RE-DISCOPERING AMERICAN HISTORY

SANTA ELENA

WHERE AMERICA BEGAN

A 16th Century European Settlement
The European struggle to settle North America in the 16th Century

The map shows locations of Spanish, French and English expeditions and settlements in North America. Most did not survive.

Santa Elena lasted for 21 years.

Only St. Augustine and Jamestown became permanent continuous settlements.
Do you really know where and when the Europeans first settled America?

Was it Jamestown? Plymouth? ...
Or really much earlier in SANTA ELENA?

These important questions have been largely overlooked by Americans...
UNTIL NOW

21st Century scholars agree that one of our earliest settlements in present-day United States was at Santa Elena.

Documents record that Spain's Pedro Menendez landed at Santa Elena in 1566, established a military garrison, and brought over 300 settlers here by 1569 and, in 1571, became the first colonial capital of the vast Spanish La Florida.

The Santa Elena Settlement continued until 1587.
**LET'S SET THE SCENE - A History Lesson**

**16th Century Europe and the Americas - SPANISH DOMINANCE**

We all know that Columbus discovered America in 1492. Two years later, The Treaty of Tordesillas divided the New World between Spain and Portugal. Spain created a trade monopoly by only requiring their territories to trade with the mother country. The Spanish monopoly frustrated France and England and began decades of sea piracy and raiding. By 1513 the Gulf Steam current was discovered making the coast of La Florida extremely important to navigation. For the first thirty years of the 16th Century, Spain collected gold held by native people in the Caribbean Islands.

In 1545 Spain discovered gold and silver veins in Peru, followed the next year by the discovery of vast silver mines in Mexico. Spain's treasure fleets returned to Europe with enormous amounts of gold and silver. French and English pirates successfully captured a number of Spanish ships and, while the envy of Europe, Spain's wars absorbed most of the wealth from the New World. By 1550 Spain was nearly bankrupt.

During the early part of the 16th century, Spanish explorers probed the Gulf and East coasts attempting to develop settlements but were unsuccessful.
FRANCE WANTS A PIECE OF THE NEW WORLD TOO

In the mid-1500's Catholic France was in the midst of the wars with Protestants. King Charles IX, at the advice of military leader and Huguenot Admiral Coligny, wanted to develop settlements in Spain's La Florida as a refuge for Huguenots.

RIBAULT ESTABLISHES CHARLESFORT - 1562

In 1562, French explorer Jean Ribault (1520-1565) led an expedition that sailed into Port Royal Sound. France quickly established Charlesfort as a military garrison on land that is now present day Parris Island. One month later, Ribault sailed back to Europe, leaving behind 27 soldiers. The garrison survived eleven months before the men ran out of food, built a boat from local materials and sailed toward home.

Two years later, France sent René Laudonnière with a second fleet to re-establish Charlesfort at Port Royal Sound. He landed near present day Jacksonville in the winter and established Fort Caroline, lasting 15 months. Laudonnière never sailed north to Charlesfort.
SPAIN FORCES FRENCH OUT OF "NEW SPAIN"

Spain was not happy with the French intrusion in their colony. King Phillip II of Spain signed an enterprise contract with the very dynamic naval captain, Pedro Menendez de Aviles. Menendez was a naval soldier and an effective leader. His mission was to drive away the French, settle La Florida, explore a northwest passage to the Pacific, develop resources in the new world for Spain, convert the Native Americans to Catholicism, and build an inland road to the silver mines of Mexico.

France sent Jean Ribault back to re-enforce the fort. Concurrently, Pedro Menendez was ordered by Spain to destroy all French settlements in La Florida. A race began to decide which country would settle present-day United States. The French arrived at Fort Caroline first. A hurricane at sea allowed Menendez to cross overland, surprising the French. Menendez defeated Jean Ribault and his army of 350 at Matanzas beach. Most were executed. Spain insisted that these men were heretics and were not killed because they were Frenchmen but because they were Lutheran/Protestants. St. Augustine was established as a military garrison in 1565, becoming a colonial settlement in 1580.

SPAIN ESTABLISHES SANTA ELENA

In 1566 Menendez and his soldiers landed at Parris Island and established a fort. The harbor of Port Royal Sound was deep and wide, thus ideal for shipping. Menendez made Santa Elena the center of his La Florida colonial enterprise. He also established an alliance with Native American leaders. The same year Captain Juan Pardo led his expeditions and established forts from Santa Elena north into present day North Carolina and Tennessee. His goal was to find an inland route to Mexico.
In 1569 Governor Menendez sent over 200 Spanish settlers - men, women and children; craftsmen, farmers and livestock to Santa Elena, creating the first major European settlement in what is now the United States. The Marsh Tacky horse was introduced by Spanish settlers. By the fall, Santa Elena had 300 settlers and over 40 houses. Surprisingly, commonly used history books record Jamestown, founded in 1607, as the first European settlement.

SANTA ELENA BECOMES THE CAPITAL

Four years later, in 1571, Governor Menendez moved his family, household and government to Santa Elena, built a large house and outfitted it with European finery. The settlement became the capital of the 16th Century Spanish enterprise in America. Menendez traveled between the New World and Spain routinely. In 1574, while in Spain, Menendez died.

SANTA ELENA IS DESTROYED AND REBUILT

In 1576 Santa Elena was burned by Native American warriors and rebuilt the next year by Spain. By 1580 there were 60 homes.

THE DOORS CLOSE ON SANTA ELENA

Ten years later, the English fleet under the leadership of Admiral Drake attacked numerous Spanish settlements in the New World, including St. Augustine. Drake was headed to Santa Elena when darkness or storms caused him to miss the entrance to Port Royal Sound. Spanish leaders, wary of further attacks by England, prompted consolidation of all La Florida affairs. St. Augustine, now both a fort and a settlement. In 1587, Spanish leaders ordered Santa Elena to be abandoned.
The Spanish influence brought Christianity, established enduring settlements, facilitated trade between the New World and Old, advanced knowledge, and accelerated the discovery of North America. Unfortunately, European presence also introduced new diseases to the Native Indian populations. Besides riches, European colonist gained considerable knowledge of Native Americans and their cultures.

**SANTA ELENA TODAY**

The story of Santa Elena is in active discovery with emerging facts and stories. Archaeological research at the site and historical investigation of surviving documents now prove that Santa Elena was not a short lived town. It survived for over twenty years and today lies buried under topsoil in a remote part of the US Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island. The historic sites are well preserved by the stewardship of the US Marine Corps.

**In Conclusion...**

**Santa Elena was the center of operations in the earliest years of European colonization.**

The first one hundred years of our country's history is lost from the history books. Dr. Paul Hoffman, a leading European colonial history scholar writes: "Our history books were written by the eventual 'winners'...the English. Thus, everything started with Jamestown." In truth, it started with the Spanish and Santa Elena was the center of the La Florida enterprise. The Santa Elena Foundation intends to lead efforts to reclaim this lost century.
SANTA ELENA FOUNDATION is a non-profit organization based in Beaufort County, South Carolina. The mission of the Foundation is to expand the story of European colonization of North America through discovery, preservation, and promotion of Santa Elena, the first European settlement and colonial capital in present-day United States.

Strategic Goals of the Foundation:

- Upon receipt of formal authorizations, Santa Elena Foundation seeks to sponsor ongoing archaeological research by the SC Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology at the Santa Elena site.
- The Santa Elena Center will be housed in a 12,000 square foot, historic building in downtown Beaufort, SC. It will include an interactive exhibit, archaeological laboratory and full suite of programs, events, and educational opportunities.
- The National Parks Service, in partnership with the Santa Elena Foundation, has developed a new lesson plan for our nation’s schools ... one that tells the entire story of this lost century.
- University of South Carolina Beaufort and Santa Elena Foundation have formed an educational and research alliance. Full development of this alliance is an important goal for both organizations.

For more information please visit our website:

www.Santa-Elena.org

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