St. Augustine

Guide to St. Augustine as it is Today

St. Augustine during all the Spanish rule was in constant danger of attack. For this reason building operations were confined to as small an area as possible in order to afford mutual protection. It follows, therefore, that practically all points of interest are within easy walking distance from any hotel or boarding house in the city.

The Plaza—Or park, is located near the center of the city, from which the streets radiate, north, south, and west.

The Cathedral—This building stands just across Cathedral Street at the north side of the Plaza. The first Catholic Church of which we have record stood on the south-west corner of the Plaza or directly across King Street from where the Episcopal church now stands. The foundation stones still remain beneath the surface of the park. In 1793 the present Roman Catholic Church, or cathedral, as it is commonly called, was commenced. This building was without tower or steeple, and cost nearly seventeen thousand dollars, of which sum the Spanish government gave ten thousand. The disastrous fire of 1887 left little of this old building besides the walls. The work of restoration was carried out in 1888, at which time large additions were made in the form of a transcept and a beautiful tower, the clock for which was a gift from Mr. J. Y. Wilson, a public spirited citizen. In the old Moorish façade hang four bells no longer used, the smallest of which bears the inscription:

"St. Joseph Ora Pro Nobis A. D. 1682."

This is probably the oldest bell in this country, being three years older than that at the Dutch church at Tarrytown, N.Y.

Slave Market—At the east end of the plaza. In the early Spanish days there stood on this spot a wooden building used as a general market. Originally the waters of the bay came up to this building, forming a basin, so that meat and other produce could be unloaded at the market directly from the boats. There being no ice, all transactions were made early in the morning, after which the place was thoroughly scrubbed.

This wooden building finally collapsed in 1833 and was replaced in 1840 by the present structure. It has been claimed by some in recent years that this building never was used as a slave market. While it was not built expressly for that purpose, records show that slaves were sold there, and, as we have recorded in another place in this work, a thousand slaves were imported into St. Augustine during a single year of the English administration. It is evident, therefore, that hundreds of slaves have been sold on this spot or its immediate vicinity.

Confederate Monument—Just west of the Slave Market was erected in 1872 by the ladies of St. Augustine in memory of the forty-six brave sons of this city who gave up their lives to the lost cause, "—far from the home that gave them birth, by comrades honored and by comrades mourned."

Spanish Monument—At the west end of the Plaza. In 1812 the Spanish Cortez formulated a liberal constitution, and throughout Spain and her colonies monuments were erected.

In 1814 Ferdinand VII was recalled to the throne of Spain, and, notwithstanding his having pledged himself to abide by the new constitution, his first act was to declare it null and void, and order the removal of the monuments. The people of St. Augustine, among the rest, had raised a shaft with a tablet bearing in Spanish the inscription:

Plaza of the Constitution, promulgated in the city of St. Augustine in East Florida on the 17th day of October in the year 1812; the Brigadier Don Sebastian Kindalem, Knight of the Order of Santiago, being Governor. For eternal remembrance, the Constitutional City Council erected this monument under the superintendence of Don Fernando de la Maza Arredondo, the young municipal officer, oldest member of the Corporation and Don Francisco Robira, Attorney and recorder. In the year 1813.

Being averse to removing the monument, the people merely took down the tablet which was replaced in its original position in 1818, where it still remains.

Episcopal Church—The first Episcopal, or "Parish Church," stood on the ground now occupied by the Spear mansion of St. George Street. The present building at the south of the Plaza was erected in 1826, and consecrated in 1833. The west transcript is one of more modern construction.

Post Office—Directly west of the Plaza, across St. George Street, is the post office, surrounded by a park. The present building was erected in 1591. It was, during all the

Spanish rule, the Governor's palace. Originally a large wing extended south toward King Street. The building also had a high tower. What is now the Post Office Park was then the Governor's garden, surrounded by a high wall. This garden was famous for its beauty.

Hotels Ponce De Leon and Alcazar—These palatial hotels stand just west of the Post Office Park, surrounded by beautiful gardens filled with tropical vegetation.

St. George Street—Passing in front of the post office at the north side of the Plaza, we enter St. George Street, which for three centuries has been St Augustine's main business thoroughfare. It still retains its original width of about nineteen feet, and many of its quaint old building with overhanging balconies still remain. The Old Curiosity Shop is one of the very oldest and best preserved specimens of Spanish Architecture in the city, and is one of the chief attractions for tourists. The Old Red Cedar School House near the City Gates is said to be the oldest frame house. Along the entire length of this street are stores and shops where the tourist may satisfy every wish.

City Gates—At the north end of St. George Street, less than ten minutes' walk from the Plaza, stand these ancient pillars, once the only entrance to the enclosed city.

Fort Marion—Just at the right of the Gates, surrounded by the reservation, stands this historic structure, around which the history of St. Augustine and Florida have been so closely woven. The fort is open to the public daily between the hours of 9 A. M. and 6 P. M., except Sundays and holidays.

Protestant Cemetery—The burial ground adjacent to the City Gates was formerly used as a Potter's field, where excommunicants and military criminals were buried. The land was subsequently bought and handed over to the vestry, or governing body, of the Presbyterian church. The cemetery is full of interest, though the oldest of the graves bears no inscription, probably because it was believed better to obliterate, rather than retain, the memories of the unfortunates there interred.

Garnett's Orange Grove—Passing north from the City Gates a few blocks on Marco Avenue, we come to the Orange grove which we enter between rows of stately palms and thence along the avenue of moss-hung live oaks.

Fountain of Youth—Passing north one block from the Orange Grove on San Marco Avenue we come to this spring of crystal water. Beside the spring we see the cross of stone. In the museum adjacent to the spring are preserved many historic objects as well as valuable paintings and many other things of interest.

North City Cemetery—In North City, near the fountain of Youth, perhaps half a mile from the City Gates, with Entrance from Ocean Street, are the remains of a very old cemetery. It is the site of the Indian Village of Topquini, where Father Rodriguez met his death at the hands of Indian converts in 1598. The chapel in which he was murdered has recently been reconstructed on the original foundation. Many of the ancient tombs and monuments are of interest.

Old Cemetery on Cordova Street—One block west of the City Gates. This spot, no longer used as a burial ground, has seen many changes. It was here that the old Indian village of Tolomato stood. Here was the site of the murder of Father Corpa by Indians in 1598. During the time of the British occupation the Dutch settlement built their church on this ground. Subsequently it became a burial ground of the Roman Catholic denomination, and the chapel standing at the far west end was erected.

Memorial Presbyterian Church—At the corner of Valencia and Sevilla Streets stands the magnificent edifice erected in 1890 by the late Henry M. Flagler in memory of his daughter, Mrs. Benedict. Over the east entrance is carved this text:

"Thy memorial O Lord is throughout all generations."

In the mausoleum at the west side, beside kindered dead, lie the remains of Florida's greatest benefactor.

Methodist Church—At the corner of Cordova and Carrera Streets is another

of the buildings which Mr. Flagler erected. It is one of the many fine pieces of architecture in the city.

Kirkside—To the west of the Memorial Church, standing well back from Valencia Street, in the middle of a beautiful lawn and tropical shrubbery, is "Kirkside," the residence of the late Mr. Flagler. A fine example of old Colonial architecture with lofty and graceful Corinthian columns.

Y. M. C. A. Building—In the western part of the city, near the railway station, is the beautiful structure known as the Railroad Young Men's Christian Association. It was erected in 1906.

Hospital Street—Extending south from the Plaza two blocks west and parallel with Bay Street. On this narrow, quaint old street are a number of the best preserved old Spanish buildings.

Public Library—This building is located at the corner of Hospital Street and Artillery Lane, one short block south of the Plaza. It was, in Spanish times, the King's bakery, and has undergone but few changes in the passing years. It was purchased in 1896 by Mr. John M. Wilson and wife and donated to the city as a free public library. It now has a large collection of books the use of which is free to the public. This is being continually augmented through the generosity of Senator Depew and other winter visitors. It is open to the public during the winter months from 9:30 to 12:30 and 1:30 to 5.

In connection with the library is a room used by the Historical Society for the housing of its collection of engravings, maps, rare books and manuscripts, connected with the history of St. Augustine.

The Barracks—The walls of this building, which stands on the corner of St. Francis and Marine Streets, near the southern end of the sea wall, are among the oldest in America. The woodwork has been burned but the original walls remain intact. The building was first used as a Franciscan convent. About 1784 it was converted into a barracks and remained as such until recent years. It is now the Florida State Arsenal.

Oldest House—On St. Francis Street, beside the old barracks and perhaps ten minutes' walk directly south of the Plaza (near the end of the sea wall), is the oldest house in the United States

For more than a century this building has been one of the chief points of interest to the tourist.

In recent years other buildings have laid claim to being the oldest. This brought about a condition which finally led to a request by the City Manager that the question be investigated by the Historical Society and Chamber of Commerce. The committees from these two bodies, after an exhaustive investigation covering over a year, met before a general meeting of the Historical Society on November 20, 1917, and after weighing the evidence presented, the Society passed the following resolution:

Resolved, that upon the written report of the committee in investigate which is the oldest house in St. Augustine, the St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute of Science, from the report of its committee, just presented, cannot positively determine which is the oldest house in St. Augustine, but it is the opinion, based upon the findings of this committee that the house known as the Geronimo Alvarez house on St. Francis Street, is such.

The house is a curious Old World structure with low ceilings and large fireplaces. It is one of the chief points of interest and is visited each year by thousands of tourists. It is open every day from 8 A. M. to 6 P. M. It was purchased by the St. Augustine Historical Society and Institute of Science on November 15, 1918. The object being to preserve it in its original state.

National Cemetery—Near the Barracks on Marine Street is the Post National Cemetery. Beneath the three pyramids lie the remains of the 139 men of Major Dade's command who were killed by the Indians December 28, 1835.

Anastasia Island—Crossing the bridge near the east end of the Plaza, by trolley or carriage, we come to the Lighthouse, one and a half miles from the city. This structure, erected in 1873, is a first order light 165 feet in height. From its summit one can obtain an excellent panorama of land and sea. Near the Lighthouse is the Government wireless station. Around the Lighthouse is clustered the village of Anastasia, a popular summer and winter resort.

South Beach Alligator Farm—This farm, a short distance south of the Lighthouse, is the largest of its kind in the world. Here we see thousands of alligators, from the baby 'gator just hatched to the mammoth man-eaters centuries old. Included with this is also a natural history museum.

Chatauqua Beach—A short distance south of the Alligator Farm is the Auditorium, hotel and cottages of the Chautauqua Assembly of the M. E. Church South.

South Beach—On the ocean side of the island, commencing near the Alligator Farms, is a hard, smooth, sandy beach, several hundred feet in width and eighteen miles long, where carriages and automobiles may travel without regard to speed limits.

Capo's North Beach—Three miles north of the city, on the opposite side of the river. Reached by boat from Capo's dock, near fort. At the boat landing is the hotel and pavilion, where delicious sea food dinners and lunches are served. From the pavilion to the ocean beach side extends a railway over which passes an ingeniously constructed car drawn by a horse. This is one of the finest beaches in the south for all the year surf bathing.

Usina's North Beach—On the opposite side of the river five miles north of the city. Reached by boat from Corbett's dock, near the bridge. At the landing is a pavilion where sea food dinners may be enjoyed. Around the pavilion is a beautiful grove. From this grove to the ocean extends a miniature railway. Alighting from the drawn car at the ocean side we see spread out before us one of the most beautiful beach scenes in Florida. Here, too, one may enjoy surf bathing throughout the year.

Drives—Radiating from St. Augustine in all directions are many level hard surfaced roads over which carriage and auto rides may be enjoyed.
Stretching south from St. Augustine 340 miles to Miami and north hundreds of miles to far distant cities, is the hard, smooth surface of that great national work, the Dixie Highway.

The St. Augustine Institute of Science and Historical Society—Home in Old Fort Marion. This society was formed about thirty years ago and through the untiring efforts of its members a great work was accomplished; but when the morning of April 2,1914,

dawned on the smoldering ruins of St. Augustine's old streets, this work of years was gone forever. Nothing but ashes remained.

Undaunted, however, the President, Mr. Dewitt Webb, at once began the colossal, and almost hopeless, task of reconstruction. The War Department generously donated the use of the necessary fireproof space in Fort Marion for the housing of a future collection, and through the valuable assistance of the Hon. Chauncey M. Depew the Society has been able to accomplish, in less than four years, what might otherwise have taken a decade. The collection of the Society is free to the public and its courteous guides are on hand whenever the fort is officially open to show the visitor through its casemates and dungeons and recite its histories and traditions.

As to the nature of the work accomplished one need but ask any one of the thousands of visitors who each month avail themselves of the service.