

SPANISH HISTORY IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES
The Old Spanish Trail Country
Along the Gulf of Mexico and the Mexican Borderlands

By Harral Ayres

From the old Spanish city of Saint Augustine on the Atlantic Coast to the old Spanish city of San Diego on the Pacific Coast the Old Spanish Trail threads its way thru old Spanish cities across the continent. In the East—the lure of the Gulf of Mexico. In the West—the Mexican Borderlands, and the highways down into that interesting country of Spanish and Mexican achievement and of legends and relics of Aztec races.

II

SPANISH MISSION AND ADMINISTRATIVE WORKS In the present United States, Spanish mission and administrative works were spread from Florida to California. The earliest were in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina; the latest, in California. The mission establishments, as a rule, embraced cathedral-like churches of stone, cement or other enduring material, with vocational buildings, livestock ranches and irrigated farms. They became havens of hospitality and centers of culture in a primitive and strange world. Often the missions were the frontier posts; the padres braving the frontier dangers, and even martyrdom if it came, and often it did come. The five missions at San Antonio, Texas, reached the highest degrees of architectural refinements and majesty. In the Tucson--Nogales country of Arizona and western Mexico another group of noble buildings and communal enterprises spread over those valleys and deserts. They were also spread over New Mexico....and thru the El Paso Valley....and in South and East Texas....and in California from San Diego to Sonoma, 600 mi. north.

III

FRENCH AND SPANISH WORKS IN OLD LOUISIANA Old Louisiana was French territory after 1699, with Biloxi, Mobile and New Orleans the first settlements. French life and traditions are strong thru there and westward in Louisiana, and up the Mississippi, the Red, the Mobile and other rivers. Spain ruled Old Louisiana from 1769 to 1800 and interesting old Spanish works are in the old French Quarter (Vieux Carré) in New Orleans. Creoles are the descendants of French-Spanish unions; many families tracing their ancestry to the nobility of both empires.

West on the highway and on the storied Bayou Teche, 140 mi. from New Orleans, is New Iberia, settled by Spaniards from the Canary Islands. New Iberia means New Spain; Spaniards were Iberians anciently. Today that is the heart of the Evangeline Country immortalized by Longfellow....the alluring Teche Country....the land of the French-Acadians. North 6 mi. is St. Martinville, home of Evangeline.

IV

THREE CENTURIES OF SPANISH POWER, PROGRESS AND DECLINE Spanish conquests and colonization were well established the first half century following the discovery of America; in that early period vast territory was brought under the Spanish flag. The Spanish Era continued for three centuries before the wars for independence destroyed Spain's New World empire in North, Central and South America. Spain began with conquests and carnage and rose to the creation of the noblest works in history for the benefit of subject races. When Spanish power ended, Indians and white vandals destroyed many missions and their properties; others stand in majestic ruins with their marvelous story for modern-day travelers; others are still in service and their irrigating systems still serve mankind as they have for centuries... all eloquent heritages of the Spanish conquering spirit.

V

TWO CENTURIES SPANNING THE CONTINENT More than two centuries passed before the first faint trail connected Saint Augustine, Florida with San Diego, California. Spain founded San Agustín in 1565 and San Diego de Alcalá in 1769---and they were the beginning of colonization in Florida and in California, a span of 204 years from the settlement on the Atlantic to the settlement on the Pacific. During those 204 years many settlements were made in this southern borderland country and trails gradually developed from one settlement to another. The modern Old Spanish Trail follows, as nearly as a modern highway can, those primitive pioneer trails.

VI

THE EARLY SETTLEMENTS The early settlements along the highway and their date are San Agustín, 1565....Santa Maria de Galvez de Pensacola, 1559 and 1698.... Saint Louis de la Mobile, 1702 and 1711....Biloxi, 1699....Nouvelle Orleans, 1718....New Iberia, 1779....San Antonio de Bexar, 1715....Ysleta, Socorro and