

St. Augustine in History

One of a Series of Brief Sketches of Historic Interest, Which Will Supply Information to Tourists and Home Folks

No. 11—Descriptions from Fairbanks

Some descriptive bits about the Oldest City from Fairbanks' "The History and Antiquities of St. Augustine, Florida," will not come amiss in this series of sketches about the old town. George Fairbanks published this history in 1858, and the dedication is "to Buckingham Smith, Esq., U. S. secretary of legation at Madrid, to whose efforts in the Discovery and Preservation of the History and Antiquities of the Spanish Dominion in America, a Grateful Acknowledgment is due from American Scholars." Fairbanks in commenting on the building of the fort says: "In the year 1638, hostilities were entered into between the Spanish settlements on the coast, and the Apalachian Indians, who occupied the country in the neighborhood of the river Suwanee. The Spaniards soon succeeded in subduing their Indian foes; and in 1640 large numbers of the Apalachian Indians were brought to St. Augustine, and in alleged punishment for their outbreak, and with a sagacious eye to the convenience of the arrangement, were forced to labor upon the public works and fortifications of the city. At this period the English settlements along the coast to the northward had begun to be formed, much to the uneasiness and displeasure of the Spanish crown, which for a long period claimed by virtue of exploration and occupation, as well as by the ancient papal grant of Alexander, all the eastern coast of the United States. Their missionaries had penetrated Virginia before the settlement at Jamestown; and they had built a fort in South Carolina, and kept up a garrison for some years in it. But the Spanish Government had become too feeble to compete with either the English or the French on the seas; and with the loss of their celebrated Armada, perished forever their pretensions as a naval power. They were, therefore,

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"It is evident that the fort or castle, as it was usually designated, had been then commenced, although its form was afterwards changed; and for sixty years subsequently these unfortunate Apalachian Indians were compelled to labor upon the works, until in 1680, upon the recommendation of their mission fathers, they were relieved from further compulsory labor, with the understanding that in case of necessity they would resume their labors.

"In 1648 St. Augustine is described to have contained more than three hundred householders (Vecinos) a flourishing monastery of the order of St. Francis, with fifty Franciscans, men very zealous for the conversion of the Indians, and regarded by their countrymen with the highest veneration. Besides these, there were in the city alone, a vicar, a parochial curate, a superior sacristan, and a chaplain attached to the castle. The parish church was built of wood, the Bishop of Cuba it is said not being able to afford anything better, his whole income being but four hundred pezos per annum, which he shared with Florida; and sometimes he expended more than his receipts."

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