next morning, October 12, 1565, with 150 of his soldiers, Ribaut surrendered.

*Cover—The Fortified Tower of Matanzas guarded the south entrance to St. Augustine.*

As before, the Huguenots were brought across the water. And a second time the white sands were darkened with blood. Sixteen escaped the knife, to march as prisoners to St. Augustine. As for the ones who had not surrendered, Menéndez later sought them out; most returned with him to St. Augustine.

Matanzas, which in English means "slaughters," had received its name.

### The Pirates

Matanzas had an important part in the defense of this vast new land. By 1569 a blockhouse for 50 soldiers was built. Later, however, Matanzas was but one of several "sentinel houses" along this coast. A wooden watchtower and palmetto thatched hut for 6 soldiers was a typical establishment. Supplies came from St. Augustine in a large sailing canoe, and to Jonathan Dickinson, the Quaker, and his party, shipwrecked near here in 1696, the corn meal, fish, and Spanish wine at Matanzas seemed food fit for a king.

When a ship was sighted at Matanzas, a runner set out on the island trail to carry the news to St. Augustine. Many were the ships seen and not all of them were peaceable merchantmen. Corsairs were a constant menace to the lonely outpost. In the blackness before dawn, March 29, 1683, stealthy enemies rowed silently over the shallow bar, landed on the shore back of the tower, and hid in the brush. Dashing from cover at daybreak, they seized the five sentries. Matanzas was taken. Over 200 strong, the motley crew took the Anastasia trail toward St. Augustine and the unfinished Castillo de San

*The Tower commands the Inlet.*



Marcos, whose defenders these high-spirited pirates far outnumbered. Old Pedro de Texeda, one of the captured sentries, was also guiding two boatloads of the adventurers up the Matanzas. Pedro led them into a blind creek, then slipped away to warn the people at the Castillo. A half league from St. Augustine, the pirates walked into an ambush. Bloody and chagrined, they boarded their ships and sailed away.

Three years later there was another corsair attack, when Corp. José Begambre did valiant battle with the notorious Agramont. This time there was no march on St. Augustine.

### Matanzas and the Lifeline to Cuba

James Oglethorpe founded the English buffer colony of Georgia in 1733 on land claimed by Spain. Hostilities were inevitable, and the war of Jenkins' Ear (a Spanish-English struggle over commercial rights) gave Oglethorpe his chance to remove the Spanish threat to Georgia. Oglethorpe's fleet blockaded both St. Augustine and Matanzas, and, on June 24, 1740, his land forces began a bombardment of the Castillo at St. Augustine. Spanish supplies diminished rapidly. The 2,000 townspeople had to be fed, and food would last only a month. Even the garrison were put on half rations, and before long the Spaniards in St. Augustine "for want of Provisions were forced to kill and eat Catts."

Since his communication by sea with Havana was cut by the British, Governor Montiano dispatched messengers southward by canoe, behind the coastal islands. Somehow the word got across to Havana. On July 7, Montiano learned

that five supply vessels were south of Matanzas at undefended Mosquito Inlet. Antonio Nieto went with four small vessels to bring in some of the food. Trading shot for shot, Nieto ran the British blockade and came in over Matanzas Bar and up the river, laden with precious flour. The Spanish kept successfully at this desperate game of blockade running until Oglethorpe, discouraged, raised the siege on July 20.

### The Stone Tower

Had the English held Matanzas, St. Augustine might have been starved into surrender. With the value of Matanzas so clearly shown, however, Montiano took the advice given him in 1736 by Engineer Arredondo. Soon after the siege ended, Matanzas Tower was begun. Indian raids drove away the workmen for a while. Oglethorpe tried to destroy it while the work was still going on, but the ocean swell was too heavy to land his men, and he departed to await a better opportunity. Before the end of 1742 the tower was built—built in disregard of orders from the King that no fortifications should be constructed without royal permission. Arredondo waited to explain until the work was done.

The marshy little island chosen for the location was naturally defensible and only a short cannon shot from the channel entrance. But construction was difficult; long piles had to be driven deep into the mud to support the courses of stone—stone from the King's quarry on Anastasia. Craftsmen came from the Castillo to do the work, and for the heavy labor there were the King's slaves and the convicts.

*Guardroom at Fort Matanzas.*



Oglethorpe "cruized" here again in 1743. He stood in close enough to see the shining white tower that could garrison 50 men. He saw the five cannon and a long, low galley lying inside the bar. The wind died. Oglethorpe cleared ship for fighting, then broke out the oars—even handling one himself—to row inshore. As darkness fell, Oglethorpe saw nothing but the sinister outlines of the waiting galley and a sea that "ran Mountains high on Shore," so again he took himself away, never to return.

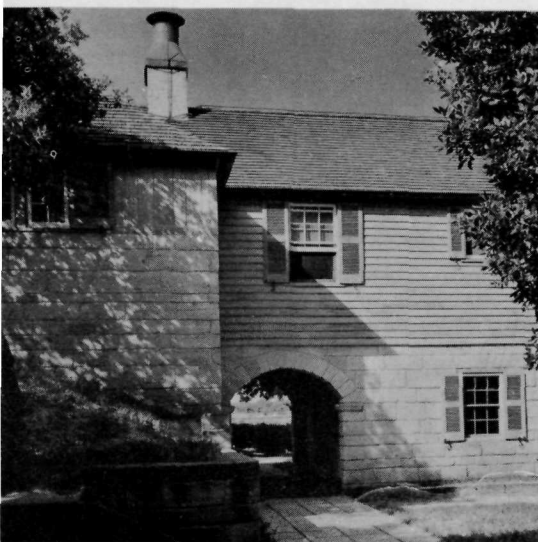
### Times Change

The English finally gained Matanzas Tower, with the rest of Florida, by treaty in 1763. After their previous experiences, they too regarded Matanzas as the key to St. Augustine, and in addition to the 30 soldiers and pair of iron 18-pounders at Matanzas, they stationed two galleys in the harbor. True, no attacks came, but during the American Revolution, Spain carefully planned to capture Matanzas and advance upriver to the most vulnerable side of Castillo de San Marcos.

After their return to the province in 1783, Spanish soldiers again gazed toward Cuba from the height of the tower, but by the time Florida was ceded to the United States in 1821, the interior of Matanzas was already in ruins.

Forgotten by the military, except for the blockade runners who operated in the vicinity during the War Between the States, Matanzas Inlet became a port of entry after that conflict, with a customhouse on Anastasia Island nearly opposite the tower. This customs activity lasted hardly a decade, however, and then the old tower and its vicinity were abandoned.

Entrance to the Monument Headquarters.



### The Monument

The fort ruin was designated a national monument by Presidential proclamation, October 15, 1924. In 1933, it was transferred from the War Department to the National Park Service, which has stabilized the ruin and constructed a headquarters building on Anastasia Island and landing wharves on the river. The monument has an area of 227.76 acres, including Rattlesnake Island (where the fort is located) and part of Anastasia Island. It is typical north Florida dune country, with a heavy, low growth of scrub and palmetto behind the wide, hard-packed beach and shifting sand dunes.

The fort is about 50 feet square in plan and has two main levels. The garrison climbed a removable ladder to enter the fortification at the first level—a gun deck some 16 feet above the ground. The second level is a 30-foot, 2-storied tower extending the length of one side and containing a small powder magazine and 2 rooms for garrison quarters, one of which has a fireplace. Drinking water was stored in a cistern in the lower level. The fortification is built of coquina, a native shellrock. Mortar and plaster were made from oystershell lime and sand.

### How to Reach the Monument

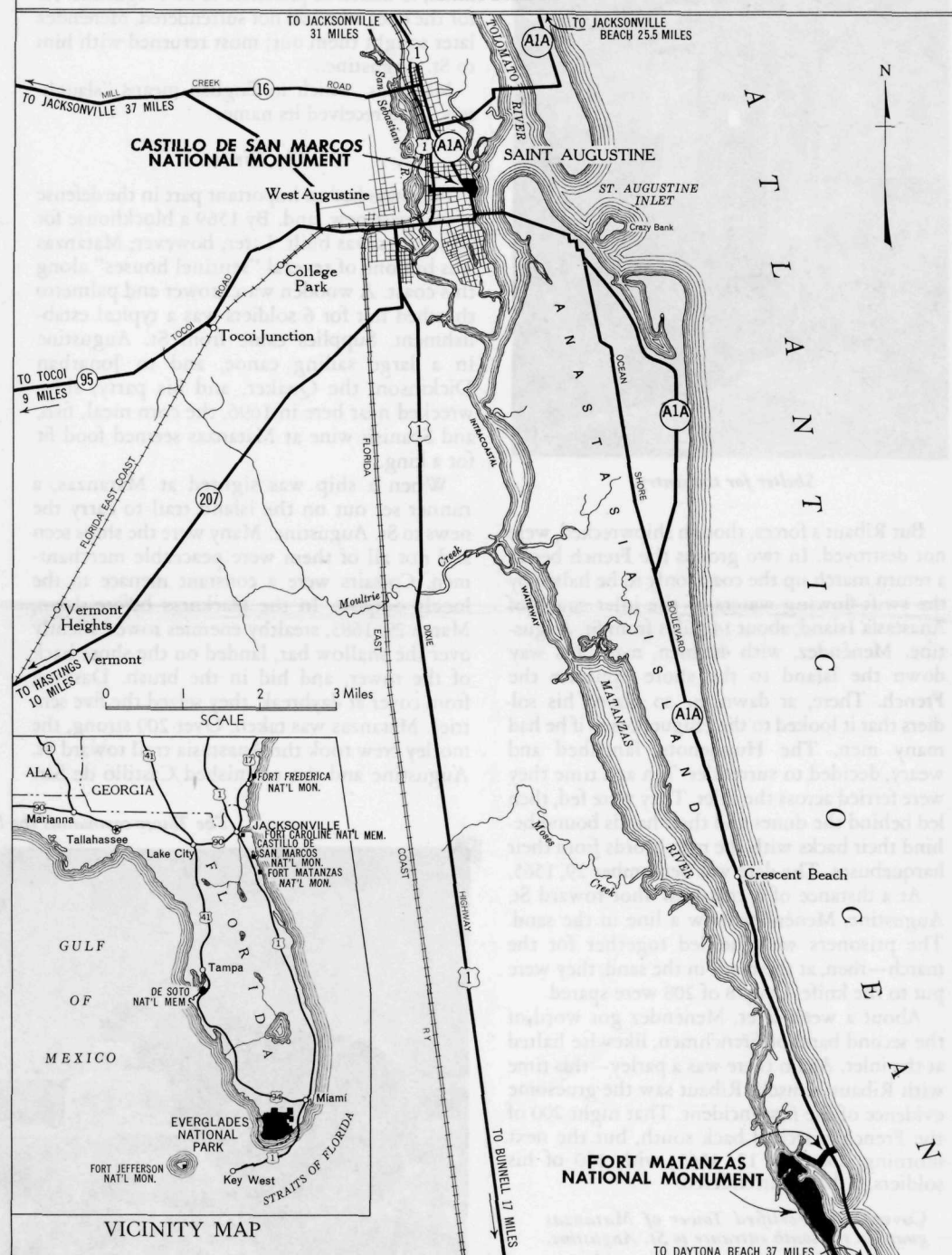
Entrance to the area is from State Route A1A (Ocean Shore Boulevard) on Anastasia Island, 14 miles south of St. Augustine, or by the inland waterway.

### Administration

Fort Matanzas National Monument is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Communications regarding this area 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 this area is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of its people.

## CASTILLO DE SAN MARCOS AND FORT MATANZAS NATIONAL MONUMENTS FLORIDA



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