

St. Augustine in History

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

In reviewing the history of St. Augustine in a series of brief sketches, for the benefit of tourists and home people, who are frequently called upon to act as guides for their own guests and for guests of the city of St. Augustine, it might be well to start with the Discovery of Florida, which antedates the founding of the city by some fifty-two years.

Florida was discovered in the year 1513 by Juan Ponce de Leon, Spanish adventurer, sailor, discoverer, who landed on the east coast of Florida, at a point, historians tell us, a little north of the present site of the city of St. Augustine. Upon landing he took possession in the name of God and the King of Spain. The discovery of Florida by Ponce de Leon, and the possessing of the land, form the theme of the first day of the Ponce de Leon Celebration, famous three-day historical pageant, which St. Augustine observes in the springtime, in memory of her historic beginnings. As every school-boy and girl knows, Ponce de Leon came seeking the magical Fountain of Youth of which he had been told.

Because the discovery of Florida is so inextricably interwoven with the early history of St. Augustine, Dr. Andrew Anderson, generous citizen, now deceased, working with the city of St. Augustine, transformed one of the small bay front continuations of the Plaza de la Constitution, into Ponce de Leon Circle, and centered it with a statue of the discoverer. This is a replica of the statue at San Juan, Porto Rico, not only as regards the statue itself, but as

regards the massive base. Juan Ponce de Leon was governor of Porto Rico, when he made his memorable voyage of discovery, and landed on the shores of Florida on Easter Sunday, naming the land of his finding "Pascua Florida," (Flowery Easter). He had shipped with Columbus on his second voyage in 1493, and it was in 1510 that he was made adelantado of Porto Rico.

Also with the thought of Juan Ponce de Leon in mind, Dr. Andrew Anderson offered to give the massive marble lions for the decoration of the approach to the new Bridge of Lions across the Matanzas Bay, and he had these executed in a famous studio in Florence, Italy, for that purpose. The lion formed the main theme of the coat of arms of Juan Ponce de Leon, of whom historians say "He was a lion in heart as well as in name." It is also a dominant figure in the Spanish coat of arms, which shows the lion rampant, and the castle, signifying the union of the two famous Spanish provinces of Castile and Leon.

Antedating these two special ways of honoring Ponce de Leon came the tribute paid by the late Henry M. Flagler, great developer of the Florida east coast section, who built a palatial hostelry, naming it Hotel Ponce de Leon. It is one of the outstanding hostelries of this country, if not in the world. The Spanish motif is used in numberless interesting ways throughout this famous hotel, which was first opened to the public about forty years ago, and will open Jan. 5, 1928, for the present season. It occupies an ideal site in the heart of the city of St. Augustine.