

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).
- Northbound sailing instructions referencing "La Punta de Santa Elena" as the navigational aid to enter Port Royal Sound remain effective today. (Hoffman, 1990, Map 4 and p. 51, and Rowland 1996, p.39).
- 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,



A 16th century Spanish map showing route of the treasure fleets from España (top right) to Nombre de Dio (Panama), and the northern return route via Florida's east coast (left center). The New World—the North American mainland—bears the title "Nuevo Mundo."

1956; Hoffman, 1990, p. 69; Rowland, 1990, p.7).

- 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 Agustín 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 Menéndez de Avilés 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 (Menéndez de Avilés, 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 Menéndez de Avilés "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).