



The Story of Santa Lucia

Story By Kevin Hemstock, Managing Editor Previously printed in The Jupiter Courier, 1993 (Posted with permission)

JUPITER — Before there was a Jupiter Lighthouse, and even before Jonathan Dickinson and other passengers of The Reformation were shipwrecked on Jupiter Island, the Spanish explored the vicinity of Jupiter Inlet. And, at one point in the mid 16th Century there was, according to some researchers, a brief settlement here that started by misfortune and ended in bloody, mutinous disaster.

The European exploration of Florida, including the vicinity of the Jupiter Inlet, began with [Juan Ponce de Leon](#), in 1513. On March 3, of that year, after being removed as Governor of Puerto Rico, he sailed from Puerto Rico with three ships on his mission of exploration seeking gold and, according to some, the rumored Fountain of Youth, after receiving a grant from the King of Spain. Based on maps drawn several years later, likely based on charts by Juan Ponce, including the Feduccini map of 1515, some surmise that one of his landings was at the Jupiter Inlet. There, according to [Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas](#) who was appointed "historiographer of the Indies" by Spanish King Philip II in 1592, Ponce placed a stone cross. Herrera likely derived his account of Ponce's activity from the

explorer's official report to the Spanish Crown.

"Somewhere out there, there is a stone cross, probably with an inscription. (It is) the most important artifact you could find," said Mike Daniel, a Jupiter Farms resident who is researching the early Spanish explorations and plans to write a book on the early history of South Florida. Known locally for his research of the Battle of Loxahatchee, Daniel, who lives in Jupiter Farms, became fascinated with the period of exploration after studying Ponce de Leon. In the course of his research, however, he also found information on the establishment of Santa Lucia as a Spanish outpost. Santa Lucia, the likely source for the name of present-day St. Lucie, the inlet, county and river of the same name, was originally located at Jupiter Inlet, he says. "I'm not the first one to put this together," Daniel said. Indeed, noted historian Eugene Lyon mentions Santa Lucia in his journal.

The Enterprise of Florida, the account of the mission of conquest and settlement undertaken in Florida by [Pedro Menendez de Aviles](#) — the founder of St. Augustine — from 1565 to 1568. The establishment of Santa Lucia was a little-known footnote to Menendez' establishment of St. Augustine, and was one step in his attempt to populate and subjugate the northern

reaches of La Florida, as was being done in Mexico and South America. Menendez' contract with Spanish King Philip II called for him to evict the French from Florida and to establish settlements in what was then a Spanish religious, economic and geographic expansion.

St. Augustine

The story of Santa Lucia begins with Menendez' arrival in the New World in September, 1565. After an initial encounter with the French at Fort Caroline, at the mouth of the St. John's River, in present-day Jacksonville, he sailed south and established [St. Augustine](#). On September 20, leaving St. Augustine defended by about 300 men, Menendez attacked Fort Caroline by land with about 500 soldiers and took that fort, renaming it San Mateo. After a victory celebration in St. Augustine, Menendez set about to complete his destruction of the French. He headed south in pursuit of the French shipwrecked in an earlier failed attempt at an attack on Saint Augustine.

Between 100 and 200 French, hoping their lives were to be spared, surrendered to the Spanish at Mantanzas on Sept. 29. Menendez, in the first such display, executed the Huguenot captives, allowing only several Catholics to live. About two weeks later, about 70 more French captives were taken at the same place and were themselves executed. Menendez continued south and in early November destroyed a makeshift French fort and took about 70 captives in the vicinity of Ponce Inlet, near what is now [New Smyrna Beach](#). Continuing south that same month, Menendez encountered the Ais Indians, whose major villages were in the vicinity of what is now Sebastian Inlet. The stage was now being set for a series of disastrous incidents that would lead to the establishment of Santa Lucia.

The Ais

While the Indians there already had a reputation of being ferocious, according to Enterprise, Menendez gained their trust, offering gifts to the local chief or cacique, who swore fealty to the Spanish Crown. Having eliminated the French from Florida, Menendez was determined to carry out his other mission of populating and establishing settlements. He had already founded St. Augustine.

Now, he established a base called Puerto De Socorro, just south of the main Ais village, and, after the arrival of three supply ships, Menendez, leaving 200 soldiers,

and 50 French captives under the command of Captain Juan Velez de Medrano to fortify this base, left in a ship for Cuba. Before Menendez left, he appointed Velez governor of the land of the Ais, and in his appointment forbade his men from causing injury to the Indians.

Soon after Menendez left, however, conditions began to deteriorate at the Spanish garrison. Most of the present day information about the Ais, comes from the journal of Jonathan Dickinson, who was shipwrecked on

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the coast of Florida in 1696 and held captive by the Indians. Florida Atlantic University archeologist Dr. Jerald Kennedy, citing Dickinson and other sources as background for a study of local Indians, states that the Ais were non-agricultural, linguistically related to the Timuquan Indians of the St. John's area, and numbered about 600, living in villages along the coast.

The Indians ate berries including fish and shellfish, berries — including palmetto berries which, according to Dickinson tasted of "rotten cheese steeped in tobacco" — drank hot cessenana made from a local herb and smoked. But, "These people neither sow nor plant any manner of thing whatsoever, nor care for anything but what the barren sand produce: fish they have as plenty as they please, but sometimes they would make it scarce to us, so that a meal in a week was most commonly our portion, and three meals a rarity."

Apparently, the [Ais](#) were no more sharing with the Spanish at Puerto de Socorro, where supplies soon ran low. Lyon states in Enterprise: "The friendly Indians possessed no store of food sufficient for such a large body of men. As discipline disintegrated, bands of soldiers roamed the area seeking food. Friction between the Indians and the Spanish became outright war."

At this point, about 100 in Velez' company, spurred on

by a soldier named Escobar, deserted the rest. The mutineers headed south by land. Medrano followed them later in a small boat and found them encamped about 45 miles south of the Ais village, likely in the vicinity of the present day St. Lucie Inlet. Keeping his distance, from the boat, he told them he was going to Havana to get supplies. But, early in his journey, he encountered another Spanish vessel, under the command of Diego de Amaya, bringing supplies to the garrisons. "Diego de Amayo and the captain sailed together along the coast and found a promising harbor at the Jupiter Inlet, where the elevation commanded a good view of land and sea," Lyons states in *Enterprise*.

"There on December 13 ... St. Lucie's Day, they established the garrison of fort Santa Lucia." After dropping off supplies, Amayo set sail for Havana to report to Menendez. Meantime, Velez went north, picked up the rebel soldiers and transported them the 18 miles south to the new fort. "No one, as far as I know has ever found the site," Lyon said in a phone interview in October. "I think it certainly was in the (Jupiter) area, somewhere, but that is only my opinion," he added. In a footnote in *Enterprise*, Lyon states: "... I believe that the beginning point of the mutineers' southward journey was not far south of the Sebastian River in Indian River County. Their course, estimated at twelve to fifteen leagues in length, would have brought them to the north side of the wide St. Lucie River; from there, it is about eighteen miles, or six leagues to Jupiter Inlet," where, he states, Velez established Santa Lucia.

Lyon's opinion is based on extensive research of the national archives of Spain, where he studied original accounts of the activities of Menendez and those with him. Kennedy concurs. "All the documents suggest it has merit in that area," he said in an October interview. But, he added, "There haven't been any excavations or surveys" to locate a site. Daniel agrees with this assumption, noting that the mutineers could not come to Santa Lucia by land because they were stopped by the St. Lucie River, and thus Velez was compelled to "ferry" them south

The Jeagas

The Indians established in the vicinity of Jupiter at the time of Velez' garrison are thought to be the Jeagas. The range of the Jeagas is thought to be limited to the Hobe Sound area on the north and their main village was said to be in the vicinity of Lake Worth. Their

territory included the Jupiter Inlet, where it is thought the village of Jobe, called Hoe-bay by Dickinson, was located. Kenneday, who has conducted several digs in what is now DuBois Park, has discovered evidence of Indian occupation that may date as far back as 700 A.D.

He uses Lyon as a source to say that the Santa Lucia was probably next to the village of Jobe. The Jaegas were likely similar to the Ais, and my have been tributary to them. In his journal, Dickinson described his first view

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of the village located on the south of the Jupiter Inlet as it appeared in 1696: "After we had traveled about five miles along the deep sand, the sun being extreme hot, we came to an inlet. On the other side was the Indian town, being little wigwams made of small poles stuck in the ground, which they bended one to another, making an arch, and covered them with thatch of small palmetto-leaves." The Indians' diet consisted largely of fish and berries, according to Dickinson, who described as Indian fishing along the inlet with a "staff," and said that one native "got as many fish as would serve twenty men" in two hours.

Digs by Kennedy turned up post holes, charred fire pits, animal bones, pot shards, shell and bone tools and even a carved bone pin. The shell midden upon which was built the area's famous DuBois house was indeed a portion of the shell garbage dump of the Indians. Dickinson indicates that the Jaegas had their hair "tied in roll behind," and that was held by pins. He described the two Indian men who came upon their party as "being naked except a small piece of platted work of straws which just hid their private parts, and fastened behind with a horsetail in likeness made of a sort of silk-grass." In *Enterprise*, Lyon states that Indians and the Spanish at first got along well, trading for gold and silver the Indians had gotten from previous shipwrecks.

The only first-hand account of Santa Lucia comes from testimony given later by one of the soldiers, Diego Lopez, self-described artilleryman. In his account, he describes finding the Indian chief there being called

"Gega" or Jega, and " ... him wanting to make war on us." The Spanish had great respect for the ferocity of the Jaegas. In a 1623 communication to the Spanish Crown, translated by Lyon, a Spanish nobleman notes concerns over depredations by the Indians on shipwrecks in the area: "I have called your attention of Your Majesty many times to the evil reception which the Indians of the coasts of Jega and Santa Lucia give the Spanish who escape from the shipwrecks, killing them all with much cruelty that is a terrible thing — and to the importance of seeing the damage they are doing."

According to Lopez, the Indians began fighting with them, killing 16 soldiers. Lopez stated that the soldiers with "great haste, they built a fort for (their) defense." In Woodbury Lowery's *The Spanish Settlements* it states: " ... The Indians had risen and killed fifteen of the colonists, for the soldiers were exhausted with their journey, and the natives were so dexterous with their bows that they could discharge twenty arrows while the soldiers were firing a single shot. At first the colonists had driven them away but when the fort was completed a thousand Indians came down upon them, fought them for four hours, wounded the captain and the sub-lieutenant, killed eight soldiers, and shot six thousand arrows into the fort."

The Indians, apparently, laid siege to the fort. Soon, the arrows of the Indians became less deadly than the lack of food. Lowery's account continues: "As the attacks were renewed daily, it soon became impossible to search for provisions and the small garrison, with their rations reduced to a pound of corn distributed among ten soldiers, began to suffer the pangs of hunger." Starvation began to take its toll. According to Lowery, a dwarf palmetto sold for a ducat, a snake for four ducats and a rat for eight reales. Even old fish and animal bones, shoe and belt leather were eaten. Lopez indicates in his account that conditions worsened and the soldiers resorted to cannibalism, killing and eating the French captured on Cape Canaveral.

Santa Lucia abandoned By February, 1566, the conditions at the garrison had worsened to the point that the sub-lieutenant and a vicar set out in a small boat for Havana to get supplies. No one aboard understood navigation, and bad weather turned the boat back to the garrison. Eight days later, the caravel *Ascencion* arrived with corn from Yucatan. But the soldiers apparently had had enough. They rose up, wounded Medrano and the sub-lieutenant, and seized

the boat, according to Lowery. But it was not over for the mutineers.

Menendez, after adventures with the Indians in the lower Florida Keys, turned his fleet northward along the eastern panhandle. On March 19, 1566, according to *Enterprise*, lookouts sighted the sails of the *Ascencion*. Subsequently, Menendez intercepted the mutineers, ending the initial settlement of Jupiter Inlet. He deposited them at St. Augustine, and their fate is

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uncertain. According to Lopez, " ... of the 236 men that went, no more than 60 or 70 returned ..."

The first white settlement of Jupiter lasted about three months. While the mutiny at Santa Lucia may have been the most bloody in Menendez' drive to settle Florida, it was not the only one. Other mutinies included those at the garrisons of St. Augustine and San Mateo in 1566. This moved one Spanish religious official in a Lyon-translated document from 1568 to blame divine retribution for mistreatment of the Indians for the mutinies: "The liberty they had in sinning very much impeded our efforts from bearing fruit among the infidels. Because it was demonstrated before their eyes that the Christians did the opposite of what we preached, and thus blaspheming the name of God among the people ... and in Xega, for the same reason, they warred on those of the fort of Santa Lucia. And now the fame that has come of the loss of five forts that the Spanish had within the country in a space of 200 leagues, I am certain had no other cause than this."

For the record The settlement of Santa Lucia may have ended in mutiny, but the name remained for some time, and is referred to in many later Spanish documents and maps and those of other nations. But, there was really no other serious attempt by the Spanish to settle the area. "That attempt to settle the Indian River area was the only one, and it was unsuccessful," Lyons said in October. "It's a sad episode in their attempts to settle, pacify and control Florida.

They were never able to do it on that part of the coast."

If Santa Lucia was located at Jupiter Inlet, as Lyon, Kennedy and other such as Marjorie Stoneman Douglas (The Everglades: River of Grass) assert, then it is likely that at some point an errant map maker misplaced the inlet, so that the name of St. Lucie now identifies the county, city, port and river some 60 miles north. "(St. Lucie) may not have been Santa Lucia at all. It's kind of ironic. Names move around on maps," Lyon said. While Kennedy says that there has never been an excavation to search for remnants of a Spanish garrison, he notes in the background of his report on the DuBois digs, that a "European axe or adze blade, and several non-local sherds" were found at an earlier dig. "A large glazed earthenware vessel was recovered near the main midden, but no Spanish ceramics have been excavated from the site," the report states.

Across the inlet, in the vicinity of the Jupiter Lighthouse, was another midden where only, according to Kennedy, "... a few sand-tempered sherds were collected." Elsie Dolby Jackson, writing about 1918, stated: "We have another Indian monument which we may speculate about. It is where the Lighthouse now stands. A high ridge in the shape of a horse shoe is situated west of the mouth of the Jupiter Narrows. In the center of this ridge is a central mound. From the river to the convex side is, apparently, an approach ... Some have called this an amphitheater. Others have called it a fortification." She adds: "It was used and, no doubt, appreciated by the U.S. Government when they erected the lighthouse."

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