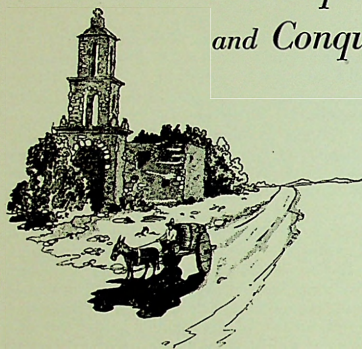


Footsteps of Padres and Conquistadores



The Centuries
of America's
Ancient History,
Florida
to California
and Mexico

Harral Ayres

Spain was a nation of wealth and culture when America was discovered. The Spaniards organized costly expeditions and explored vast domains in the New World while their missionaries built great churches and industrial enterprises for the Indians. A hundred years before the Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock the Spanish were penetrating the country along the Old Spanish Trail. The story of their explorations and settlements from Florida to California is a romance that has not yet been clearly written but as the highway that traverses this country is reconstructed for modern-day travel this story will be developed for the pleasure of the travelers that pass over it.

Four centuries of history, the longest period in American annals, are embraced in the Old Spanish Trail. From ocean to ocean it is rich with stories of Spanish adventures and the wonders of the Old Mission construction.

Florida and the East

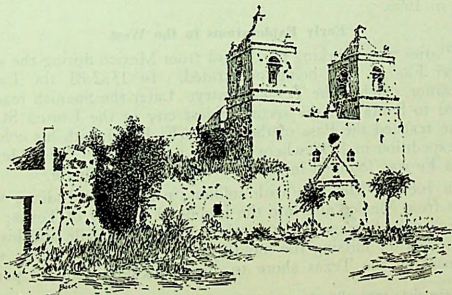
Ponce de Leon landed in Florida in 1512 and was the first European to disembark on the United States mainland. De Narvaez reached Florida in 1528, eleven years before De Soto, and explored the Gulf country



with 300 men to the country of the present Tallahassee. He failed to reconnect with his ships and a historic disaster ensued. In crudely constructed vessels a part of his followers reached the "Isle of Ill-fate" believed to be Galveston Island, shipwrecked, naked and dying. Some lived as slaves to the Indians for six years. De Vaca, Narvaez' treasurer, and three others escaped in 1534, crossed Texas and reached in 1536 the Spanish at Culiacan on the west coast of Mexico. That story of eight years of suffering and nakedness is a revelation of the cost of conquering a new land—and it marks the first Spanish trail across the continent. De Vaca is thought to have been in the country of Sheffield, Fort Stockton and the Big Bend in Texas along the Old Spanish Trail, passing that way into Mexico.

De Soto landed at Tampa Bay in 1539 with 1,000 men, 213 horses and a remarkable equipment, including chains and collars for enslaving the Indians. He explored the southern country to the western bounds of Arkansas, then returned to the Mississippi River where he died. Several hundred of his half-naked Spaniards reached the present Tampico four years after the proud landing at Tampa Bay.

The Spanish expeditions were brilliantly organized and led. The explorations of the conquistadores and the missions of the padres form remarkable pages in history. Slavery was forbidden by Spanish laws; religious freedom was their high purpose as it was of the Puritans and of other colonizers yet in the conquests of the New World, slavery, oppression and religious zeal led men of all races far a-field from the principles they proclaimed.



Mission de Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Acuña,
San Antonio, Texas.