The following brief document includes historic facts and supporting references. The goal of the authors was to synthesize scholarly histories and records to suggest the uniqueness of La Florida, Santa Elena, and the activities of early Spanish explorers and settlers. The story of Santa Elena helps communicate the lost Century of European settlement in America.
This chart depicts the world as Columbus knew it before setting sail in 1492. The sun and heavens still revolved around the Earth and those who lived inland had little pragmatic reason to consider otherwise that the world was flat. But experienced European mariners had never seen an edge to the ocean and suspected a globe…and that the riches of Marco Polo’s Asia lay not too far beyond the westward horizon.

Within a decade, the edges of the South American continent would be discovered. In another ten years, so would be the first outline of North America. With one foot still in the Middle Age, the explorers of the 16th Century remarkably expanded world knowledge as humanity stepped toward the Renaissance. How that difficult move forward happened can be partially told through
the story of La Florida, and its eventual capital, Santa Elena in current Beaufort County, South Carolina.
Santa Elena & America’s Lost Century Timeline

1493  Columbus letter to Ferdinand and Isabella describing his discovery of the western route to China and the Orient is published in Europe.


1494  Columbus establishes the first New World Spanish colony La Isabela, Hispaniola. Treaty of Tordesillas divided the New World between Spain and Portugal. The 1502 chart at left was produced after South America was discovered, but is useful to depict the Treaty line.

1496  Santo Domingo founded by Columbus

1499  Vasco de Gama rounds the southern tip of Africa and reached India

1500  Pedro Alvares Cabral discovers the presence of South America. At Columbus’ expense, Amerigo Vespucci, gained credit for describing the discovery as a new continent

1505  Columbus’ fourth expedition in 1503 produced his last understanding of the new world’s proximity to Marco Polo’s well-known Asia before his death; along with the proximity to Asia, note the presence of Mondo Novo (South America) and the absence of knowledge of any land mass north of Hispaniola and Cuba.
1507 The first map is published using “America” (feminine derivation of “Amerigo”)

1511 Peter Martyr produced a map depicting the “New World” prior to the discovery of North America; the map suggests awareness of a land mass north of Cuba

1513 Ponce De Leon discovers “La Florida”

Spaniard Balboa crossed the Isthmus of Panama and discovers the “South Sea”; first inkling that a continent may exist between the Atlantic and the Pacific
1514  King Ferdinand appointed De Leon “Adelantado of La Florida” on 27 September

Leonardo da Vinci produced a New World map depicting “La Florida” as an island off the China coast

1515  ca. 1515, in search of slaves, Pedro Salazar makes landfall northwest of the Bahamas; first Europeans on the Carolina coast and first interaction with regional natives

1517  Martin Luther marks the beginning of the Protestant Reformation

1519  Magellan and El Cano circumnavigate 1519-1522 confirming the “globe hypothesis” and additional information as to the major land mass separating the Atlantic from the Pacific

1521  Francisco Gordillo (employed by Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón) & Pedro de Quejo kidnapped ~100 natives from Winyah Bay (South Carolina) and transplant to the West Indies; “Francisco Chicora” imparts myths of riches and wonders that resonates in Europe

Ponce de Leon took 200 men to SW Florida to attempt a colony; the venture collapsed after five months, his wounding, and subsequent death

1522  The Spaniards invalidated the belief that La Florida is an island by mapping the Gulf Coast from Cape Sable to Texas 1519-1522

1523  Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón appointed Governor and Capitan General of La Florida

1524  Verazzano’s North American coast survey established the perception of an Atlantic-Pacific maritime passage that colored European exploration ambitions through the 1580’s

1525  Under contract from Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón, Pedro de Quejo conducted a coastal survey from Cumberland Island, Georgia beyond Cape Fear, NC; “La Punta de Santa Elena” (Savannah River-Tybee Island) first reported by Quejo in May as “Rio de la Cruz”
The first European municipality in present-day United States, San Miguel de Gualdape, existed south of Santa Elena ~4 months, but imprecise navigation, terra incognita, and poor records, later combined with Spanish artifacts found among natives by DeSoto, reinforced the belief that Ayllón had settled in the vicinity of Santa Elena. (Paar, 1999, pp. 16-18 & Pickett, 2011, p. 39)

The first African slaves imported on US soil were among the San Miguel Gualdape colonists and the first European-built boat in the US was constructed during the expedition (Hoffman, 1990)

1528 Pánfilo de Nárvaez with ~400 people landed near Tampa and set out overland in search of a northern port connection with Mexico. After eight months, only four survived including Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca who walked to Mexico City arriving in 1536; and Juan Ortiz who was found living with natives near Tampa by DeSoto in 1539.

1529 “Santa Elena” as referenced in the 1525-26 Ayllón sponsored voyages appeared on European charts; Diogo de Ribeiro drew the “padron general” or master map of the ever-expanding explored world (Hoffman, 1990, pp. 69, 85-86 & Nebenzahl, 1990, pp 84, 92)

1534 King Henry VIII’s “Act of Supremacy” leads to establishment of the Church of England

1535 French Cartier conducts explorations of North American coast 1534 & 1536

French King Francis I caused Papal clarification that sovereignty was conferred commensurate with physical occupation of territory- American settlement by European nations became a “space race” (Pickett, 2011, p. 14)
1536 Cabeza de Vaca, survivor of the 1528 Narvaez attempt arrives in Mexico City on 24 July with information describing terrain and natives along the Gulf Coast from Tampa to the Mississippi and Texas and into Mexico. He hints at rich provinces north of Mexico, and perhaps in peninsular Florida.

1539 Hernando DeSoto and 600 trekked through the U.S. southeast; Juan Ortiz, survivor of the 1528 Narvaez colony attempt, was found living with Native Americans near current Tampa and was incorporated into the expedition. DeSoto found Spanish artifacts on the upper reaches of the Santee and Edisto rivers with natives and incorrectly assumed that this was the “Rio de Santa Elena” and that Ayllón’s San Miguel Gualdape had settled on it (Hoffman 1990, 94). The Hernando DeSoto “reconnaissance in force” lasted until 1543

Concurrently, gold and silver discovered in Peru, silver mines discovered in Mexico

1540 Prompted by the report of Cabeza de Vaca, Coronado (Tristan de Luna as 2nd in command) explored Texas, Kansas, and New Mexico 1540-1542

1544 Reports from the Hernando DeSoto exploration result in the production of a map including the depiction of Santa Elena, though he never saw Port Royal Sound

1546 An English/French privateer expedition headed for the Spanish Main stopped at “Punta de Santa Elena” and replenished with fresh water (Pickett, 2011, p. 39)

1547 Henry II and Catherine de Medici assume the French throne; “worked through his twelve year reign to stamp out Protestantism in France”; despite royal repression, exiled John Calvin’s writings caused a groundswell of Protestant growth (Bennett, 2001, p.5)

1549 Dominican mission to Florida Gulf Coast under Father Cancer recovers Juan Munoz, member of de Soto expedition, captured by Native Americans in 1539 (Gannon, 1965, p.13 & Weddle, Spanish Sea, pp.242-234)
1556 Philip II becomes King of Spain

At left, Guillaume Le Testu’s depiction of North America underscores Santa Elena’s proximity to Gulf Stream shipping

1557 Royal grant issued to New Spain Viceroy Velesco to settle La Florida vicinity of Santa Elena (Pickett, 2011, p. 39)

In a royal decree 9 December 1557, Philip II established Santa Elena-centric strategy that drove Spanish activities for twenty-seven years (Pickett, 2011, p.39; Priestley, 2010, pp.47-53)

1558 New Spain (Mexico) Viceroy appointed Tristan de Luna, veteran of Coronado explorations, Governor and Capitan General of La Florida

Elizabeth I becomes the Queen of England

1559 Philip II reemphasized Santa Elena-centric strategy that would drive Spanish activities for twenty five years- Insists “La Punta de Santa Elena must be the first of all the La Florida settlements” (Priestley, 2010)

In accordance with Philip II’s Santa Elena strategy, Viceroy of New Spain launched Tristan de Luna and 1500 people to attempt a two-phased colonization operation; establish a base at Pensacola-Mobile Bay (“Polonza”) so as to build a road to establish a sea-port colony on Santa Elena. The attempt failed as of April 1561 (~18 months)

Huguenots hold their first national synod in France

1560 England challenges the Treaty of Tordesillas: The Pope does not have the authority to give or take away kingdoms (Pickett, 2011, p. 12)

Ten-year old Charles IX (Catherine de Medici’s son) assumes the French throne in December

1561 Based on de Luna’s failure to complete the overland road, Angel de Villafañe dispatched by the viceroy of New Spain (Mexico) that “a settlement be made with all haste at Punta de Santa Elena.” Villafañe abandons the expedition & reports there was no harbor at Santa Elena
which strongly suggests Villafañe was at the wrong place, or was trying to avoid responsibility for not making a settlement and generally trying to end the entire venture (Hoffman 1990, p. 176-77, 180-81).

On 23 September, Philip II ordered the Mexican authorities to report on the truthfulness of reports that Santa Elena was unsuitable for settlement but better prospects might be found north of 35 degrees (Cape Hatteras). The 1562 replies affirmed that conclusion underscoring New Spain’s apathy towards Atlantic Coast settlement. (Hoffman, 1990, pp180-82).

1562 French Huguenot Jean Ribault explored the Florida-Georgia coast 1-15 May, took soundings, found Santa Elena and renamed the harbor “Port Royal” as the “one of the fairest havens of the world”. Established Charlesfort (the first Protestant-related settlement attempt) and returned to France for reinforcements (Rowland, 1996 and Map: Parreus, William P. Cumming, “The Parreau Map (1562) of French Florida,” Imago Mundi 17 (1968): 27-40).

1563 ~28 Frenchmen built a boat and abandoned Charlesfort-leaving cabin boy Guillaume Rouffi to live with the Orista Indians (Bennett, 2001, pp 107-124)

Jean Ribaut writes The Whole & True Discouerye of Terra Florida during his Tower of London imprisonment while seeking English support to reinforce Charlesfort

Pedro Menendez’ son, Juan, lost at sea, possibly on the east coast of La Florida

1564 Galileo Galilei is born 15 February. His greatest works were fifty years in the future.

Spanish Captain Manrique de Rojas explored La Florida coast from ~Jacksonville to find Charlesfort on Santa Elena in June, captured Rouffi, recovered the French monument, and returned both to Havana on 10 July

Second French expedition under Laudonniere established Fort Caroline on the St. John’s River 22 June with 150 soldiers and 50 civilians including four women (Hoffman, 1990, pp 217-220). A reinforcement ship arrived on 4 September, adding some colonists and removing others. First European children born in North America (at least 8) 1565 (Bennett, 2001, pp 44 & 132)

Guillaume Rouffi used as interpreter during Governor Mazariegos’ interrogation of eleven French Ft Caroline deserters at Havana on 22 December (Hoffman, 1990, p. 221)

1565 Laudonniere finds two Spaniards (Martin Gomez) shipwrecked “fifteen years earlier” off SW Florida, living with Indians vicinity Canaveral (Bennett, Three Voyages, p. 109). Sent Captain Thomas Vasseur to Port Royal Sound to make contact with Orista (Edisto) Indians; Orista send corn and news that the Spanish had captured Rouffi (Hoffman, 1990, p. 221)
Pedro Menendez de Aviles’ (PMA) 22 March La Florida contract to settle Santa Elena subsequently modified with orders to first eliminate the French incursion at Fort Caroline.

English privateer John Hawkins (future commander of Sir Francis Drake) lands at Ft Caroline on 3-15 August with Frenchman Martin Atinas, a survivor of the 1563 Charlesfort transatlantic raft trip (Hoffman, 1990, p. 222)

Ribaut’s seven-ship colonial reinforcement convoy (700 men and 200 women) arrived at Ft Caroline 28 August; PMA arrived near Cape Canaveral, started to search for the French fort, and confronted Ribaut’s fleet on the evening of 4 September.

PMA off-loaded troops on 8 September thereby establishing San Agustin. Guided by a 1564 Fort Caroline mutineer, Françoise Jean, they marched 3 days to capture Ft Caroline on 20 September. On 29 September PMA executed 111 Huguenots and took prisoner ~15 French Catholics at Matanzas. On 12 October, PMA executed Ribaut and an additional 70-150 Huguenots at Matanzas. Some reports alleged Ribaut’s red-beard “face scalp” was sent to Philip II (Bennett, 2001, p. 168), inciting French-Spanish animus and giving rise to the “Black Legend “of Spanish monstrosity echoed in Hemingway’s For Whom the Bell Tolls (conversation with Dr. Gene Lyon, 2 May 2015)

Menendez discovered the near-shore south-flowing current in the Gulfstream probably first used by Ponce de Leon; returned from La Florida to Havana for supplies in December 1566

PMA found Hernando Escalante Fontanza and other survivors of a 1546 ship wreck living amongst Native Americans in Southwest Florida. Chief (cacique) “Carlos” gives Menendez his sister, Dona Antonia, as a wife; Menendez moves her to Havana.

PMA resupplied Saint Augustine on 21 March, moved northward in early April to find “Guermo”, a French survivor of Ribaut’s September 1565 shipwreck, with the Guale tribe near St Catherine’s Island (executed as a heretic Lutheran), then established La Ciudad de San Salvador (Santa Elena) on the site of Charlesfort in late April. Guillaume Rouffi (cabin boy for Ribaut 1562) incorporated from Havana as guide and Orista interpreter.

In April, Fort San Salvador constructed. In July, Fort San Filipe constructed and remained until burned by Native Americans in July 1576

In August, Pedro Menendez designated Esteban de las Alas as “Capitan General of La Florida”; Esteban conducted his duties from Santa Elena 1566-1570 (Lyon, 1976, p.166)
Juan Pardo made his first exploration of the southeast, established garrisons at the base of the Appalachian Mtns. The largest was Fort San Juan near Morganton N.C. (Hudson, 1990). In 1567, Juan Pardo led a second expedition from Santa Elena to the interior.

Based on Juan Pardo’s reports, PMA selected the area near Guatari (Hickory, NC) as the future site of his 75 mile X 75 mile estate specified in his 1565 La Florida contract.

1568 Phase II of colonization plan- 225 civilian settlers departed Spain in October, 193 of which were in Santa Elena by August 1569. A smaller number went to San Agustin.

French De Gourgues collaborated with Native Americans to execute a revenge raid against Spanish at San Mateo (former Ft Caroline).

1569 By October, Santa Elena had 327 residents (~200 civilian settlers) with 40 houses; Jesuit missionary work initiated (Lyon, 1990, p. 4).

1570 Father Juan de Segura mission (with Native American, Don Luís de Velasco) departed to vicinity of future Jamestown on Bahia Santa Maria (Chesapeake) (Hoffman, 1990, p. 262).

1571 Don Luís de Velasco murders the Segura mission except one young survivor harbored by friendly tribe (Hoffman, 1990).

Pedro Menendez and Family establish La Florida residence in Santa Elena (Lyon, 1976).

About this time, artist Jacques LeMoyne, survivor of the 1564-1565 Ft Caroline colony rendered knowledge of La Florida as he and Laudonniere would have known it. Before his death in 1588 LeMoyne worked for Sir Walter Raleigh, so this chart, and its perpetuation of Verrazano’s inland sea myth, would have influenced England’s earliest New World colonization planning.
Admiral Coligny, sponsor of French colonization attempts to 1555 Brazil, 1562 Charlesfort, and 1564-65 Fort Caroline, murdered in Paris with thousands of Huguenots on 24 August; Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre orchestrated by the Duke of Guise and Catherine de Medici (Bennett, 2001, p.51)

Pedro Menendez leads September hostage recovery mission and punitive expedition to Jamestown vicinity (Hoffman, 1990, p. 265)

Menendez household remains at Santa Elena (179 settlers plus 76 soldiers= 255 total). San Agustin had 13 married settlers, plus some soldiers at about this time (Manucy, 1997, p. 38)

1574 Pedro Menendez died while in Europe; son-in-law Don Diego Velesco attained inherited proprietary rights & duties

1576 Pedro Menendez the Younger (nephew) and other officials killed at Guale (vicinity St Catherine’s Island) while delivering payroll to Santa Elena

Leadership passed from Don Diego Velesco to an even less capable son-in-law Hernando de Miranda. Miranda allowed Santa Elena to be evacuated and destroyed by regional Indian uprising. Most settlers sent to Havana, government and a few settlers moved to San Agustin

Santa Elena converted to a Crown Colony. Pedro Menendez Marques (founder’s nephew) is appointed governor by Philip II and arrives at San Agustin in July 1577 (Pickett, 2011, p. 94)

French "Le Prince" shipwrecked in vicinity of Santa Elena in December. A fort is built near St Helena Sound, eventually survivors live among native Orista near Edisto, Guale near Saint Catherine's Island, and with the Cherokee beyond the Appalachians through 1579.

1577 Pedro Menendez Marques arrived at San Agustín in July. Spanish military reoccupied-rebuilt Santa Elena.

Fort San Marcos was built as a pre-fabricated fort in St. Augustine, transported to Santa Elena and assembled on the Santa Elena site. Subsequently augmented in the 1580’s, the enlarged fort was dismantled on 16 August 1587.

Privateer Frances Drake departs England to plunder Spanish New World riches and ends up circumnavigating the globe December 1577 - September 1580; investors gained a 470% return at Spaniard expense of treasure and detailed charts. Impossible to suppress knowledge of the feat, Queen Elizabeth gave up pretentions of disinterested detachment, and endorsed Drake through knighthood in 1581, thereby adding to the growing tension with Spain’s Philip II.
1579 Spanish military under Pedro Menendez Marques eliminated pockets of French Le Prince survivors and executed Le Prince Captain Strozzi in San Agustin.

1580 Civilian settlers returned to Santa Elena; “La Florida” government remained in San Agustin, but Santa Elena expanded to 60 houses.


1585 Transition to mobile “guarda costa” mobile defense diminished strategic importance of Santa Elena (Rowland, 1990, p. 27).

Sponsored by Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Richard Grenville leaves Ralph Lane and ~100 men to founded a colony at Roanoke (Hoffman, 1990, pp295-298).

1586 Enroute to his primary target of Santa Elena, St. Augustine (population ~280 = 205 civilians + 75 soldiers) sacked by Sir Francis Drake (Manucy, 2009, p. 32 & AGI Contratacion 4802, Stetson Collection) and stripped of all iron, doors, and other useful items (Hoffman, 1990, p301). Santa Elena spared by navigational chance as Drake may have sailed past La Punta de Santa Elena at night.

After by-passing Santa Elena, Drake evacuated Lane and the Roanoke Colony in June.


Against settler protests, Santa Elena abandoned in August, consolidating La Florida settlement around St. Augustine. Spanish missionaries continued to visit the Sea Islands until 1684.

Mary, Queen of Scotts (Catholic who intended to give throne to Spain’s Philip II) executed by Elizabeth I.

1588 Spanish Armada invasion fleet defeated by England and nature; significant change in the European naval balance of power.
1592 Spanish military mission returned to Santa Elena in search of foreign incursions

1593 Philip II ordered an update to the map of the New World consolidating all geographic knowledge gained through the 80 years of Spanish experience in America.

1607 Armed with the knowledge and experience gained during the 16th Century, the English arrive at Jamestown. The Jamestown leaders would have had direct access to the work of LeMoyne and the map at left, drafted by John White upon his 1586 return to England aboard Drake’s Golden Hind from the Ralph Lane Roanoke colonization attempt. Note the slight misplacement of Saint Helena to the NE of Port Royal underscoring imperfections in primary source transcription and/or navigation.

1620 The Pilgrims arrive off Plymouth Rock aboard the Mayflower

1663 English Captain William Hilton, conducting a reconnaissance for the English Lords Proprietors of the Carolinas, first sees La Punta de Santa Elena and names it “Hilton Head”

1666 Under the auspices of the Lords Proprietor, Ship’s Surgeon Henry Woodward arrived at Port Royal Sound to become the first English settler of the Carolinas. (Rowland, 1996, p. 61)

1670 Treaty of Madrid: Spain recognizes English colonies in the Americas, including Charleston, South Carolina which was founded just before the treaty was signed.

1686 17 August Spanish fleet arrived in Port Royal Sound to enforce La Florida territorial claims and eliminates the Scottish settlement at Stewart Town. The Spanish armada continues northward to burn Charleston, but a storm defeats the Spanish fleet (Rowland, 1996, p. 74)

Reclaiming America's Lost Century

American history is commonly understood to begin with three familiar historical events: 1492 Columbus, 1607 Jamestown, and 1620 Mayflower. However, it is within the 16th Century, that Europeans first arrived on American soil. The English perspective largely defines American history, yet the English were latecomers to the New World contest. French and Spanish interaction with Native Americans, friendly and else-wise, cross-pollinated knowledge, languages, cultures, religions, affinities, enmities, diseases, and gene pools from the Southeastern coast to beyond the Appalachian Mountains and set the stage for the 17th Century. The American nation might have been born in the 18th Century, but it was conceived 1513 - 1593. 16th Century history of America contains treasure, shipwrecks, pirates, castaways, cannibalism, human sacrifice, terra incognita, and murderous religious intolerance comparable to anything we see in our current Middle East headlines. America’s “Lost Century” may be well understood through the story of Santa Elena, a central focus of “La Florida”, where America began.

The story of Santa Elena contains answers to both when and where America began.

- The mouth of the Savannah River and Present day Hilton Head - Tybee Island was first seen by Pedro de Quejo on 3 May 1525 during his coastal survey and may have been called "Cabo de Santa Elena" in the same year. (Hoffman, 1990, pp. 51-52).
- As part of the Lucas Vázquez de Ayllón attempt to establish San Miguel Gualdalpe in 1526, "Santa Elena" was the name given by a scouting party to Port Royal Sound on 18 August 1526. During the same reconnaissance, "Rio de Santa Elena" was assigned to modern Port Royal Sound and "La Punta de Santa Elena" assigned to the landmasses of Hilton Head - Tybee Island, and depicted as such on maps from 152. (Hoffman, 1990, Map 4 and pp.68-69, Rowland 1990, p.4).
- Along with "La Florida", “Santa Elena” and the English “Saint Helena” derivation are among America's longest-lived European place names in continuous use. (Hoffman, 1990, Map 4 and pp.68-69, Rowland 1990, p.4).
- As depicted on charts from 1526, Santa Elena was at the navigational hinge where the Gulf Stream intersected westerly trade winds to carry the Treasure Fleets back to Spain. The location also was believed to be near the imagined “inland sea”, an arm of the Pacific Ocean that nearly reached the Atlantic coast. The Santa Elena location made it a strategic focal point for European predator and prey (Gannon,
Santa Elena was identified as the gateway to the human and natural resources of the piedmont first reported by Chicora and Ayllón in 1523 (Hoffman, 1990, pp. 20-21).

Based on the limits of imprecise navigation records, unexplored and unmapped terrain, poor records, and artifacts found among natives by Soto at Cufitatchiqui on the Wateree River (SC), the vicinity of Santa Elena was presumed by Spain to be the general site of the San Miguel de Gualdape (Paar, 1999, pp. 16-18; Pickett, 2011, pp. 36, 233).

Under the Huguenot auspices of Admiral Coligny and command of Jean Ribaut, Charlesfort was established in Port Royal Sound in 1562, the first Protestant-affiliated colonization attempt in North America. In 1566, Santa Elena was built upon the same site (Rowland 1990, p.8, Rowland, 1996 p. 22).

San Agustin, the first continuously occupied La Florida settlement, evolved from a series of interrelated events connected with Santa Elena (Hoffman lecture, 2014, 0:53). “Spanish, French, and English interaction surrounding Santa Elena accelerated American exploration, upon which knowledge and experience 17th Century colonization was built” (Hoffman lecture, 2014, 1:10).

Santa Elena was the capital of all Spanish North American claims from Newfoundland to Mexico

- Spanish “La Florida” encompassed New World claims from Delaware Bay to Mexico (Hoffman, 1990, p. 88) and from Newfoundland to the Florida Keys (Lyon, 1982, p.1).
- Designated by Pedro Menendez de Aviles, “the first founding father of our nation,” as the principal city of his settlement strategy (Lyon, 1976, p. 166; Manucy, 2009, forward by Gannon).
- Esteban de las Alas’ appointment to Governor and Captain General by Pedro Menendez in made Santa Elena La Florida’s the residence of the senior ranking regional official from August 1566 (Lyon, 1976, p. 157 & 166).
- Perhaps before (Lyon, 1976, p. 166), but certainly by July 1571 when Pedro Menedez selected his seat of government and primary family residence, Santa Elena became the European colonial capitol of the territory, which would become the Continental United States (Lyon 1982, p.16), “No dispute about that” (Hoffman, 2014, lecture 1:09).
- 193 of 225 (86%) Spanish pobladores were destined for Santa Elena in 1568 as the civilian second wave, reinforcing inaugural military base establishment (Lyon, 1982, pp. 3-4).
- In October 1569, the capital of La Florida had a fort, 40 houses, and 327 inhabitants. By 1580 Santa Elena had 60 houses (Lyon, 1982, pp. 4& 13).
- San Agustin founder and Adelantado of Spanish claims from Delaware Bay to the Rio Grande, Pedro Menendez de Aviles established his La Florida residence at Santa Elena in July 1571 (Lyon, 1982, p.7).
- An arc of Catholic missions and military operations emanating from Santa Elena ranged from Tennessee thru the James River on the Chesapeake Bay (Hoffman, 1990, pp.231, 262 & 319; Lyon, 1976, pp. 181& 204).
- Archaeologist Dr. Stan South stated that artifacts from 104 classes were found at Santa Elena, while only 71 classes in St. Augustine. Dr. South “attributed this to the fact that Santa Elena was the center for the power elite while it was the Florida capital in the late 1560s and until 1576” (Lyon, 1992, p. 4).
• Capital seat of La Florida transitioned to and remained in San Agustin following the June 1576 evacuation of Santa Elena (Lyon, 1992, p 4).

Santa Elena was the royal imperative of La Florida strategy from 1557-1587.
• Philip II set Santa Elena as the strategic imperative of Spanish national policy in 1557 and reinforced Santa Elena as the strategic imperative in 1559. He stated Santa Elena must be the first of all “La Florida” settlements to perfect sovereign claims with physical occupation, protect the navigational hinge of the treasure route, gain access to the mythic navigation link to the Orient, and to deny the same to all European competitors (Hoffman, 1990, pp. 144, 152, 169 & 171; Priestley, 2010).
• Santa Elena was described by Pedro Menendez de Aviles as the fulcrum of his strategy for the settlement of "La Florida" in his October 1565 letter to King Philip II (Bennett, 2011, pp.130-139). The settlement at Santa Elena was to be the eastern anchor for development of La Florida (Menendez de Aviles, 18 February 1568).
• The Royal Order of 2 December 1557 specified the Punta de Santa Elena to be the Atlantic terminus for a planned series of settlements (Hoffman, 1990, p. 152).
• Intended terminus of two strategic highways: The first from “Polonza”, a Gulf of Mexico port colony in the vicinity of Pensacola, and the second from the rich silver mines in northern Mexico (Lyon, 1976, p.181).
• The Luna overland settlement attempt from Pensacola faltered in late 1560. The May 1561 Santa Elena settlement attempt by Villafañe’s ships underscored Philip II’s Santa Elena imperative (Hoffman, 1990, pp.169-175).
• The second deepest natural harbor on the east coast of the United States, Pedro Menendez de Aviles ”estimated that the bay could accommodate the entire Indies Fleet” (more than twenty large ships) (Hoffman, 1990, p. 176).
• Spain launched multiple missions (military and Jesuit) from Santa Elena to Tennessee and within miles of the eventual site of Jamestown (Hoffman, 1990, p. 262).

Santa Elena was a highly developed 16th Century European colony in North America.
• “Santa Elena was a stratified community, a society mirroring that of the peninsula, presenting every class except that of grandee, from nobleman to servant”(Lyon, 1982,p. 6)
• "In discussing his excavations at Santa Elena, [Dr. Stan South] stated that artifacts from 104 artifact classes were found at Santa Elena, while only 71 artifact classes were represented in St. Augustine excavations. He attributed this to the fact that Santa Elena was the center for the power elite while it was the Florida capital in the late 1560s and until 1576" (Lyon, 1992, p. 4).
• In October 1569, the capital of La Florida had a fort, 40 houses, and 327 inhabitants. By 1580 Santa Elena had 60 houses (Lyon, 1982, pp. 4 &13).
• “The real beginning of the fur trade with southeastern Indians was at Santa Elena” (Lyon 1982, p.7).
• Thirty-three Santa Elena farmers sued for the loss of their homes and gardens subsequent to the 1587 forced abandonment of the thriving colony (Lyon 1982, p.16).
• Effective in 1569, Santa Elena was the major settlement in La Florida (Hoffman lecture 1:08). Of ~500 Spaniards living in La Florida in June 1576, 65% were at Santa Elena,
20% at San Agustin, and 15% at San Pedro (Amy T. Bushnell, Historian, Historic St. Augustine Preservation Board, 23 November 1983).

Santa Elena Bibliography


