

THE MAGAZINE OF THE FLORIDA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

FORUM

WINTER 2001

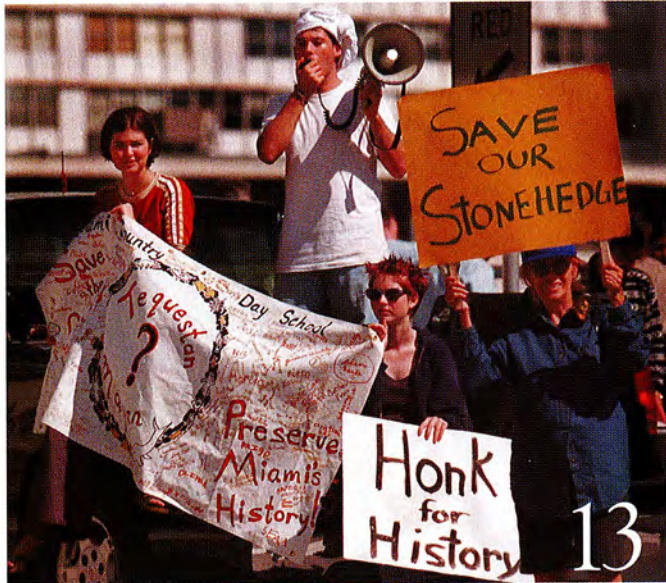
ARCHAEOLOGY

Digging Into Florida's Past



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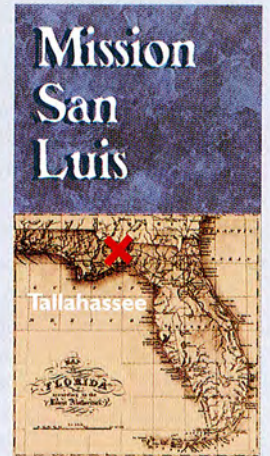
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We would like to thank State Archaeologist **Jim Miller**, chief of the Bureau of Archaeological Research, for helping us to develop and edit this issue of FORUM. For a list of books and websites on Florida archaeology, visit our website at www.flahum.org





Native porter's room inside the convento, or friary (left). A friar directs the Apalachees in raising a cross at San Luis (below).



FLORIDA DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

Spanish Missions Try To Claim the Frontier

BY BONNIE G. McEWAN

During the 16th and 17th Centuries there were more than 100 missions and outstations with churches in Spanish Florida. They were scattered along our state's colonial El Camino Real (royal road), which ran roughly parallel to U.S. 90 from St. Augustine to west of Marianna. Although early attempts had been made to convert the Indians of South Florida, the missionaries found these fisher-hunter-gatherers to be completely unreceptive to the Spaniards' religious message.

The successful missions were confined to the relatively sedentary agricultural chiefdoms of North Florida and southern Georgia. Colonizing Spaniards used these missions to spread the word of God, establish strategic footholds and native allies in hinterland territories, and obtain native laborers and provisions through a tribute system known as *repartimiento*.

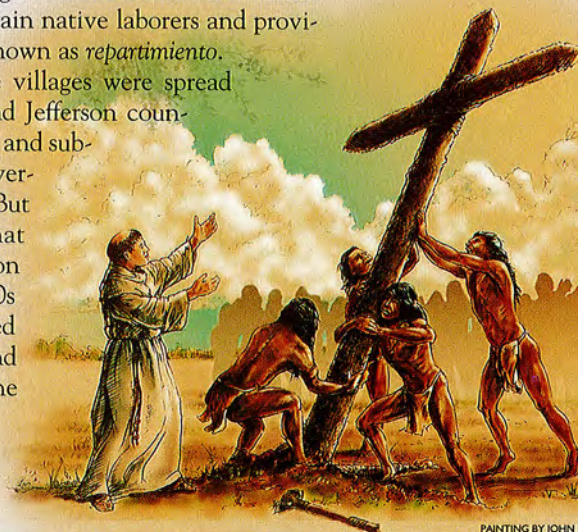
The Apalachee chiefs, whose villages were spread across the highlands of Leon and Jefferson counties, first requested friars in 1607, and subsequently accepted Spanish sovereignty on behalf of their people. But it was not until 1633 that Franciscan efforts in this region began in earnest. By the 1670s Apalachee Province was described as thoroughly Christianized, and the fertile area known today as the

Tallahassee Red Hills was a breadbasket to all of Spanish Florida. The province also provided ideal conditions for the establishment of Spanish ranching, farming and shipping enterprises, which led to the development of a highly prosperous frontier community.

Most of the missions were pre-existing native villages with principal chiefs and a resident friar (*doctrinas*); others were subordinate outstations visited by a nearby missionary (*visitas*).

Mission San Luis, or San Luis de Talimali, was different from the others. Its location was selected for strategic purposes by Spanish authorities in 1656, who decided to build their western capital on one of the area's highest ridgetops. One of the Apalachees' most powerful chiefs then moved his village to the Spaniards' western capital. San Luis was one of the largest and most important missions in Spanish Florida. It became the only settlement beyond St. Augustine with a significant Spanish population—including a deputy governor, soldiers, friars and civilians. By 1675, both San Luis and St. Augustine had populations of more than 1,400, although unlike St. Augustine, San Luis' residents were primarily Apalachee Indians.

Life at the mission was social and religious and built around church activities, farming and other manual labor, daily chores and family life. A summer morning at Mission San Luis probably began around 6 o'clock with the sound of bells. This marked the beginning of a new day, lifted spirits and gave a sense of community to natives in nearby farmsteads and hamlets. Most of the Apalachees living under the jurisdiction of Mission San Luis resided near their fields in the low-lying areas around



PAINTING BY JOHN LoCASTRO

The Apalachee chief's house and council house have been reconstructed at Mission San Luis (right). This quartz crystal cross, found in the mission church (below), is believed to have been made by a native artisan.

the town center. They would have been able to hear the church bells and see the hilltop town with its magnificent public buildings at a distance.

Many Spaniards, along with some Apalachees living close to the church, probably attended Mass at about 7 or 8 a.m. everyday. Although the Franciscans took vows of poverty, this did not extend to the House of God, on which they spared no expense. The Franciscan church at Mission San Luis was awe-inspiring by any measure. At 50-by-110 feet, its elegant configuration was informed by a European proportional system and was comparable in size to St. Augustine's main church. The nave and sanctuary were adorned with paintings, statuary and church furnishings supplied primarily from Mexico.

Although the church was European in its overall appearance, in many respects it was the domain of the Apalachees. Not only did they build the church, the Apalachees observed the Christian calendar, provided native-made furnishings (such as candlesticks), sang Latin hymns in the church choir and had at least one *cofradia* (religious brotherhood) dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. They also chose to be buried in the consecrated cemetery beneath the church floor where they would continue to hear Mass after death. All evidence indicates that the Apalachees' religious conversion was voluntary and sincere.

Following the morning Mass, most Apalachee men went to work in the fields and tended their maize, pumpkin, squash and sunflower crops. Others were employed on Spanish ranches, served on work details (such as construction crews responsible for the mission's public buildings) and performed military duties at the San Luis fort.

Apalachee women spent their days taking care of their small children, laboring on their farms, gathering nuts, berries and greens to supplement their field crops, making pottery and cooking. Some native women went to the village on the hilltop where they worked as domestic servants in Spanish homes, sold fresh produce on the town plaza, or served the friars by

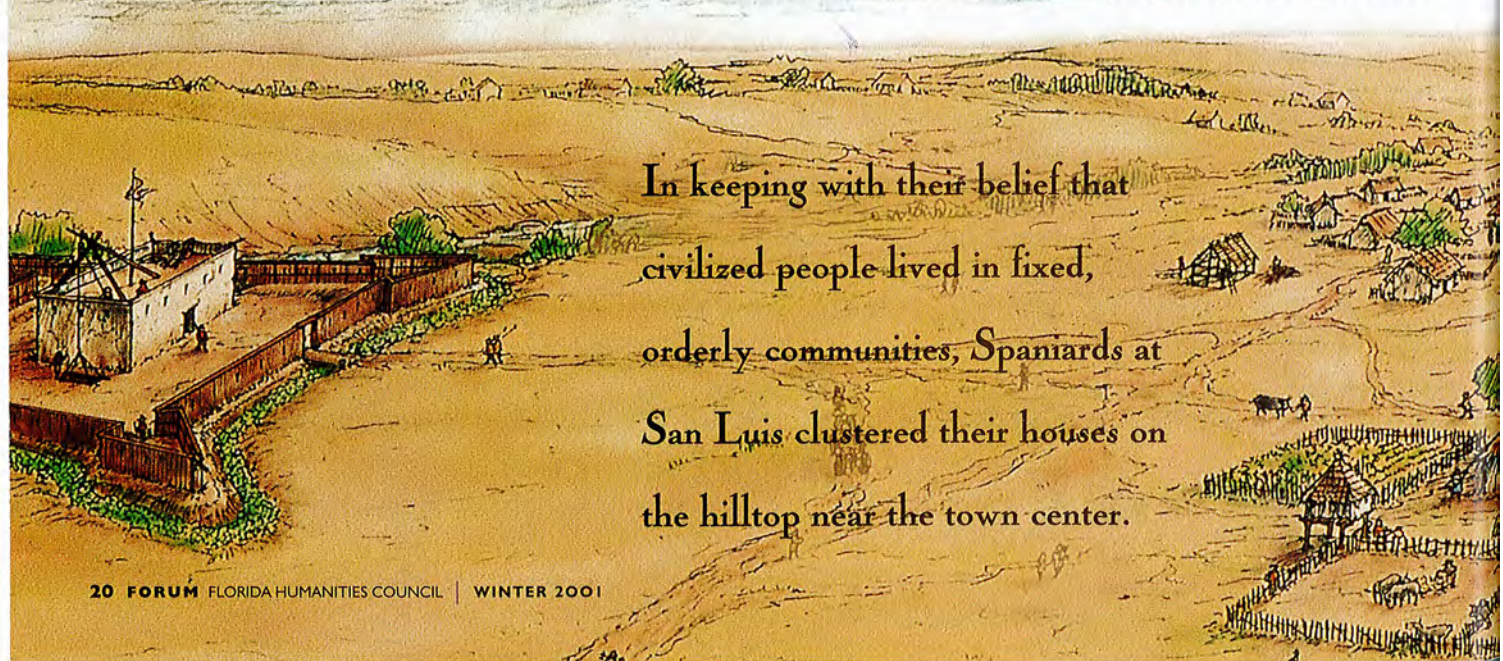


FLORIDA DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

cooking, washing clothes, and cleaning the church friary (*convento*) and kitchen (*cocina*). Others may have married Spaniards as a means of upward social mobility for them and their children who, as *mestizos*, would be exempt from manual labor. The important role of native women in the lives of Spaniards at San Luis is underscored by the thousands of fragments of Apalachee-made pottery found throughout Spanish areas of the site.

Apalachee leaders met in the council house every morning to discuss community affairs including planting schedules, military expeditions and grievances. Their meetings

always included the brewing and drinking of *cacina*, a native tea made from *Ilex vomitoria* or yaupon holly. In the broadest sense, the council house symbolized the bond of community, a beacon that was visible for miles around. At over 120 feet in diameter, the imposing Apalachee council house at Mission San Luis is the largest known colonial-era Indian structure in the Southeast and an architectural marvel. It was maintained by Apalachee widows and elderly or disabled men who were no longer able to work in the fields. They swept the council house and central plaza every day and also ensured that there was plenty of firewood for the huge hearth that burned continu-



In keeping with their belief that civilized people lived in fixed, orderly communities, Spaniards at San Luis clustered their houses on the hilltop near the town center.

ously in the center of the building.

In keeping with their belief that civilized people lived in fixed, orderly communities, Spaniards at San Luis clustered their houses on the hilltop near the town center. Their village at the mission was described by one European traveler as having the appearance of a Spanish city. Most of the men were soldiers and maintained around-the-clock shifts in the fort or as sentries. Others were ship owners and traders who spent their days organizing agricultural exports from the surrounding countryside, preparing shipping manifests, inspecting incoming shipments and selling their exotic goods, which included an impressive array of luxury items from around the world.

Spanish wives were primarily responsible for raising the children and keeping their homes well tended with the help of Apalachee women. On most mornings they probably went to local stores or markets to buy fresh bread, meat and other supplies for the day's meals. While Spaniards living in St. Augustine were eating mainly fish, turtles, deer and other local foodstuffs, those living at San Luis enjoyed beef and pork from nearby ranches.

Both Spanish and Apalachee school-aged children probably attended catechism in the church or friary classroom, after which they helped with chores and played. Clay figurines (*jugetes*), marbles, small rings and tiny protective amulets (*higas*) recovered from San Luis once belonged to the mission's youngest residents.

Following the evening bell (at about 6 p.m.), the workday ended except for those on military duty through the night. Most Spaniards enjoyed their evening meal at home, but the Apalachees spent most evenings together. Every night they served meals and held dances in the council house, and visitors to the mission lodged there.

Remains from the building suggest that the Apalachees continued traditional activities such as flint knapping, hide preparation and cacina brewing, and that the European presence had little influence on the architecture or functioning of the native council house. In general, the same can be said of Apalachee social and political life at San Luis, which remained intact

throughout the mission period. Although their religious conversion was lasting, the Apalachees managed to maintain many pre-contact traditions even after three generations of mission life.

The end of Mission San Luis came suddenly. The outbreak of Queen Anne's War in 1701 prompted open English hostility against Spanish Florida, and ultimately led to the end of the missions. On July 31, 1704, just two days before an Anglo-Creek strike force arrived at Mission San Luis, the Spaniards and remaining Apalachees burned and abandoned the site. The Apalachees from San Luis moved to Mobile at the invitation of French authorities, and in 1763 resettled in the Red River area of Louisiana. Mission San Luis was never repopulated by Spanish colonists or the Apalachee Indians, who had lived in the region for centuries.

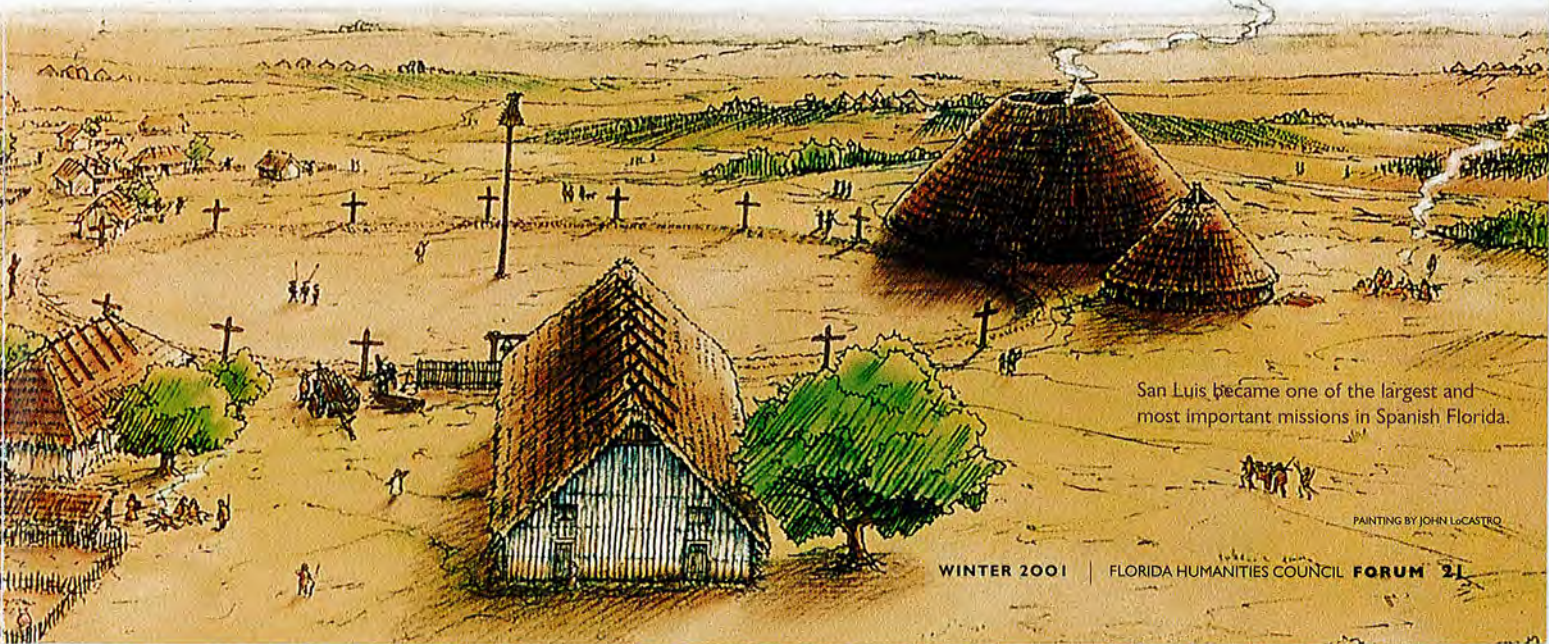
Today, Mission San Luis is a spectacular symbol of Florida's unique culture and history. The State of Florida purchased Mission San Luis in 1983 because of its archaeological and historical significance, and is in the process of reconstructing the site, based on nearly two decades of painstaking research. The Florida Department of State's Division of Historical Resources manages the site, which is open to the public.

The educational programming available at today's Mission San Luis communicates the importance of Florida's Native American and Spanish heritage—both past and present—to people of all ages in a very tangible way. Visitors to the site not only develop an appreciation of Florida's colonial past, but they also gain an understanding of how and why archaeological and historical research is done.

* * *

Mission San Luis is located at 2020 Mission Road in Tallahassee. The site is open to the public Tuesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mission San Luis is closed on Mondays, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Admission is free. For more information, please call (850) 487-3711 or visit the San Luis website at http://dhr.dos.state.fl.us/bar/san_luis/ ■

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San Luis became one of the largest and most important missions in Spanish Florida.

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