

OUTLINE OF ST. AUGUSTINE RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE 1565 - 1845

This presentation emphasizes the two earliest historic periods in the development of St. Augustine architecture. They are the First Spanish Period, 1565-1763, and the English Period, 1763-1784. The Second Spanish Period, 1784-1821, and the American Territorial Period, 1821-1845, will be examined with less emphasis. In addition, I will limit most of my remarks to the residential architecture of those periods. For those interested in a broader view of St. Augustine, many of the publications listed in Works Referenced extensively explore its military, religious, and commercial aspects, as well as the imprint left by other ethnic groups.

St. Augustine began in 1565 as a military base to protect the Spanish ships carrying the riches taken from the Americas to Spain. The first location of the new colony probably was on the site of the present Fountain of Youth Park, north of the present colonial city, but after temporarily moving to Anastasia Island, it was soon relocated to its present site. Although the Spanish learned about local materials from the Native American Timucuan Indians, there is evidence that the Spanish did not adopt Indian building methods, but instead adapted European vernacular construction to the new materials. On the other hand, the Indians did not adopt Spanish methods, although they did adopt European tools. The Timucuan left faint footprints, and even today many questions regarding the shape and construction of their buildings remain unanswered.

From St. Augustine a chain of Catholic missions was established throughout the southeastern US to convert the Native Americans to Christianity. The colonial city extended from the Matanzas River on the east to what is now Cordova Street on the west, and from the Castillo de San Marcos and city gates on the north to approximately San Salvador Street on the south. With the single exception of the Castillo de San Marcos, constructed of coquina shellstone, no buildings constructed in St. Augustine before 1702 are known to have survived. In 1702, while the Spanish took refuge in the Castillo, the English Governor Moore of South Carolina razed the city to the ground. In 1704 Governor Moore forced the Spanish to abandon their chain of missions, and, unlike the later masonry mission buildings in the American southwest that have survived, the earlier impermanent structures in the Florida mission chain soon disappeared. Thus, most of our knowledge of buildings constructed before 1702 comes from archaeological and documentary evidence.

The plan of the colonial city of St. Augustine followed to some degree the ordinances enacted by the Spanish Crown in 1563 and 1573 for the development of new colonies in Spanish America. Each village was to have a plaza, church, public buildings, and individual town lots surrounded by community lands. The town lots measured 50 x 100 Spanish feet (45.69 x 91.38 US feet) for the *peons* and 100 x 200 Spanish feet (91.38 x 182.76 US feet) for the higher-ranking *caballeros*. It is apparent that the scale of the urban landscape was quite small. This small scale is evident today because the colonial plan of the city has been honored and preserved for over 400 years with minor changes. It is a very important factor in maintaining

the historic ambiance of the city, as is recognized by its National Landmark status on the National Register of Historic Places.

Early drawings and later 19th and 20th century photographs of St. George Street reveal that the character of the street has changed very little over the years. The narrow streets and early flat-roofed residences of the 1st Spanish Period may reflect middle-eastern Arabic architecture brought to Spain by the Moors. The small scale of the public spaces and the narrowness of the streets are emphasized by the Spanish practice of placing the front walls of buildings directly upon the front lot line, effectively creating a continuous wall defining public and private spaces. Fences or structures were provided on the other lot lines to provide complete enclosure of the property. The rear areas of the lots were reserved for small gardens, fruit trees, and outbuildings. Entrance to the Spanish house was from the street through a gate in a fence or wall to a side yard, and from the side yard into the house. Windows to the street were often provided with wooden gratings to permit protected conversation between the house and the street. These protected openings were known as *rejas*, and they and other windows were not glazed but were provided with wooden shutters that opened to the interior. Windows were often omitted in north walls, and entrance piazzas and loggias were preferably located on the south or east side of the building. Exterior doors opened inward so they could be effectively barred against entry. Kitchens were often provided as separate internal spaces or separate buildings. The Spanish stove had no chimney, and smoke from the charcoal fire found its way out through the roof or smoke holes. Similarly, heating was provided by charcoal braziers that were carried from room to room. There were no fireplaces.

Historian Albert Manucy has identified three types of basic vernacular residential plans used by the Spanish. A characteristic found in all types is the lack of hallways. Access to a room is provided directly from the exterior, or through an adjoining room, or from a porch or loggia that serves as a hall. The first plan is called the "common plan" and consists of one to three adjoining rooms. Access to a second floor, if present, is from a stair located in one of the rooms. Open porches and balconies are often found with these plans. One of the houses we will visit this afternoon, the Gallegos house, is a reconstructed "common plan" residence. The second plan is called the "St. Augustine plan" and consists of several adjoining rooms, entry to which is provided by a porch, which is enclosed on one side, or by a loggia, which is a room open to the air on one or two sides. Access to a second floor, if present, is from a stair located at one end of the porch or loggia. The second floor often had a balcony overlooking the street. The third plan is called the "wing plan," consisting of two or more rooms to which are added one or two substantial wings, or additional rooms, to create an "L," "U," or "H" plan shape. Access to a second floor is from a stair located at one end of a porch or loggia. The second house we will visit, the Sanchez-de Mesa house, evolved from a "common plan" to a "St. Augustine plan" and into a "wing plan." The "common" and "St. Augustine" plans are particularly well-suited for the Florida climate, for when oriented to the south or east, the porches and loggias provided cool shade and ample ventilation to the interior rooms.

Although the Spanish preferred to build using masonry materials, and apparently found the local shellstone known as coquina as early as 1580, the coquina was not considered suitable for construction until it was used in building the Castillo from 1672-1696. Thus, the early military, mission, government, and domestic buildings were constructed of impermanent materials. Building frames were often of wood in which the bottoms of vertical posts were buried in the ground and the upper framework was mortised and tenoned together. Evidence of this type of impermanent, vernacular braced-frame construction has been found throughout both English and Spanish colonies by archaeologists in recent years. Although some techniques of using local materials such as palm thatch were borrowed from the Native Americans, construction reflected the vernacular traditions of Spain. Floors were usually of concrete made with crushed oyster shells or coquina, poured on the ground and sometimes sealed with any available animal or vegetable oils. Walls were often palm thatch, wood planks, clay reinforced with a light wooden framework known as wattle-and-daub, or tabby concrete, a mixture consisting of lime from burned oyster shells, sand, and whole oyster shells. The tabby concrete walls were always plastered, inside and out, and the wood plank walls were whitewashed, inside and out. Roofs were sometimes sloped and covered with palm thatch, wood planks or shingles, or were relatively flat and surfaced with tabby concrete. The flat roofs were wonderful in the arid, hot areas of Spain, and they were resistant to fire. However, they must have required high maintenance in the rainy and humid Florida climate.

Following the destruction of St. Augustine in 1702, coquina shellstone began to be used in the construction of residential buildings, although tabby concrete and wood continued in use. The coquina masonry, like the tabby, was plastered inside and out not only to prevent deterioration but also to increase interior light levels and for sanitary reasons. The exposed tabby concrete and coquina shellstone visible today in St. Augustine would have been plastered by traditional masons, whether Spanish, English, or American Territorial.

When Florida was ceded to England in 1763, almost the entire Spanish population left the city. According to John Bartram, the Quaker botanist, almost half the town was pulled down by British soldiers and used as firewood. However, many buildings were preserved and utilized. Six hundred Minorcans from Turnbull's failed New Smyrna colony added significantly to the town's labor force in 1777. In addition, the population of St. Augustine swelled as Loyalists fled from Charleston and Savannah to seek shelter in Florida during the American Revolution, for the English colonies of East and West Florida remained loyal to the English Crown. An entire wooden English barracks was shipped in pieces from New York and assembled in St. Augustine, and other new English vernacular wooden buildings were erected. Water-powered sawmills that relied on tidal flow were constructed. The English replaced the Spanish interior wooden shutters with exterior shutters and glazed sash windows, provided wood flooring over the Spanish tabby first floors, added fireplaces and chimneys, added wooden second floors clad with clapboards to Spanish single-story masonry structures, revised floor plans to include central halls and entries directly from the street, rebuilt

roofs using slightly different roof slopes, and scored replastered walls to resemble masonry similar to the finishes found in Savannah and Charleston. Overall, however, these changes did not affect the scale or basic character of the city. Few major changes were completed during the period the Spanish re-occupied St. Augustine from 1784-1821. During the American Territorial period, 1821-1845, St. Augustine at first experienced several years of economic development which did not succeed, followed by the Seminole wars and the gradual growth of tourism. A substantial amount of Greek Revival interior trim, doors, shutters, hardware, and other material has survived from this era.

At this point it is appropriate to step outside the colonial city and briefly note a few plantation and rural residences constructed during the Spanish, English, and American Territorial Periods. Unfortunately, no structures predating approximately 1800 have survived, but some idea of their appearance can be imagined by viewing recorded examples of similar buildings.

Although the military and religious goals of the Spanish did not lead to extensive exploitation of the natural resources of Florida, the Spanish did establish a number of cattle and wheat plantations, and at least some of the major plantation residences were fortified blockhouses, as recorded at Mission San Luis and Fort San Diego. However, with the advent of the English in 1763 began the intensive cultivation of the land for indigo, sugar cane, cotton, and other crops. As noted previously for the buildings in the colonial city of St. Augustine, the English brought their own traditions with them. In their smaller plantation utilitarian buildings, including some slave quarters, they used impermanent framing techniques, and indentured Minorcan colonists seen to have used the same methods in Turnbull's New Smyrna colony. The English methods of constructing tabby walls were similar, but not identical, to Spanish methods. The English seem to have introduced the use of tabby brick to Florida, as seen at Kingsley Plantation in Duval County and the later Gamble Mansion in Manatee County. They used coquina not only in their manor houses but also in immense industrial structures related to the sugar industry. Many of the English plantations remained in operation and prospered throughout the English, Second Spanish, and early American Territorial Periods, and as a result Florida was an active participant in the American industrial revolution until the Seminole Indian wars ended the operations of most of the plantations.

A number of impressive plantation manor houses constructed during the English and Second Spanish Periods appear to have strong English design precedents, although the Jesse Fish plantation house on Anastasia Island combined Spanish and English design elements. The massive coquina foundations that remain at New Smyrna are believed to have been constructed by Turnbull, but the use of the structure is unknown. However, the plan bears a close resemblance to an English manor house, Hagley Hall, dating from about 1752. Descriptions of Governor Moultrie's Bella Vista residence indicate it was the equal of any plantation in the Carolinas, and this magnificent masonry building and its surrounding landscaped grounds may have resembled South Carolina's Drayton Hall. The main house at Kingsley Plantation, on

Fort George Island in Duval County, also may have precedents from South Carolina or England. The plan of Mulberry Plantation in South Carolina has similar projecting corner rooms, and it is in turn similar to a 17th century English plan based upon Palladio's Villa Valmarana.

Other plantation manor houses reflect different design precedents. The Second Spanish Period wood-frame residence of the Minorcan Joseph Hernandez probably resembled a type of cottage introduced by the French to the Carolinas and called by some the "Cape Cod Cottage of the South." Examples can be seen in the Melrose Plantation and Middleburg Plantation houses in South Carolina, and in the Princess Murat House in Tallahassee. A French West Indies tradition which embodies wide surrounding porches and protecting roofs may have been reflected in the plans of Governor John Moultrie's manor house at Rosetta Plantation and in Gamble Mansion in Manatee County. Finally, a northern European tradition of log structures was probably evident in the large, thatch-roofed, log structure on the Dummett Plantation in the early 1800's. As Florida became an American Territory, a number of smaller but beautifully constructed log cabins were built by settlers from Georgia, the Carolinas, and elsewhere. The Burnsed Blockhouse in Baker County has survived, but the larger Fletcher plantation log house in Gadsden County has not. These buildings may reflect a quality of workmanship found in the Dummett Plantation structure.

Although major changes occurred with the advent of the Flagler era in the 1880's, a growing awareness of the historical importance of the colonial city in the early 1900's initiated the preservation of the colonial city. In addition to the 17th century Castillo de San Marcos, thirty-five colonial buildings constructed between 1702 and 1821 have survived. These buildings, plus a number that have been accurately reconstructed, and an even greater number of modern buildings that have been constructed following preservation guidelines, have preserved a substantial amount of the 16th through 19th century character of the city.

Herschel E. Shepard, FAIA July, 2009

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This lecture is based primarily upon Manucy 1962, *The Houses of St. Augustine*, and many of the illustrations are from that publication. Notes on plantation architecture are based to a large extent upon a series of articles published in the two referenced editions of *The Florida Anthropologist*. However, supplementary information and illustrations are used throughout the lecture and are from additional sources referenced below. If included in the lecture, notes and illustrations of historic tools are primarily from Sloane 1984, supplemented by a few additional referenced works. See also Works Referenced: Illustrations, on file with the Florida Humanities Council.

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