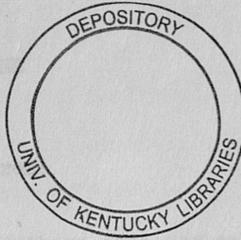




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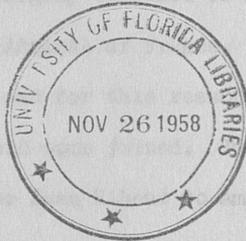
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STORIES OF FLORIDA

FORT CAROLINE

by

Herndone Cochrane



Prepared for Use in Public Schools by the

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT OF THE WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION

Jacksonville, Florida

## FORT CAROLINE

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Herndone Cochrane

Fort Caroline was established on the southern shore of the St. Johns River, west of St. Johns Bluff, by French Huguenots in 1564. The struggling colony, having undergone sickness, starvation and mutiny, and facing the increasing hostility of the native Indians, had just been strengthened by a French relief expedition, when it was finally destroyed in an attack by Spanish forces. The execution of the French Huguenot colonists by the Catholic Spaniards was an event that aroused much bitter controversy throughout Europe in 1565 and has since brought forth volumes of opinion written in many languages.

On April 22, 1564, three ships bound for Florida sailed from Havre, France. Aboard these vessels were three hundred persons, including the crews, soldiers, artisans, and four women, the latter probably the first Protestant white women to step ashore within the confines of the present United States.

The expedition was largely composed of Huguenots, special proteges of Gaspard de Coligny, High Admiral of France. However the avowed purpose of the colony was non-sectarian and for this reason no ministers accompanied it. Catholics were admitted and some joined. Two years before, Coligny had sent an exploratory fleet under Jean Ribaut to America, seeking a site for a Protestant refuge.

Ribaut had reached the Florida coast in April 1562, and on May 1, entered the mouth of a broad stream--the St. Johns River--which he called the River of May, in commemoration of the day of its discovery, landed, and entered into friendly relations with the Indians. After erecting a column to establish France's claims to the country, he had again embarked and sailed up the coast to the vicinity of Port Royal. There he had left a small colony, and promising

to send reinforcements and supplies, had returned to France. European wars engaged his attention, as well as that of the French authorities, and the colony, receiving neither support nor assistance, was soon deserted.

During a temporary lull in the European conflicts, Coligny sent out this second expedition, and since Jean Ribaut was being held as a diplomatic prisoner in England, had appointed as its commander Rene Laudonniere, a lieutenant under Ribaut in the previous voyage to America.

Laudonniere and his colonists were joyfully received by the natives who lived near the mouth of the St. Johns River. These Indians had regarded with great reverence and awe the pillar left by Ribaut, had crowned it with evergreens and about its base placed baskets of fruit and maize. (The previous year a Spanish captain, De Rojas, had searched for this pillar in vain, the Indians having hidden from him.) The warmth of their welcome, combined with the fertile aspect of the countryside, determined Laudonniere upon establishing his colony in this region.

The site selected for a fort was just west of St. Johns Bluff, where the ground sloped gradually along the river bank. To the southward extended an area of rolling, wooded country, called the Vale of Laudonniere by the newcomers. On the east side of the bluff was a sheer drop to a little creek from which continuous marshes extended to the ocean.

Work upon the fortress, which was named Fort Caroline in honor of King Charles IX, proceeded rapidly, with the natives assisting in the construction. LeMoyne, an artist and a member of the colony, made a sketch of the fort and gave the following description:

"Thus was erected a triangular work, afterwards named Carolina. The base of the triangle, looking westward, was defended by a small ditch, and a wall of sods nine feet high. The side next the river was built up with planks and

fascines. On the southern side was a building after the fashion of a citadel, which was for a granary to hold their provision. The whole was of fascines and earth, except the upper part of the wall for two or three feet, which was of sods. In the middle of the fort was a roomy open space 18 yards long and as many wide. Midway on the southern side of this space were the soldiers' quarters; and on the north side was a building which was higher than it should have been, and was in consequence blown over by the wind a little afterwards. Experience thus taught us that in this country, where the winds are so furious, houses must be built low. There was also another open space, pretty large, one side of which was closed in by the granary above mentioned, while on the other side stood the residence of Laudonniere, looking out upon the river, and with a piazza all around it. The principal door of this opened upon the larger open space; and the rear door, upon the river. At a safe distance from the works, an oven was erected; for, as the houses were roofed with palm branches, they would very easily have caught fire."

Although the new colony appeared well favored by its environment and its ready acceptance by the neighboring natives, it was soon beset by troubles. Many of Laudonniere's followers were adventurous younger sons of rich Huguenots who had come to the new world to seek gold. While the land about the fort was fertile and the river full of fish, they knew nothing of work, and relied upon the Indians for food, which the latter soon tired of providing. The colonists also were restive under discipline, and were prone to resent their leader's display of authority.

Laudonniere rashly entered into various alliances with Indian chieftains who were hostile to each other, with the result that it was not long before he was regarded with distrust by all the tribes around him. Saturiba, a powerful overlord, who had been his friend, for instance, was bitterly antagonized when

Laudonniere became the ally of Chief Olata Utina, Saturiba's mortal foe. Utina and his tribesmen in turn were made enemies of the French, when Laudonniere held him captive in a futile attempt to force him to provide the white men with food.

Discontent, conspiracy and sedition spread rapidly through Fort Caroline. A number of the colonists revolted, confined Laudonniere, who was suffering from severe illness, upon a vessel in the river, and stealing two small boats, set out on a plundering expedition to the West Indies. Their piratical activities ended disastrously, however. Many of the mutineers were killed by Spaniards who assaulted them suddenly from three Spanish ships. Several of the Frenchmen were captured and sent back to Spain as proof of French ambitions and activities in Florida. The ones who escaped beat a retreat up the coast to the mouth of the River of May, where they were taken by Laudonniere's loyal followers, and four of their ringleaders executed.

The growing threat of starvation next faced the colony, and plans were under way to abandon Fort Caroline, when Sir John Hawkins, an Englishman returning from a slave trading expedition in the West Indies, arrived with four ships, in August 1565, seeking fresh water.

Strengthening the bond of religious sympathy between the French Huguenots and the English Protestants was their mutual hatred of the Spanish. Laudonniere states: "we killed certain sheep and poultry that we may entertain Captain Hawkins the best we could; this stock had been carefully preserved to stock the company." Hawkins saw the distress of the colony and gave them: 20 barrels of meal, 5 barrels of beans, a hogshead of salt, 100 pounds of wax for candles, and 50 pairs of shoes for the soldiers.

His offer to convey them all to Europe in his ships was refused by Laudonniere, who rightly feared that Hawkins might covet for Queen Elizabeth the land in which the colony had been planted. Before the Englishman departed, however, Laudonniere

did purchase one of his smaller ships, paying for it with four pieces of artillery and some powder from the fort.

The English sails were hardly out of sight over the horizon when the Frenchmen resumed their preparations to depart. Food was stowed aboard their ship, and everything was finally in readiness and they only awaited a favorable wind, when another fleet appeared off the mouth of the river.

Jean Ribaut, released from his detention in England, had at last arrived with a fleet of seven vessels, including his flagship, the Trinity, carrying 32 pieces of ordinance, the Emerillon, of 29 guns, the Pearl, under command of the Admiral's son, Jacques Ribaut, and four other ships, all laden with foodstuff, supplies, seeds for planting, and agricultural implements. Aboard these vessels were reinforcements of soldiers, laborers, adventurers, women and children, their number variously estimated by different historians as being from 300 to 1200, one modern authority placing it at about 600 persons.

Ribaut also brought orders from Admiral Coligny for the resignation of Laudonniere's command, and for his return to France that he might clear himself of certain charges that had been made against him. Laudonniere was informed that these charges, lodged by malcontents and persons antagonistic to the younger commander, included accusations of cruelty and arrogance, and the declaration that he sought to establish himself as an independent ruler in the new world.

But even while the French colonists were rejoicing over Ribaut's arrival, and Laudonniere moped ill and morose in his quarters, a force was approaching that was to bring destruction to Fort Caroline and thrust into oblivion the hopes of France for dominion over Florida.

Philip II of Spain had watched with growing wrath the French activities in this quarter. Adding depth to his hatred of the French Protestants had

been the activity of the Huguenot sailors from Normandy, restless adventurers, who had sacked many towns of the Spanish Main, and had preyed upon Spanish shipping. In regard to Florida, Philip II desired not so much to establish Spanish colonies, as he did to protect the route of his rich treasure fleets along the Florida coast.

Pedro Menendez de Aviles, who had served Philip in Flanders during war between Spain and France, who had later made many voyages to America as Captain-General of the treasure fleets, and had proved both his ability and his loyalty to the Spanish Crown, was chosen to head the expedition that sailed for Florida on June 29, 1565. Menendez was instructed to destroy the French fort and establish defenses so that other Europeans could not secure a foothold.

Ribaut, delayed by storms, arrived on August 28th. Fort Caroline immediately became a beehive of industry; the fort was strengthened, additional quarters were planned, and preparations made for planting crops. It was the unofficial intent of Coligny that Fort Caroline should be a permanent refuge for the Huguenots. But Spain was equally determined that neither Catholic nor Huguenot French should be established in Florida.

On September 4, 1565, the French colony was thrown into a state of alarm by the appearance of the Spanish galleons. Menendez immediately launched an attack upon the French fleet anchored at the mouth of the River of May, but the sailors aboard the latter, cut their cables and fled, soon outdistancing the slower Spanish ships. Returning from the futile chase, Menendez found that the French infantry had hastily completed plans for a strong defense of the River of May, and decided to sail on down the coast and make a landing at the next harbor, near the site of St. Augustine, where he established Fort Charles.

Against the advice of Laudonniere, Jean Ribaut withdrew most of the forces from Fort Caroline, and brought his ships to the bar of St. Augustine. A violent storm arose before he could assault the Spanish, and his fleet was driven southward, and wrecked on the coast.

Menendez learned from his Indian scouts that the French had boarded ships and sailed toward Fort Charles, evidently with the intent of attacking the fort. He realized that the French had probably sent their best men in the ships against him, and recognized this storm and the difficulties of the French fleet as his opportunity. Taking five hundred soldiers, several Indians, and a captive Frenchman, who acted as a guide, he made a forced march through the wilderness north of St. Augustine, and after two days' time had brought his attacking force within a mile of Fort Caroline.

The French officers had humanely but imprudently withdrawn their sentries from exposure to the continued rage of the storm. On the morning of September 20, 1565, the Spanish soldiers fell upon the fort, swept into the stockade and through the buildings of the enclosure, routed the dazed Frenchmen, and killed all of the remnant garrison left by Ribaut, except fifty or sixty men who escaped to the woods, some reaching three small French vessels at the mouth of the river. Spanish historians also state that about seventy women and children were spared by the orders of Menendez. Having taken possession of the fort, Menendez turned its guns upon the French boats, sinking one. The other two set sail for France, bearing among others Laudonniere, Le Moyne, and Ribaut's son.

On September 28, Menendez learned that survivors from Ribaut's wrecked fleet were on the beach a number of miles below St. Augustine. Hurrying southward with a detachment of forty soldiers, Menendez, the following day, executed over two hundred Frenchmen after they had surrendered and were ferried

over Matanzas inlet by boat in groups of ten.

Again on October 10, came tidings to St. Augustine that there were many more Frenchmen at Matanzas inlet, and again Menendez sped down the beach, taking with him one hundred and fifty soldiers. Near the same place and under nearly the same circumstances he slew all of a group of one hundred and fifty Frenchmen who surrendered, except several musicians who were kept alive to furnish music for dancing, four men who professed to be Catholics, and one sailor, who was stunned and left for dead, but reviving, managed to escape. Among the victims of the second Matanzas massacre, October 12, 1565, was the French leader, Jean Ribaut. Two hundred Frenchmen had refused to surrender, and retreated southward along the coast. Later, all but a remnant of these threw themselves upon Menendez' mercy, and were well treated. The handful of irreconcilables, declaring that they would "rather be eaten by Indians than surrender to Spaniards," fled into the interior, and were never heard of again.

Fort Caroline, renamed San Mateo by the Spaniards, was burned, probably accidentally, eight days after its capture. It was rebuilt by Menendez, who also ordered the erection of two blockhouses, one on each side of the River of May near its mouth. The history of these Spanish establishments repeated in many ways that of the French fortress. Starvation, successful attacks by hostile Indians and threatened widespread mutiny of the colonists and soldiers were prevented largely by the timely efforts and orders of Menendez, who, despite charges of ruthlessness in gaining his objectives, proved himself an able commander.

While Menendez was for a period in Europe, Dominique de Gourgues, a Frenchman who had once been a captive galley slave of the Spanish and who was eager to avenge the slain colonists of Fort Caroline arrived on the Florida coast. He had three ships, and had fitted out the expedition at his own expense.

Forming an alliance with the Indians, de Gourgues attacked and captured the two Spanish blockhouses at the mouth of the River of May, on April 12, 1568, killing most of the garrisons. On April 15, 1568, he began an assault upon Fort San Mateo. A vain attempt at a sortie by the Spaniards brought only death to many of them. De Gourgues and his men forced their way into the fort, and the inmates, terror-stricken, fled in a body from the stockade, hoping to find refuge in the forest, as a number of their predecessors, the French of Fort Caroline, had done. Most of the fleeing Spaniards, however, were slain by De Gourgues' native allies. Satisfied with the vengeance he had wrought upon the Spaniards, De Gourgues commanded the destruction of the fort, and then sailed back to France.

Fort San Mateo was again rebuilt by the Spanish and garrisoned as an outpost. A French vessel was captured in its harbor, July 20, 1580, and those aboard were executed. San Mateo also became a retreat to which the Spaniards retired when Sir Francis Drake, in 1587, attacked and burned St. Augustine. In 1602, San Mateo is mentioned in Fray Pareja's reports as being an Indian village with a mission sub-station church. Dona Francisca, a native cacica of the village, was confirmed by Bishop Altamirano, in 1606.

After a period of comparative peace lasting nearly one hundred years, San Mateo was finally destroyed early in the 18th century, when Indians and British raiders swept down from the north, looted and burned many Spanish mission villages and carried off the native inhabitants to slavery in Carolina.

## VOCABULARY

Artisan (ar ti zan); one skilled in any craft or trade; a mechanic; a handicraftsman.

Cacica (ka sek a); a feminine leader or chief of a native tribe.

Citadel (sit a del); a fortress in or near a fortified place, intended as a final point of defense.

Conspiracy (kon spir a sy); combination of men for an evil purpose; a plot; unlawful agreement.

Fascine (fa sen) a long bundle of wooden sticks bound together and used in making parapets, strengthening ramparts, etc.

Galleons (gal le uns); sailing vessels of the 15th century and later, often having three or four decks and used for war or commerce.

Havre (hav er); a French seaport.

Huguenots (hu ge nots); French Protestants of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Irreconcilables (ir rek on sil a b'ls); those who refuse to compromise.

Malcontents (mal kon tents); those who are discontented or dissatisfied.

Normandy (nor man dy); a duchy or province of France bordering on the English Channel.

Predecessors (pred e ses ers); those who have preceded or gone before, especially in regard to state or position.

Proteges (pro te zhas); those under the care and protection of another.

Ruthlessness (rooth less ness); cruelty, mercilessness.

San Mateo (San Ma ta o)

Sedition (se dish un); Treason against established authority; conduct which tends toward treason; strife.

Sortie (sor te); the sudden issuing of troops from a besieged place to attack or harass the besiegers; a sally.

Spanish Main; a name given to the Caribbean Sea and to the north coast of South America and to the shores along the Caribbean Sea of the former provinces of Spain in Central America.

PERSONAL NAMES

Altamirano (Bishop); Al ta mee ra no

De Coligny, Gaspard; de ko le nye, gas pard

De Gourgues, Dominique; de goor jway, dom in eek

Dona Francisca; donya fran see ska

Laudonniere, Rene; lo do nyar, re na

Le Moyne; le mwan

Menendez de Aviles, Pedro; ma nen dath da a ve las, pa dro

Pareja, Fray; pa ra ha, fra

Ribaut, Jean; re bo, jeen

Saturiba; sa tu ree ba

Olata, Utina; o lat a, u teen ah

### Lesson Study

1. Who was Rene Laudonniere? Gaspard de Coligny?  
Pedro Menendez de Aviles?
2. What was the purpose of Ribaut's first expedition to Florida?  
That of the expedition under command of Laudonniere?
3. Why did Laudonniere and his colonists fail to prosper?
4. In what vicinity was Fort Caroline erected?
5. Why, and in what way, did Sir John Hawkins, an Englishman,  
assist the French colonists at Fort Caroline?
6. Why was Ribaut sent to replace Laudonniere in command of  
the colony at Fort Caroline, in 1565?
7. Why did King Philip II of Spain send Pedro Menendez de  
Aviles to Florida?
8. Why was Fort Caroline left with but a few defenders at the  
time it was attacked by Menendez? What was the result, for  
the fort and its French inmates, of this attack?
9. What happened to the Frenchmen under Ribaut who were ship-  
wrecked off the coast of Florida?
10. What was the name of the Spanish fort that replaced Fort  
Caroline?
11. Who avenged, and in what way, the slain Frenchmen of  
Fort Caroline?
12. What brought about the final destruction of the village  
of San Mateo?

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