

Pedro Menéndez de Avilés

February 15, 1519– September 17, 1574



From Spanish Naorteno to South Carolina's First Governor

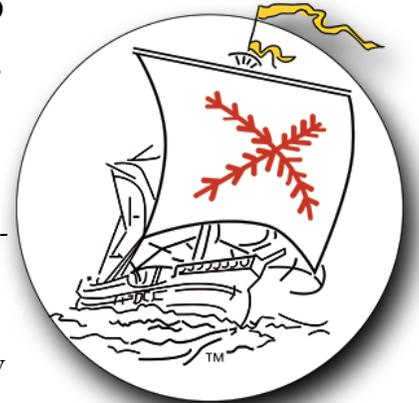
Born in Northern region of Spain to an old, poor family, Pedro Menéndez rose through service ranks under King Phillip II to become the key figure in the settlement of *La Florida*. With his predisposition towards the sea, aptitude for military command, and deeply rooted faith, he brought about North America's earliest European colonies, including Santa Elena in present-day Beaufort, SC.

THE EARLY YEARS

One of many children of Juan Alfonso Sánchez and María Alonso de Arango, young Pedro was raised by extended family following the death of his father. At a young age, he married Doña María de Solís and began a career in privateering. Largely resulting from his successes at sea, by 1548 Menéndez was granted royal commissions to pursue corsairs, one signed by King Carlos I, also crowned Holy Roman Emperor. Subsequent commissions were issued by the emperor in 1550, extending the authority of Menéndez to seek French corsairs across the Atlantic in the Indies.

MISSION TO CLAIM THE NEW WORLD

In 1552, at age 34, Menéndez achieved a commission for further voyages to the Indies as Captain-General. After escorting Prince Philip to England to wed Mary Tudor, Menéndez's fleet set sail in October 1555, and he gained much knowledge of the Atlantic. In September 1556, Menéndez and his brother were briefly jailed, largely because of the Crown's favoritism towards the him. In the early 1560s Pedro Menéndez served as escort for King Philip II, while maintaining his status as Captain-General of the Indies fleets. When he returned to Spain in 1563, Menéndez was dismayed to learn of the French settlement of Port Royal Sound at Charlesfort, and later, the settlement on the May River at Fort Caroline. By March of 1565, Pedro was assigned the contract, or *asiento*, designed to furnish him with the resources necessary to combat the French and definitively settle *La Florida* for the Spanish.



SANTA ELENA FIRST CAPITAL, MENENDEZ FIRST "GOVERNOR"

Pedro Menéndez, named *Adelantado* (loosely translated, "lead man" or "governor") overcame obstacles in his mission to claim *La Florida*. In a race with Frenchman Jean Ribault to cross the Atlantic, a major hurricane devastated the Spanish fleet, and when their beleaguered forces arrived in the Caribbean, Menéndez lacked support needed to eradicate the French settlements. A new alliance with Juan Ponce de León in Puerto Rico and a reconstructed fleet allowed the *Adelantado* to set sail for *La Florida* on August 15, 1565. In command of 800 men, Menéndez anchored and officially took possession of *La Florida* in Spain's name at San Augustin on September 8, 1565 then marched north to conquer the French outpost at Fort Caroline, renaming it Fort San Mateo.

By April of 1566, Menéndez headed north to Santa Elena and upon landing, his men constructed Fort San Salvador. By the summer, a larger fort, San Felipe, was constructed to account for over 200 reinforcements. Within 3 years, hundreds of Spanish settlers arrived and by 1571, Adelantado Menéndez established family residency, making Santa Elena North America's first European capital. Santa Elena would be his final New World voyage in 1572 before his death on September 17, 1574 in Santander, Spain.