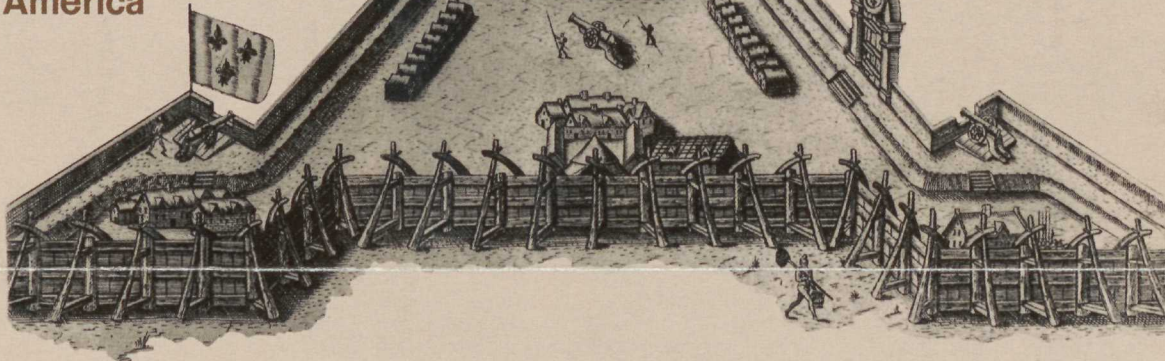


Fort Caroline

National Memorial
Florida

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

France in North America



Fort de la Caroline protected the first planned French settlement in what is now the United States. Above: the French royal coat of arms. Engraving of the fort is by Theodore de Bry, after an illustration by Jacques le Moyne.

In the mid-16th century France was a vigorous, expansionist nation emerging from feudalism and dreaming of empire. Spain, the world's leading power, already had a foothold in the Americas, and France wanted a share of the riches the Spanish were gaining through trade and plunder. France's first attempt to stake a permanent claim in North America was at La Caroline, a settlement near the mouth of the St. Johns River in Florida.

Initially, the settlement was to be a commercial venture, but religious conflict in France broadened the goals. The growing persecution of French Protestants (Huguenots) led their most powerful member, Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, to make a proposal to the crown: The colony could also be a refuge for Huguenots. An exploratory expedition, commanded by Jean Ribault, left France in February 1562. After erecting a monument at the River of May (now St. Johns River), Ribault headed north, left a small garrison at Charlesfort near Port Royal Sound, and sailed home. Within months the situation of his men became desperate and they returned to France.

Coligny urged another attempt in April 1564, planning for a permanent settlement of some 200 soldiers and artisans, as well as a few women. Led by René de Goulaine de Laudonnière, who had accompanied Ribault on his previous expedition, they first touched at the River of May on June 22. With help from Indians, the colonists began building a village and fort on the river's south bank, naming the area La Caroline ("land of Charles") after their king, Charles IX. Good relations with the Indians eventually soured and by the following spring the colonists were close to starvation. Twice mutinous

parties had sailed off to make their own fortune and some were eventually captured by the Spanish, revealing the presence of the French colony. The remaining colonists, having failed to discover silver or gold, were about to leave Florida in August 1565, when they spotted sails on the horizon. Ribault had arrived with a relief expedition of supplies and 600 soldiers and settlers, including more women and some children.

On learning of Ribault's departure for Florida, Philip II of Spain sent Admiral Pedro Menéndez to dislodge the French. Initially rebuffed off the coast, Menéndez established a base to the south at St. Augustine. Ribault sailed down the coast seeking to attack the Spanish, but his ships were scattered by a hurricane and beached far to the south. Seizing the opportunity, Menéndez marched north with 500 soldiers to attack the weakly guarded colony. Early in the morning of September 20, his troops massacred 140 settlers, sparing only about 60 women and children. Forty to fifty others, including Laudonnière, escaped and sailed for France. Menéndez next marched south and found the shipwrecked Frenchmen, Ribault among them. They threw themselves on his mercy, but to Menéndez they were heretics and enemies of his king. At a place later named Matanzas (Slaughter), he put to the sword about 350 men—all but those professing to be Catholics and a few musicians.



With Indian allies Dominique de Gourgues recaptured Fort de la Caroline—called San Mateo by the Spanish—in 1568.

France's revenge was enacted in April 1568 by Dominique de Gourgues. He attacked and burned the fort, killing anyone who didn't escape, then sailed home. Spain rebuilt the fort only to abandon it in 1569, but France never again strongly challenged Spanish claims in North America.

Sea Lanes of Settlement and Conflict

In Florida, both France and Spain hoped to claim their piece of the "new world." By the time the French planted their settlement at La Caroline, Spain was entrenched in South and Central America and its sea routes through the Caribbean were well established,

as shown on the map below. Spanish ships bearing gold and silver from the mines of Mexico and Peru stopped at Havana before sailing for Spain. They rode the Gulf Stream through the Bahama Channel (now the Straits of Florida) and up the southeastern coast of

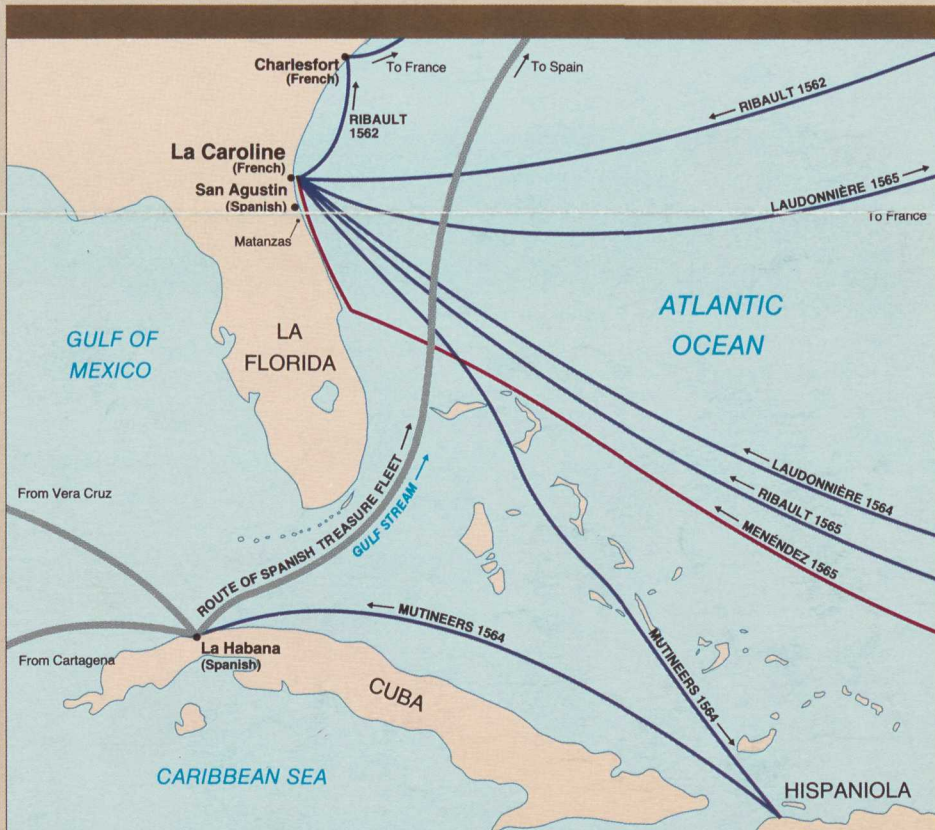
North America. The Spanish were uneasy about a French settlement because their treasure ships, while they followed the Florida coast, could be easy prey for suspected French raiders in their nearby haven at La Caroline.



Charles IX (1550-74) was crowned king at age 10. He was counseled by his mother, Catherine de Medici, and Admiral Coligny to license Ribault's voyage to North America.



Gaspard de Coligny (1516-72) Admiral of France and prominent Huguenot, was supported by Catherine de Medici in his plan to colonize New France with Huguenots.



Jean Ribault (c.1520-65) was hand picked by Admiral Coligny to explore Florida. He brought reinforcements to Fort de la Caroline in 1565 and died in its defense.



René de Laudonnière (c.1529-82) commanded Fort de la Caroline. He survived the Spanish massacre of the French and later wrote his *L'Histoire notable de la Florida*.

The Native Floridians

Engravings by Theodore de Bry after illustrations by colonist Jacques le Moyne. Courtesy Library of Congress.



"Floridians crossing over to an island to take their pleasure."



"Consecrating the skin of a stag to the sun."

"They be all naked and of goodly stature, mighty, faire and as well shapen . . . as any people in all the worlde, very gentill, curtiuous and of a good nature . . . the men be of tawny colour, hawke nosed and of a pleasant countenance . . . the women be well favored and modest . . ."

French explorer Jean Ribault was impressed by the first native peoples he encountered in Florida. The Timucuan under Chief Saturiwa, who met the French at the mouth of the River of May in 1562, were one of a number of Timucua-speaking tribes who inhabited central and north Florida and southeastern Georgia. They were the final stage of a culture whose way of life had remained essentially unchanged for more than 1000 years.

The Timucuan looked to the water for sustenance, settling along rivers or near the coast. (Their prehistoric ancestors are called "People of the Shell Mounds.") Besides collecting shellfish and fishing, they hunted and gathered in the forests and swamps and planted maize, squash, and beans. In their often palisaded villages, they lived in circular dwellings with conical palm-thatched roofs and walls of woven vines caulked with clay. Ceremonial squares in the larger villages were the scenes of festivals, dances, and religious ceremonies.

Related villages formed a loose political confederation under a head chief. In this caste society commoners paid deference to a hereditary elite, at the pinnacle of which sat the chief. Wealth and title were inherited within clans through the mother's brother.

The Timucuan helped their new neighbors adapt to conditions in the "new world"—sharing food and even helping them build a village and fort. The French, well aware of their minority status, initially made every effort to avoid alienating local tribes. Only when starvation threatened did this policy unravel. Mistrust turned to armed conflict, and the brief period of harmony between French and Indian came to an end. Yet the Timucuan apparently remained neutral during the attack by the Spanish against the French fort in 1565 and actively assisted De Gourgues's forces in the successful French recapture of the fort in 1568.

The Florida tribes could not long survive contact with Europeans. After driving out the French, the Spanish imposed tribute on the Timucuan and forced them into missions. Devastated by European disease and attacks by other Indians, the Timucuan culture rapidly disintegrated. From a population possibly numbering tens of thousands at the time of contact, only an estimated 550 Timucuan were still alive in 1698. Today there are no known Native Americans who call themselves Timucuan.

Timucuan hold an early place in the European consciousness of Native Americans. French colonist Jacques le Moyne's sketches of Timucuan ceremonies and customs provided Europeans with some of their first views of Native Americans. Franciscan priest Francisco Pareja's translation of a set of catechisms and confessionals from Spanish into Timucuan in 1612 was the first translation involving a Native American language.



Replica of the stone column placed by Jean Ribault at the mouth of the River of May (St. Johns River), May 2, 1562.

☆GPO:1991-281-954/40049

About Your Visit

The Memorial is about 13 miles east of downtown Jacksonville. Follow the Arlington Expressway (FL 115/Alt US 1/90) to Atlantic Blvd. (FL 10). Turn north on either Monument Rd. or St. Johns Bluff Rd.; then proceed east on Fort Caroline Rd.

Administration
Fort Caroline National Memorial is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is 12713 Fort Caroline Road, Jacksonville, FL 32225, is in immediate charge.

The Site in Later Years
The original site of La Caroline no longer exists. It was washed away after the river channel was deepened and widened in the 1880s. The construction of the fort model was based on a 16th-century sketch by Jacques le Moyne, the

colony's artist and mapmaker.

Protect Yourself and the Park
Use caution when walking along bluff trails and near the river. Mosquito repellent is advised. Picnicking is permitted, but no fires or

grills are allowed. Use litter containers. Please do not remove any historical or natural feature from the park.

