

# Mel Fisher Maritime Museum

PRESENTS THE POP UP MUSEUM

## WHEN SPAIN CAME TO FLORIDA

### WHAT'S OUR HISTORY?

The Spanish Empire is a big part of Florida's story, but it's often overlooked.



Map of the Spanish Empire at its height (about 1720).  
Cartographer, Nagihuin. Wikimedia Commons.



Christopher Columbus and his Spanish Crew  
Making their First Landfall in the Americas in  
1492. Artist, Theodore de Bry. 1590.  
Engraving from *Americae partes*. Alamy.

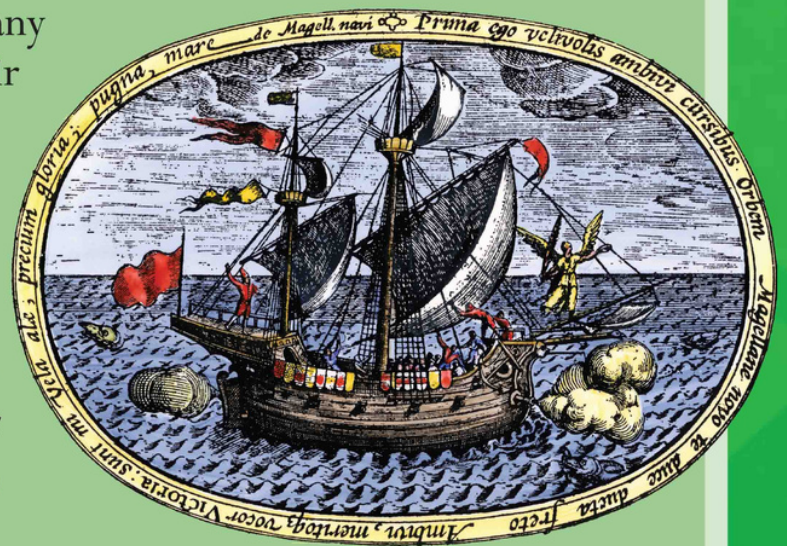
In the spring of 1513, Juan Ponce de León led Spain's first official expedition to Florida. Later, other Spanish explorers, conquistadors, and settlers attempted to tame Florida. It was not until 1565, under King Philip II, that Spain established a successful colony. Today, this settlement, now known as St. Augustine, is the oldest city in the United States.

Long before the American Revolutionary War started in 1775, Spain had claimed areas that are now part of the US. Between 1500 and 1750, the Spanish Empire stretched from the southern tip of South America to Oregon. In North America, this included states such as Florida, California, Montana, Colorado, Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. It also ranged from the Caribbean to the Philippines.



King Phillip II of Spain.  
Artist, Sofonisba Anguissola.  
1573. Oil painting.  
Wikimedia Commons.

Spain did not transfer Florida to the US until 1821. When they did, some Spanish settlers moved to Mexico and Cuba. However, many families stayed, and their descendants still live here today. More recently, people from other former Spanish colonies have immigrated to Florida. Spanish influence is seen across the state in our architecture, food, language, and arts.



Magellan's ship Victoria. Artist unknown. Woodcut. Alamy.

1565

St. Augustine becomes the first Spanish colony in what is now the US

1763

The Treaty of Paris awards Florida to the British

1783

A second Treaty of Paris returns East and West Florida to Spanish control

1810

West Florida settlers claim independence from Spain

1821

Spain trades Florida to the US under the terms of the Treaty of Adams-Onís

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### WHAT'S FOR DINNER?



Native Americans learned to use horses to hunt bison. Artist, George Catlin. 1844. Wikimedia Commons.

Did you ever eat a burrito? Do you like spaghetti with tomato sauce? Do you love chocolate or peanuts? Florida grows many crops that Indigenous people farmed and others that Europeans brought with them. Cocoa, pineapples, and tomatoes are from the Americas. Bananas, mangoes, and citrus fruits grow from plants introduced by European sailors. In other parts of the United States, Europeans

successfully planted onions, wheat, rice, apples, peaches, and pears. They also learned to enjoy native pumpkins, potatoes, and sweet corn.

Spanish galleons, such as those led by Ponce de León and Hernando de Soto, carried live cattle,



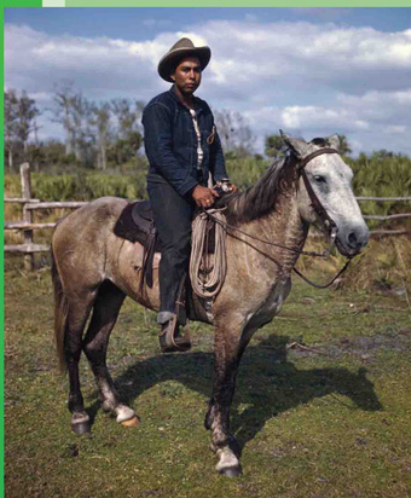
The jawbone of a cow from the *Santa Margarita*. Photographer, Dylan Kibler. Mel Fisher Maritime Museum.

sheep, and pigs for fresh meat during the long voyages. By the time



Silver stirrup from the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*. Photographer, Dylan Kibler. Mel Fisher Maritime Museum.

Europeans arrived, horses were already extinct in the Americas. The Spanish brought Old World horses with them on their ships. Once ashore, the Spanish let the animals go, hoping they would survive and establish herds. They planned to catch them later when needed. Indigenous people quickly saw this as an opportunity. They kept pigs and cattle for food and tamed the wild horses for travel, hunting, and warfare.



Seminole cowboy Big Charlie Osceola on a cow pony at the Brighton Indian Reservation, 1949. Photographer, Joseph Janney Steinmetz. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

Unfortunately, the unexpected result of bringing these animals to Florida is the damage done by their wild descendants. Wild hogs, for example, have no natural predators, and their numbers have grown dramatically. They destroy our native plant and animal populations, and damage crops.



Feral hogs in Glades County, Florida. Photographer, Lovett E. Williams. State Archives of Florida, Florida Memory.

500

Indigenous people farm corn, beans, and squash in Florida

1493

Christopher Columbus brings sugar cane to the Caribbean

1526

William Strickland brings North American turkeys to England

1565

Pedro Menéndez brings orange trees from Spain to St. Augustine

1833

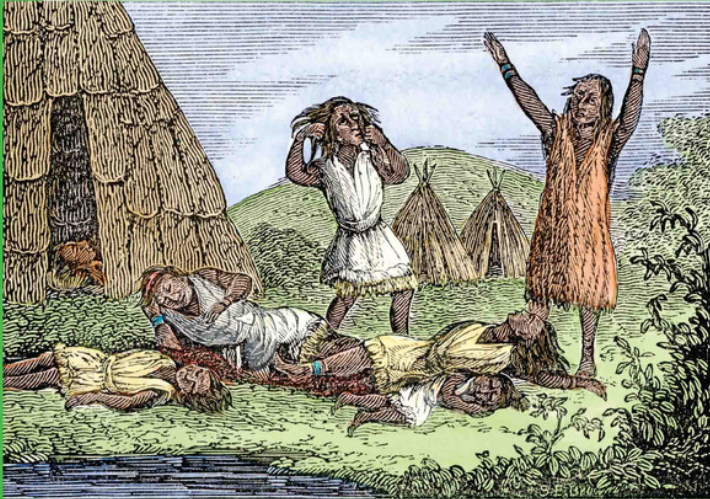
Florida is the first US state to farm mangoes

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### A SECRET WEAPON?

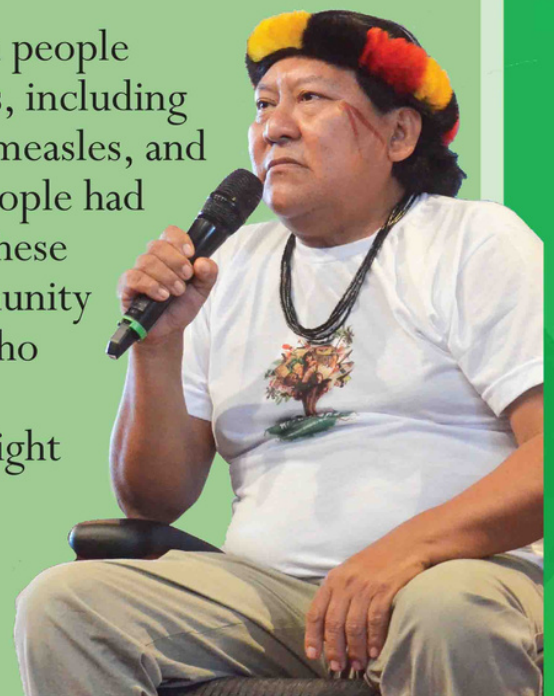


*Mortal Sickness among the Indians.* Artist unknown. 1850.  
Illustration. *Historical, Poetical, and Pictorial American Scenes.* Alamy.

In the Spanish colonies, Indigenous people fought hard to keep their lands, but the Europeans had a weapon they did not fully understand—contagious diseases.

Ships bringing European people also brought their germs, including influenza, tuberculosis, measles, and smallpox. Indigenous people had never been exposed to these diseases and had no immunity to them. Their rulers, who

were often among the first to meet the Europeans, usually died first. Without leaders, they were too disorganized to fight Spanish invaders successfully.



Indigenous activist Davi Kopenawa, one of the few survivors of a 1950s measles epidemic among the Yanomami people in Brazil. Photographer, Fernando Frazão. Wikimedia Commons.



Hairless and coated Xoloitzcuintli. Photographer, Amanda L. Dellario. Wikimedia Commons.

The Tequesta people, who lived on Florida's southeast coast for 2,000 years before the arrival of the Spanish, had almost all died due to disease by 1750. Millions of the Calusa and the Caribs who lived in Florida and the Caribbean also died, leaving towns, villages, and whole islands empty.

Spanish colonists had expected to use Native Americans either as free workers or slaves, but so many native people died that the king of Spain encouraged the colonists to import enslaved Africans to do the work instead. This time, the ships brought African diseases to which European sailors and Africans were often immune, but Indigenous people were not—many more died.

Indigenous people who live in isolated areas of countries such as Brazil, still face danger and even death from these diseases.



Map of the Caribbean islands and the state of Florida. Artist, Theodore de Bry. Etching. Wikimedia Commons.

1796

In England, Dr. Edward Jenner develops the first vaccine for a contagious disease—smallpox

1918-20

A severe form of flu kills more than 50 million people worldwide

1945

First flu vaccine approved for US civilians

1953

In the US, Dr. Jonas Salk creates the first polio vaccine

1980

The World Health Organization announces that smallpox has been eliminated due to vaccination efforts

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### WHO'S IN CHARGE?



17th century depiction of Havana from *Atlas Beudeker*, British Library.

Spain's empire was won by war and conquest. This meant that Spaniards believed that their laws, aristocrats, and the Roman Catholic religion were superior to Indigenous customs, rulers, and spiritual practices. However, Spanish kings stayed in Spain, which made ruling distant colonies difficult.

Sharing information was slow—it could only be sent by ship. In an age before computers, mobile phones, or GPS, controlling an empire spread

over continents was an enormous task. The Spanish relied on carefully kept handwritten records of

everything they did.

They sent copies of these documents, along with news and royal orders by ship. These took weeks or even months to arrive.

To keep things on track, the Spanish appointed viceroys (meaning “deputies of the king”) who made

important regional decisions. The viceroy in Lima, Peru, oversaw Spanish South

America. In Mexico City, the viceroy oversaw Central and North America, as well as Spain's interests in the Pacific, China, and the Philippines. Ships of the fleet system connected these centers. The viceroys appointed governors to manage ports, such as St. Augustine in Florida and Havana in Cuba.

In addition to these officials, Roman Catholic priests came to establish Christianity in Spain's colonies. Many Indigenous people converted to the new religion, but not everyone wanted to change their spiritual beliefs. They often maintained their spiritual practices in secrecy to avoid punishment.



The Manila galleons traded between New Spain and the Spanish East Indies using the ports at Acapulco and Manila. *Reception of the Manila Galleon by the Chumorro in the Ladrone Islands, about 1590.* Boxer Codex, Wikimedia Commons.



General Archive of the Indies, Seville, Spain. Wikimedia Commons.



This map shows which areas were controlled by the Spanish (blue) and Portuguese (green) in 1790. *Map of Spanish Americas, 1790.* Cartographer, Nagihuin. Wikimedia Commons.

1844

In the US, inventor Samuel Morse sends the first telegram

1911

Earle Ovington makes the first official American airmail delivery

1927

The first transatlantic telephone call is made from New York to London

1971

In the US, Raymond Tomlinson sends the first email

1992

In Britain, Neil Papworth sends the first text message

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## WHEN SPAIN CAME TO FLORIDA

### WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The first Spanish voyages were hazardous. The ships were not designed for ocean crossings, and there were no maps of the Atlantic. Violent storms, hidden reefs, and sandbars sank ships. Nevertheless, many people believed that the adventure offered opportunities. Wealthy Spaniards expected to be rewarded by the king for their exploits. Poor soldiers hoped for enough loot to return home and live comfortably. Roman Catholic priests came, believing that they should risk their lives to convert Indigenous people to Christianity.



The Gulf Stream is an ocean current that carries warm water up the eastern coast of the US and Canada and up to western Europe. Map of the Gulf Stream. NOAA.



Before Ponce de León led the first official European expedition to Florida, he was the first governor of Puerto Rico. *Ponce de León*. Artist unknown. 17th century engraving. Wikimedia Commons.



Inventor and scientist Benjamin Franklin was one of America's Founding Fathers and helped write the Declaration of Independence. *Portrait of Benjamin Franklin*. Artist, Joseph-Silfred Deplessis. 1778. National Portrait Gallery. Wikimedia Commons.

In 1492, the first explorers sailed from Spain using the trade winds, which flow east to west in the North Atlantic. How were they going to get back to Europe? Fighting the winds was difficult and sailors were often lucky to make it home.

It was not until 1519 that Antón de Alaminos, a ship's pilot during one of Ponce de León's voyages to Florida, figured out how to use the Gulf Stream. The Gulf Stream is an ocean current that circles the North Atlantic. It flows from the Gulf of Mexico, between Florida, Cuba, and the Bahamas, and up the eastern North American seaboard. It gave ships traveling from the Caribbean to Europe better direction and a boost of speed.

Soon, the Spanish mapped round-trip routes that were reliable and relatively safe, following the Gulf Stream and the currents in the South Atlantic and the Pacific.



Benjamin Franklin and his cousin created the first map of the Gulf Stream after noticing that mail took longer to travel west across the Atlantic than it did to go east. *Folger-Franklin Map of the Gulf Stream*. Cartographers, B. Franklin and T. Folger. 1769. NOAA.



17th century navigational instrument. Photographer, Dylan Kibler. Mel Fisher Maritime Museum.

1492

Christopher Columbus lands in the Americas while looking for a direct route from Europe to Asia

1519

Ferdinand Magellan organizes the first sailing voyage around the world for Spain

1619

Brothers Bartolomé and Gonzalo de Nodal make the first map of the ocean route around South America

1761

In Britain, John Harrison develops his most successful chronometer, the first tool to measure longitude at sea accurately

1769

Benjamin Franklin publishes the first map of the Gulf Stream

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PRESENTS THE POP UP MUSEUM

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### WHO'S GOT THE TREASURE?



Silver ingots from the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*.  
Photographer, Dylan Kibler. Mel Fisher  
Maritime Museum.

Spanish treasure fleets carried gold, jewels, and other cargoes around the world. Their main task was to transport silver from the rich mines of Peru and Mexico to Europe. Spanish colonial silver was the first item to be traded worldwide. It fueled Spain's economy, but it

was also used throughout Europe and Asia.



Can you find your hometown on this map of Florida?  
Map of Florida. Nations Online Project.

A single fleet, such as that of 1622, carried as much as 400 tons of silver and other valuables. However, when a treasure ship sank, its valuable cargo was not necessarily gone forever. It was far too valuable for Spain to write off as a loss.

The Spanish had expert salvagers and divers who sometimes spent years recovering the most valuable cargoes. Often the divers were enslaved Indigenous people who were trained as pearl divers. In a documented account, Juan Bañon, the first enslaved diver to find a

silver ingot from the 1622 Fleet, was set free in reward. The Spanish continued to recover silver ingots and other valuable items from the 1622 wrecks in several expeditions over the next fifty years.



Cerro Rico—the Mountain in Potosí, Peru.  
Bertius. 1616. *Tabularum geographicarum contractarum Libri septem*.  
Mel Fisher Maritime Museum.

Florida's "Treasure Coast" ranges along the shores of Indian River, St. Lucie, and Martin counties. It is so named because ships from Spain's 1715 Fleet wrecked there during a hurricane while carrying coins, jewelry, and other precious materials. Items from the wrecks are sometimes found there to this day.



The original American dollar coin was modeled after the Spanish "piece of eight."  
Photographer, Dylan Kibler.  
Mel Fisher Maritime Museum.

**1559**

Eleven ships are destroyed by a hurricane in Pensacola Bay during Spain's first attempt to colonize Florida

**1622**

Seven ships of the 1622 Fleet wreck between the Marquesas Keys and the Dry Tortugas

**1715**

Over 1,000 people drown when 11 ships from the 1715 Fleet sink off Florida's east coast

**1733**

A hurricane hits that year's Spanish Fleet and at least 13 ships are lost in the Florida Keys

**1985**

Mel Fisher's team locates the cargo hold of the 1622 galleon, *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*

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### WHY SETTLE HERE?



*Indigenous Floridians Using Hollow Rods to Search for Gold in a Stream. Artist, Theodore de Bry. 1528. Alamy.*

Throughout the first half of the 1500s, Spanish conquistadors came to Florida to find gold and other wealth or to capture and enslave Indigenous people. None of these expeditions succeeded.

Instead of treasure, the Spaniards found dangerous swamps and forests that were home to people who were determined to fight for their land at every turn.

Florida was not an easy target or a rich place. However, its location made it strategically

important, so the Spanish continued to try to settle there. As the treasure fleets began to sail regularly, it was important that Florida, on one edge of their route, be under Spanish control. In 1565, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés founded St. Augustine. Forts were built to guard the galleons' route along Florida's east coast. When hurricanes hit the fleets, rescuers could sail out quickly to save people and cargo.

Other European nations soon built their own colonies to rival or attack Spain's. Early on, the French started Fort Caroline near today's Jacksonville, but the Spanish massacred them and destroyed the settlement. Sir Francis Drake looted and burned St. Augustine in 1586 for England. Later, England's growing American colonies began to threaten Florida from the north. England even took control from 1763 to 1783, but Spain won Florida back and held on to it until 1821.



*Why do you think Florida looks so different on this map from 1565 than it does on a modern map? Map of Florida in 1565 by Baptista Boazio. Library of Congress.*



*The Miami Circle consists of a perfect circle measuring 38 feet (11.5m) containing evidence of more than 600 posts. Wikipedia Commons.*



*Hernando de Soto led the first European expedition deep into the territory of the modern-day US, traveling through Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and most likely Arkansas. Hernando de Soto. Engraving. Library of Congress. Wikimedia Commons.*

1513

Juan Ponce de León lands in Florida and claims it for Spain

1565

The Spanish destroy French Fort Caroline

1763

Spain trades Florida to the British in exchange for Havana, Cuba

1775-1783

Most Floridians side with the British during the American Revolutionary War

1845

Congress admits the states of Florida and Iowa into the Union at the same time

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### WHAT DO SHIPWRECKS TEACH US?



Diver discovers a cannon from the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*. Photographer, Don Kincaid, Mel Fisher Maritime Museum.

Grab your snorkel! In 1733, the *San Pedro*, a galleon sailing with that year's treasure fleet, sank in a hurricane. Today, you can visit the underwater site in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.



Map of Florida Keys shipwreck trail. Dive Buddies 4 Life.

Spanish galleons tell us a lot about the early American colonies in North and South America. Shipwrecks can provide hard evidence of how people lived. Objects from wrecks show what they traded, which resources they had, and what their lives were like.



When would you use a tray like this gold salver from the *Santa Margarita*? Photographer, Dylan Kibler, Mel Fisher Maritime Museum.

Some of the oldest shipwrecks found in the waters of the United States sank in Pensacola Bay. In 1559, don Tristán de Luna y Arellano landed with 1,500 people to establish a colony. However, a powerful hurricane destroyed their ships and supplies. The shipwrecks are still buried under the muddy bay bottom. Since their discovery, archaeologists have gradually uncovered much about how Spanish colonies were formed, including their food, weapons, and tools.



How many shipwrecks can you find on this map? *Cabeza de Martires and 1622 Wrecks*. Artist, Nicolas Cardona, 1628. Biblioteca Nacional de España.

Florida's most famous shipwreck is the *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, which sank with other vessels of the 1622 Fleet near Key West. It sailed during the high point of the Spanish Empire, and the wealth it carried shows how important the colonies were to Spain's financial success. In its cargo hold were 30 tons of silver bullion, chests of gold, 200,000 silver coins, and jewels, along with cannons and other weapons to protect the treasure.



Archaeologists examining an iron bombard (early cannon) from the *Santa Clara*, which sank in 1564. Photographer, Dylan Kibler, Mel Fisher Maritime Museum.

1535

Guglielmo de Lorena uses a diving bell to find ancient Roman shipwrecks in Italy

1771

In Britain, John Smeaton builds a pump to provide air to divers through a hose

1825

Englishman William James creates a dive helmet with a reservoir that can hold enough air for a 7-minute dive

1865

In France, Benoît Rouquayrol invents a 200lb diving suit that provides a safe air supply

1942

Frenchmen Émile Gagnan and Jacques Cousteau develop a regulator that releases fresh air to divers on demand