



St. Augustine

Founding of St. Augustine

Pedro Menendez was a courtier who had acquired a high reputation by the success of his naval expeditions. He now undertook the command of an expedition, the object of which was to exterminate the Huguenots, establish a colony and implant the Catholic faith among the Indians. To carry out this latter work he brought with him twenty-six priests and monks. This expedition consisted of two thousand six hundred souls embarked on board thirty-four vessels, the largest of which was one thousand tons of burden and carried over a thousand people, a most unusual size for those days. Menendez expended on this fleet all he possessed or could procure, about two million dollars, while King Philip gave but a single ship.

On the 28th of August, 1565 (the same day Laudonniere arrived at the River May), he landed on the spot where St. Augustine now stands and established the first permanent settlement on what is now the territory of the United States—fifty-five years before the first pilgrim set foot on Plymouth Rock.

Ribaut, the French commander, learning that the Spanish were about to make a settlement, at once set out to attack them from the sea, leaving only the women and children and thirty-eight feeble soldiers at Fort Caroline. He, however, encountered a terrible storm and his whole fleet was wrecked on the shore many miles below St. Augustine.

At the same time Menendez marched by land, surprised the French at the fort, meeting with but feeble resistance, and slaughtered men, women and children in a most indiscriminate manner until checked by an order that, "No woman, child or cripple under the age of 15 should be injured," by which seventy persons were spared. Some of the prisoners were hung from trees and the inscription, "Not as the Frenchman but as Lutherans." placed over them.

Laudonniere fought as long as there was any hope but finally fled to the woods and joining a few other fugitives they made their way to the river, got on board their boats and so escaped. Laudonniere and the survivors sailed on September 25th, and after a protracted voyage and much suffering arrived in Wales and went thence to France where they were coldly received and died in obscurity.