



ST. JOHNS CULTURAL COUNCIL

ST. AUGUSTINE | PONTE VEDRA | FLORIDA'S HISTORIC COAST*

Fact Sheet

Overview

In partnership with Florida's Historic Coast community, the St. Johns Cultural Council presents arts, culture and heritage activities and events in St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra and the beaches. As America's oldest city, St. Augustine offers more than 450 years of history to explore including America's longest standing masonry fort, oldest port, first free African American settlement and oldest street. St. Augustine was the preferred vacation destination for the rich and famous of the Gilded Age, and as a result is now home to a stunning array of late 19th century art and architecture, including the world's largest stationary collection of Tiffany-stained glass. The 20th century brought social change. Today, visitors can walk in the footsteps of Martin Luther King Jr. and Andrew Young and learn about St. Augustine's pivotal role in the passage of America's Civil Rights Act. Visitors can experience the city's Old-World charm reminiscent of European cities by strolling past charming homes on brick-paved streets that serve as authentic reminders of a by-gone era while enjoying year-round performances and annual festivals that celebrate visual, performing and literary arts.

Historic Sites

Castillo de San Marcos, the oldest masonry fort in the continental United States and the oldest structure in St. Augustine, is a National Monument. Built by the Spanish from 1672 to 1695, the fort was meant to protect and defend Spain's claims in the New World. Made of coquina, the fort was impenetrable to enemy attack and is fire resistant. The Castillo de San Marcos is open to the public seven days per week except for Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

Fort Matanzas, built in 1742 by the Spanish, was meant to defend the city of St. Augustine from British attack. Located 15 miles south of St. Augustine, it has stood in the Matanzas Inlet for well over 250 years. The fort, made of coquina, is a National Monument maintained by the National Park Service. The Visitor Center and most of the park grounds are open daily to the public and is accessible only via a passenger ferry.

Fort Mose Historic State Park is the site of the first legally sanctioned, free African settlement in what is now the United States. In 1687, an intrepid group of freedom seekers were granted freedom on the condition that they swear allegiance to Spain and adopt the Catholic religion. For men, there was also a term of service in the militia. Today, Fort Mose is a State Park, National Historic Landmark and a precursor site of the National Underground Railroad Network.

Ponce de Leon's Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park is the original site of the Nation's oldest city. Long before the Spanish came to La Florida, the Timucuan Indian village was established at this site for nearly 3,000 years. It was in this spot that Ponce de Leon came ashore in 1513 and Pedro Menéndez de Avilés founded the city of St. Augustine in 1565. Today visitors can drink from Ponce de Leon's Spring of Eternal

Hope, see blacksmith demonstrations, a recreated Timucuan village, weapons demonstrations and dozens of roaming peafowl.

Mission Nombre de Dios and **Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche** go back to the founding of St. Augustine. On September 8, 1565, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés landed and proclaimed the site for Spain and the Church and named it Nombre de Dios, meaning Name of God. It was here that Menéndez knelt to kiss a wooden cross presented to him by Father Francisco López de Mendoza Grajales, chaplain of his expedition. It was on these grounds that Fr. López would celebrate the first parish Mass and begin the work at America's first mission. It was at this sacred spot that the Spanish settlers would begin the devotion to Our Lady of La Leche that continues into the present.

Plaza de la Constitución is the predominant park in downtown St. Augustine. The plaza has been a central part of St. Augustine since 1573 when it was first laid out by the Spanish. The plaza earned its name for the Constitución Obelisk that was erected to celebrate the Spanish Constitution of 1812.

The **Father Miguel O'Reilly House Museum**, circa 1691, is one of the few surviving buildings from the first Spanish period. The museum is home to the Catholic Diocese archives, the oldest collection of colonial period documents in America. Operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph, the archive items on display interpret the continuous occupation of St. Augustine.

Ximenez Fatio House, one of the best-preserved colonial structures in St. Augustine, was built in 1798 of coquina. The home became a boarding house by 1830 complete with a lobby, dining room and guest rooms. In 1939, The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Florida purchased the property. The Ximenez-Fatio House is listed in the National Register of Historic Places and the Historic American Buildings Survey. It is a Florida Heritage Landmark and is also recognized as an integral part of the St. Augustine Town Plan National Historic Landmark District.

The **Pena-Peck House** was constructed circa 1750 by order of the King of Spain to be the residence of his royal Treasurer, Juan Estevan de Peña. Built of native coquina stone, it is one of the finest surviving first Spanish period homes in the city. In 1837, Dr. Seth Peck, along with his wife and children, purchased the former Peña residence. Dr. Peck's medical office was on the first floor in what is now the gift shop. The large northwest room was rented for a general store. Today, volunteers with the Woman's Exchange guide visitors throughout the house filled with Peck furnishings, including priceless 18th-century American antiques.

Gonzalez Alvarez House, the oldest surviving Spanish colonial dwelling in St. Augustine, is a National Historic Landmark. Also known as The Oldest House, Gonzalez-Alvarez House is an authentically restored example of an early Spanish colonial home with its walled garden. Built after 1702, this site has been home to many under Spanish, British and American rule. It is owned and operated by the St. Augustine Historical Society. Archeological evidence exists that the site had been occupied since the 1600s.

Just steps from St. Augustine's historic city gates at St. George Street, the **St. Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine** is an institution of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and is dedicated to the first colony of Greek people who came to America in 1768. The Shrine consists of exhibits depicting the life of early Greeks in America, the development of the Greek Orthodox Church in America and the St. Photios Chapel.

Gilded Age Attractions

Flagler College, located in the heart of St. Augustine, has provided a rich liberal arts education to the community and nation for more than 50 years. Its history, however, spans more than a century. Henry Morrison Flagler, a Gilded Age industrialist, railroad pioneer and entrepreneur, built the luxury Hotel Ponce de León in 1888, which now serves as a residence hall and centerpiece of the campus. The hotel was Flagler's first in a series of luxury resorts along Florida's east coast. The building was the first major poured-in-place concrete building in the U.S. and is a masterpiece of Spanish Renaissance architecture. Its grandeur launched the careers of famed architects John Merven Carrère and Thomas Hastings, and the Edison Electric Company powered the building with steam heat and 4,000 electric lights, making the hotel one of the nation's first electrified buildings. Louis Comfort Tiffany created the hotel's 79 stained-glass windows, the largest collection in the world that remains in its original location. Today, Flagler College is committed to preserving its campus's opulent architecture that serves as a reminder of the economic and industrial growth of the Gilded Age.

The Lightner Museum is home to an extensive collection of Gilded Age artifacts, including fine and decorative art, Tiffany glass, musical instruments and rare oddities such as mummy and human hair art. In 1948, Otto Lightner founded the museum as the Lightner Museum of Hobbies, as its origins are attributed to the craze for collecting that swept America in the years surrounding the Great Depression. The museum occupies the former Hotel Alcazar, a Gilded Age resort hotel commissioned by Henry Flagler in 1888. Architects John Merven Carrère and Thomas Hastings constructed the architectural masterpiece that, like the neighboring Hotel Ponce de León, housed some of America's wealthiest vacationers at the turn of the 20th century. The hotel featured the world's largest indoor swimming pool at the time, a grand ballroom, sulfur baths, a steam room, massage parlor, a gymnasium, a bowling alley, archery ranges, tennis courts and a bicycle academy.

St. Augustine's **Memorial Presbyterian Church** was built in 1889 by Henry Morrison Flagler as a memorial to his daughter, Jennie Louise Flagler Benedict, who passed away during childbirth that same year. Memorial Presbyterian was designed by architects John Merven Carrère and Thomas Hastings. When Flagler died in 1913, he was interred in a marble mausoleum connected to the church alongside his daughter Jennie, his granddaughter and his first wife Mary Harkness Flagler.

Built by Henry Morrison Flagler, **Grace United Methodist Church** is on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places for its architectural significance. Designed by architects John Merven Carrère and Thomas Hastings, the building boasts a Spanish Renaissance Revival architecture style, complementing the other structures built by Flagler in St. Augustine. Construction was completed in 1887 and the church held its first service on January 1, 1888. It was built of poured concrete, an underused building material and

process at the time, and the sanctuary was adorned with Louis Comfort Tiffany stained-glass windows resembling Ponce de León.

Villa Zorayda Museum was constructed in 1883 as the winter residence of Franklin Webster Smith. The building set the precedent for architectural styles in St. Augustine and represents the birth of the Moorish Spanish Revival style that is seen throughout the city today. Today, the museum features the priceless antique collection of both Smith and Abraham Mussallem, an immigrant from Lebanon who owned the property after Smith's death. Guests can take a 45 – 60-minute tour of the museum to learn about the building's historical significance to St. Augustine, the magnificent architecture as well as the antique collections on display including the famed Sacred Cat Rug that is over 2,400 years old and made from the hairs of ancient cats that once roamed the Nile River.

Civil Rights History

The **LincolNville** neighborhood spans 45 blocks on the southwest peninsula of St. Augustine. Established by freedmen after the Civil War, the neighborhood was initially called "Little Africa." Later renamed LincolNville, it thrived during segregation as a busy shopping district with churches and the largest collection of Victorian houses in town. It played a major role in the civil rights movement of the 1960s. One of the main streets has been named to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., M L King Avenue in LincolNville is one of only two streets named in his honor that MLK walked on. LincolNville is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

LincolNville Museum and Cultural Center is an African American history museum located in the LincolNville neighborhood of Saint Augustine. The museum is housed in the historic Excelsior School Building, which served as the first public Black high school in St. Johns County in 1925.

The **ACCORD Civil Rights Museum**, the first civil rights museum in Florida, opened in July 2014 in the LincolNville neighborhood. The museum houses exhibits, articles, stories and artifacts that tell the stories of the unsung heroes of the local 1960s civil rights movement, including artifacts from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's stay in St. Augustine.

The **ACCORD Freedom Trail** is a self-guided walking tour made up of 31 historic civil rights markers throughout the community that tell the story of how events in St. Augustine became the final impetus for passage of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Cultural Landscape

Beluthahatchee Park is a four-acre park located within a 70-acre tract of land owned by author and human rights activist Stetson Kennedy. The park is the location of Kennedy's former home, which served as an enclave for other writers and artists and is now a museum. Kennedy preserved the land, consisting of a lake surrounded by high bluffs with a heavy canopy of native vegetation, to be a wildlife refuge where native animals thrive.

The **Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve** (GTM Research Reserve) is dedicated to the conservation of natural biodiversity and cultural resources through research and monitoring to guide science-based stewardship and education

strategies. GTM Research Reserve protects 76,760 acres, providing a habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife including at least 44 mammals, 358 birds, 41 reptiles, 21 amphibia, 303 fish and 580 plants. The reserve offers nearly 10 miles of trails for walking, hiking, biking, horseback riding, dog walking, nature viewing and picnicking.

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