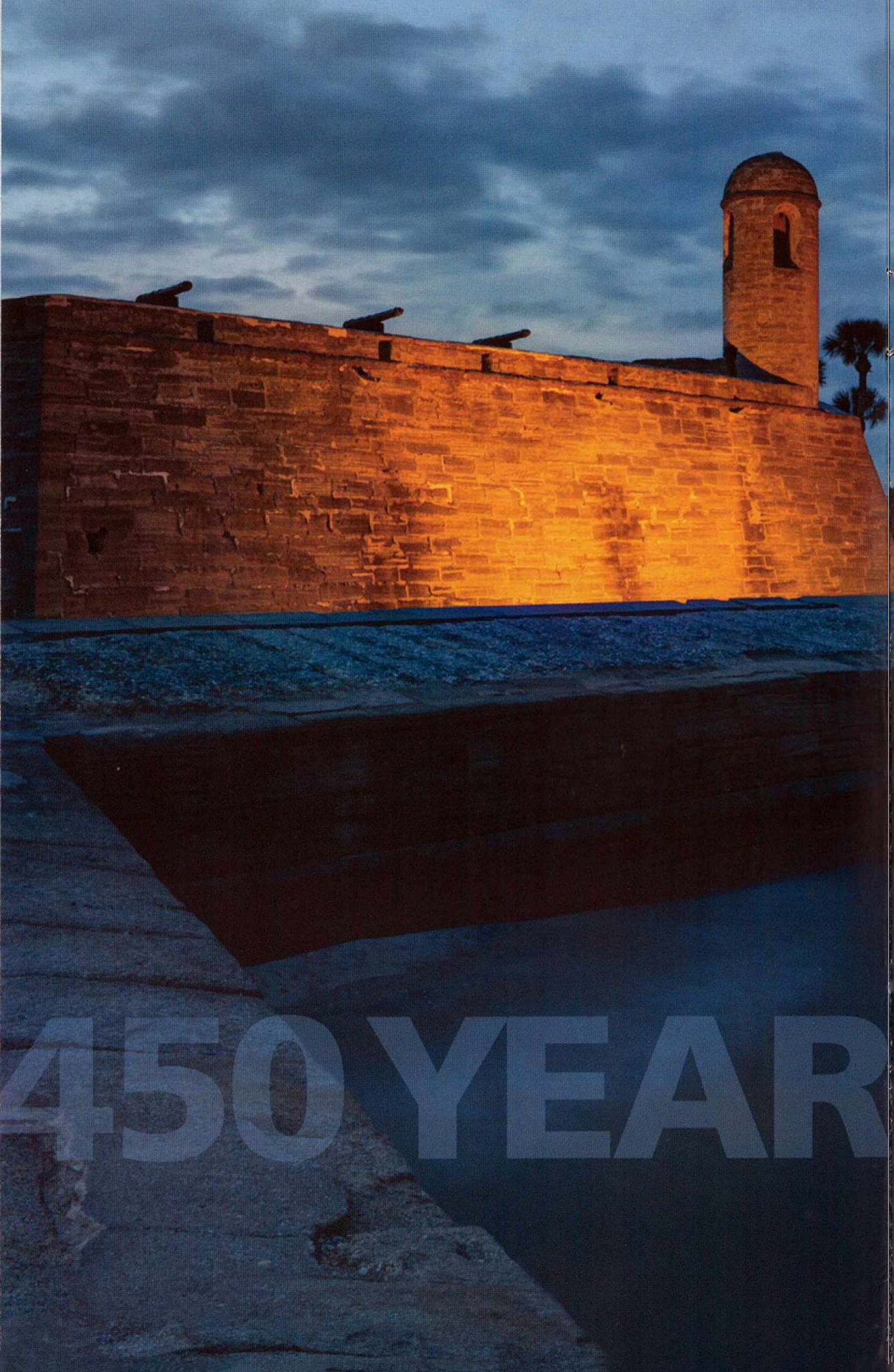
St. Augustine at 450 Years



Castillo de San Marcos National Monument



An Opportunity of a Lifetime

History is a river. All great rivers have multiple sources. On their journey to the sea, rivers take turns and twists and are exposed to new perspectives with every single bend. The history of St. Augustine, Florida–the oldest non-Native city in the continental United States–is like a river. At every new turn in its history, new perspectives arise as to who we are as a people, and as a nation.

In 2015, St. Augustine will turn 450 years old. Most commemorations reflect on a moment in time. While St. Augustine will reflect on the anniversary of its establishment on September 9, 2015, this commemoration will also provide an opportunity for the nation to learn about why and how it was created and, most importantly, the diverse peoples who made it possible.

A National Story

The 450 years of St. Augustine's history reveal many compelling and surprising stories that present a unique opportunity to make the 450th Anniversary relevant to new audiences, showcase the unique diversity that has defined St. Augustine, and attract new visitors to Castillo de San Marcos and Fort Matanzas National Monuments.

St. Augustine's history is not just local or regional. It contains elements that touch every facet of our national story. From Spanish exploration and settlement came changes to the environment and complex interactions with Native populations who considered the area home long before Spanish settlement.

In a country where demographic changes have real implications, St. Augustine is a compelling case study of American history. It was founded by the Spanish in 1565. In fact, the numbers are startling:

- 235 years of Spanish settlement
- 21 years of British settlement
- 192 years of American settlement

WILLIAM TRINKLE

A Diverse People

St. Augustine has a longer history as a Spanish settlement than any American town. Therefore, the 450th commemoration provides an opportunity to highlight Hispanic heritage in the United States.

From its beginnings, St. Augustine contained a surprising mixture of people. In addition to Spanish settlers, the area was already home to the Timucua people. Missionary activity took Spanish reach up the coast into what would become the Carolinas and brought other Native people back to St. Augustine.

American Indians were indentured to build the forts of St. Augustine, including the Castillo de San Marcos. Enslaved Africans and English prisoners were also instrumental in the construction of the fort and the development of a multicultural community.

City of Freedom, City of Struggle

Beginning in the 1730s, St. Augustine fostered the first free African American settlement in North America. The Spanish provided refuge for people enslaved by the English in the Carolinas. They formed the town of Fort Mose–a site now preserved by the Florida Park Service.

As different nations controlled Florida, new groups of people were introduced. Following British occupation, a significant influx of Menorcans, Greeks, and Corsicans became part of the cultural mix. Beginning in 1821, the American period saw another influx of people with different ethnic backgrounds.

Fort Marion (as Castillo de San Marcos was known by the US Army) was also used in the 1830s as a prison for Seminole people during the Second Seminole War. It later imprisoned Cheyenne, Comanche, Kaddo, and other Southern Plains tribes in the 1870s. In the mid-1880s, Chiricahua Apache were held within the fort.

DOUG KERR

Capt. Francisco Menendez, military officer and leading resident of Fort Mose.

NPS PHOTO



JAMIE SANFORD



American Indians from the Southern Plains were imprisoned within the fort in the 1870s.

NPS/CASTILLO DE SAN MARCOS

Ironically, the very town that welcomed escaped slaves into freedom in the 1700s was one of the most segregated communities in the 1960s. During the debates over the Civil Rights Act in 1964, St. Augustine was an important site of a very public effort to integrate services at hotels, restaurants, and public facilities. Nightly television news coverage of the movement in St. Augustine helped sway public opinion in favor of passage of the Civil Rights Act.

During the spring of 1964, protestors including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., helped focus the nation's attention on St. Augustine's segregation while Congress debated the Civil Rights Act.

ASSOCIATED PRESS







ROBERT SANSON

Preparing for a National Commemoration

In 2009, Congress created a Federal Commission to help plan and carry out a variety of inclusive programs to commemorate this important event on-site and to facilitate activities throughout the United States. A number of partners will join together to honor the heritage of all people who were present during the founding of St. Augustine: the National Park Foundation, the Florida Park Service, and the City of St. Augustine.

St. Augustine's varied stories provide important windows into our nation's history. The National Park Service and its partners are poised to take advantage of this moment in history to help connect a new and diverse array of visitors to St. Augustine and to the Castillo de San Marcos/Fort Matanzas National Monuments.

We invite you to take this opportunity of a lifetime to join in the commemoration of the nation's oldest non-Native city in the continental United States–St. Augustine.

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KIM SENG

Join us for the Commemoration. September 2015