

St. Augustine in History

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

No. 10—The City Gates

The City Gates, which guarded the entrance to the city in olden days, now mark practically the middle of the modern town, so great has been the growth of population in the northern section of St. Augustine during past years.

The gates as seen today are two picturesque pillars of coquina, surmounted with Moorish capitals and bearing marks of great antiquity. Between these, in olden times, was the iron gate, which barred the way to all comers after nightfall, and was closed in daytime hours upon signal of danger. On either side of the gates extended a wall. There was also a moat or deep ditch filled with water, and a hedge formed of double rows of the Spanish bayonet, by way of further protection. Whoever has come against the sharp spear-like leaves of the Spanish bayonet can realize that a double hedge of these would make a most effective barrier.

The moat extended to the very end of what is now Orange street, and, like all Spanish government property, became the property of the U. S. government after the

change of flags. A number of years ago school authorities of St. Augustine secured the grant of this moat property from the government, with the understanding that it was to be used for school purposes. The moat was filled, and the Orange street junior high and grammar school is built there, also the school dental clinic, built and endowed by the late John T. Dismukes.

One historian gives the description of the City Gates in 1783, saying that entrance to the city was gained by a drawbridge over the fosse and through the gate. When the sunset gun was fired the gate was barred and the guards took station. After the closing of the gates, the belated wayfarer, be he friend or foe, must make the best of it outside the town until morning. The little sentry boxes on either side may be seen as one makes an inspection of the gates.

A romantic novel "When the Land Was Young," by Lafayette McLaws, written some years ago, weaves some of its thrilling happenings of olden days about St. Augustine, and makes reference to the ancient gates of the city, emphasizing the fact that criminals, or those whom the Spanish dons honored with their enmity, were often punished by being hung in an iron cage attached to the city gates.