

VIVA FLORIDA 500

Florida's 500th Anniversary 1513-2013



Florida has the longest recorded history of any state in America. Contrary to popular belief, Florida was the first place of European arrival in America. St. Augustine is the oldest city in the U.S. – established 42 years before the English settled Jamestown and 55 years before the Pilgrims arrived in Plymouth. Prominent historians have stated that the first Thanksgiving took place in Northeast Florida, the first Christmas took place in the Tallahassee area and the Pocohantas story actually happened in Florida with a Spanish explorer and a Native American Tocobaga Princess.

The Tallahassee region played a very important role in the Spanish exploration, arrival and settlement of the new world in the 1500s. Spaniards were the first Europeans to settle colonies in the new world and several areas in North Florida, including Pensacola, Tallahassee and St. Augustine, have a very rich history, however the Tallahassee Spanish Colonial heritage sites are significant in their own right, but not nearly as well known.

The year 2013 will mark the 500th anniversary of Ponce de Leon's arrival and exploration in Florida. Leon County and the Tallahassee area played a very significant role in the Spanish legacy in Florida and in Florida's role in the nation's development. In fact, Leon County is named in honor of the Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon.

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Consider these important sites in the region:

1) **Mission San Luis** – (Leon County) In the late 1600s Mission San Luis de Apalachee was the western capitol of the Spanish Mission system in Florida. Mission San Luis is the only reconstructed Spanish Mission in Florida.

2) **De Soto Winter Encampment Site** –

(Leon County) The Hernando de Soto expedition camped at this location during its first winter in North America and it is the site of the first North American Christmas celebration.

3) and 4) **R.A. Gray Building** (Leon County) - **Florida State Archives** – Historical records and archival collections includes the Spanish Land Grants, the confirmed land grant claims related to the territory that Spain ceded to the United States in 1821; **Museum of Florida History** – 1700s Spanish Shipwrecks exhibit displays artifacts from the Spanish plate fleet shipwrecks. The museum is developing a 6,000 sq. ft. permanent Spanish Colonial exhibit, opening in Spring 2012.

5) **San Marcos de Apalache Historic State Park** (Wakulla County) – This National Historic Landmark site began in 1528 when Panfilo de Narvaez arrived in the area with 300 men. Located at the confluence of the Wakulla and St. Marks Rivers, the Spanish built the original fort in 1679 to protect the Spanish missions in the area.

6) **Fort Gadsden Historic Site** (Franklin County) – Fort Gadsden, also known as the Negro Fort, is a testament to the cultural diversity of Florida during the Second Spanish Period. This National Historic Landmark along the banks of the Apalachicola River houses many interpretive exhibits and artifacts.



Visit www.VivaFlorida.org to sign-up to receive an e-newsletter to learn more about this exciting statewide initiative.