

ORANGE COUNTY REGIONAL  
**HISTORY CENTER**

HERITAGE SERIES

*Celebrating*

**HISPANIC  
HERITAGE  
MONTH**



**SEPTEMBER 15  
- OCTOBER 15**

# CELEBRATING HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

In honor of Hispanic Heritage Month, the Orange County Regional History Center is celebrating centuries of Hispanic influence, history, and culture in Florida.

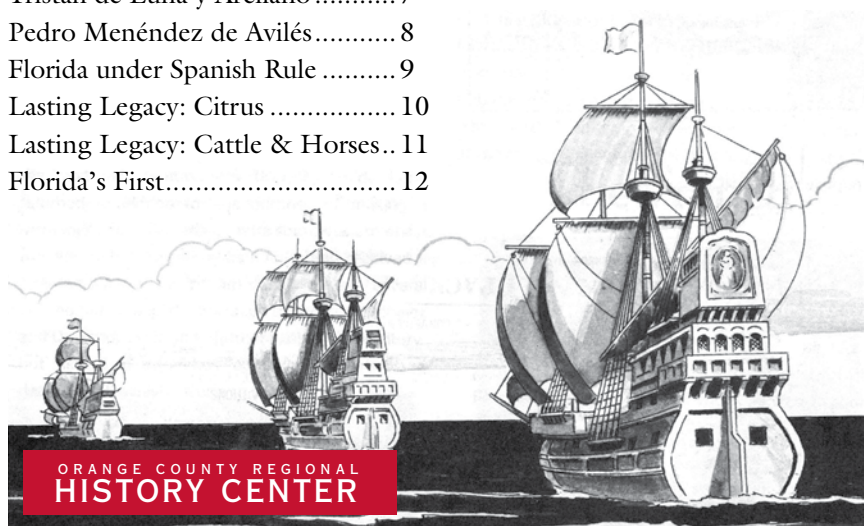
More than 500 years ago, Juan Ponce de León waded ashore on the northeast coast of Florida, looked around, and called the area La Florida in honor of Pascua Florida – Spain’s Eastertime celebration known as the “feast of the flowers.”

Since then, adventurers, politicians, and trailblazers have shaped the landscape of La Florida. Countless people came by ship hundreds of years ago, many fled Cuba after the Revolution, and others were born and raised here. We hope their stories inspire and encourage you to learn even more about these movers and shakers in Florida’s history.

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*Cover images, left to right: Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Joseph Marion Hernández, Hernando de Soto, Juan Ponce de León, and Robert “Bob” Martinez. All images from the State Archives of Florida.*



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## OVER 500 YEARS OF HISPANIC HISTORY IN FLORIDA

- 12,000 B.C. The first people move into Florida.
- 1513 Juan Ponce de León lands on the east coast of Florida.
- 1521 Ponce de León returns to Florida for a second expedition. He has conflicts with the Calusa Indians and is fatally wounded.
- 1527 Pánfilo de Narváez leads a second, unlucky expedition to Florida.
- 1539 Hernando de Soto lands near present-day Tallahassee and travels through the Southeast, crossing the Mississippi River twice.
- 1559 Tristán de Luna y Arellano attempts to establish Florida's first settlement near present-day Pensacola. Unfortunately, the settlement was not successful.
- 1565 Pedro Menéndez de Avilés establishes St. Augustine, the first permanent European settlement in North America.
- 1763 Florida is transferred to England as a result of the Seven Years' War.
- 1776 The American War for Independence begins. Florida stays loyal to England.
- 1783 The Treaty of Paris ends the American War for Independence. Florida is transferred back to Spain.
- 1817 American settlers, Spanish citizens, and Native Americans fight over territory.
- 1819 Florida is transferred to the United States by the Adams-Onís Treaty.
- 1821 Florida becomes a territory of the United States.
- 1845 Florida becomes a state.



## JUAN PONCE DE LEÓN

When Juan Ponce de León was a young man, he accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second voyage to the New World. Ponce de León returned later and built his home in Puerto Rico. The king of Spain granted him permission to explore north-west of Puerto Rico. When he reached land, he thought he had found a large island. Instead, he ended up being the first recorded European to set foot on Florida's coast.



RICK KILBY

### FAST FACTS

- Juan Ponce de León was the first governor of Puerto Rico.
- He is credited with being the first European to step onto Florida land.
- He discovered the Gulf Stream, which later helped Spain's ships return to Europe.
- According to legend, Ponce de León was searching for the fountain of youth, but he was really searching for gold when he reached Florida.
- The house he built in Puerto Rico for his family still stands today.
- His greyhound, Bercerillo, went with him on his explorations.
- He died in Cuba in 1521 but is buried in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

## PÁNFILO DE NARVÁEZ

After successfully exploring Cuba, Pánfilo de Narváez was asked by Spain to colonize Florida. Narváez landed near Tampa Bay. He took 300 soldiers and 40 horses and began an expedition onto land. He met Native Americans wearing gold ornaments, and when he asked where the gold came from, they pointed to the north, saying “Apalachee!”

Communicating with signs and gestures, the Spaniards thought they could find a great deal of gold. They went on a difficult and trouble-ridden march northward, but no gold was ever found.



### FAST FACTS

- Pánfilo de Narváez was born in Castile, Spain, in 1478.
- He joined the Spanish army and traveled to Jamaica in the New World.
- He split his forces in Florida between land and sea expeditions.
- Various disasters happened to his expedition, and only four of its 300 men survived.
- He was blown out to sea on a raft in the Gulf of Mexico, never to be seen again.

# HERNANDO DE SOTO

**H**ernando de Soto is largely known for conquering the Inca Empire in the New World and for leading the first expedition that reached the Mississippi River. He set sail for Florida with five large vessels and four smaller ones. These ships carried de Soto's army, as well as priests, women, horses, mules, war dogs, and pigs.

## FAST FACTS

- Hernando de Soto was born about 1500 into a poor but noble family.
- His family wanted him to become a lawyer, but he wanted to be an explorer.
- He was 14 when he went on his first expedition to the West Indies.
- De Soto explored what is present-day Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Alabama.
- He came across a Spanish survivor of the Narváez expedition 11 years earlier. The survivor was living with Native Americans.
- De Soto was only 42 when died from a fever in Louisiana.
- An American car was named for him – the DeSoto – because he traveled through more territory than any other explorer.



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## TRISTÁN DE LUNA Y ARELLANO

**T**ristán de Luna y Arellano's plan was to establish the first European colony in North America. In 1559, he sailed with 1,500 colonists into a large bay that's now called Pensacola Bay. Before his colonists could unload the ship's supplies, a violent storm sank the fleet.

The colonists lasted for two years in difficult circumstances but eventually had to give up their plan to stay. Most of them migrated to Mexico, Cuba, or back to Spain. Today, de Luna's misfortune provides opportunities for archaeologists and students. Every summer, the University of West Florida conducts field studies that allow students to explore the site of his colony. They also study his expedition's shipwrecks and search for lost objects that tell de Luna's story.



STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA

### FAST FACTS

- Tristán de Luna y Arellano was born in Borobia, Spain, in 1519.
- His father was Don Carlos de Luna, the governor of Yucatan in Central America.
- Tristán was a wealthy and religious nobleman, known to be a moody soldier.
- He established Pensacola, one of the earliest European settlements in North America.



## PEDRO MENÉNDEZ DE AVILÉS

When the king of Spain learned that France was building colonies in Florida, he sent Pedro Menéndez de Avilés to drive out the French. In 1565, Menéndez de Avilés sailed to a small harbor just south of the French settlement, called Fort Caroline. The Spanish outnumbered the French and forced them out of Florida.

Menéndez de Avilés and his expedition set up a camp, and with the help of nearby Timucuan people, built their own fort, which became St. Augustine – the first permanent, continuously occupied European settlement in North America.



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### FAST FACTS

- His full name was Pedro Menéndez de Avilés y Alonso de la Campa.
- He was born in 1519 at Avilés, Spain, and was one of 20 brothers and sisters.
- He is the founding father of St. Augustine.
- He was appointed governor of Cuba.



# FLORIDA UNDER SPANISH RULE

## FIRST SPANISH PERIOD (1565-1763)

After Juan Ponce de León's first landing in 1513, several countries fought to control Florida, including Spain, Great Britain, and France. Before Florida became a territory of the United States, it was mostly under Spanish rule. In 1565, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés founded St. Augustine, which marked the start of the First Spanish Period.



STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA

## SECOND SPANISH PERIOD AND THE TRANSFER OF FLORIDA (1783-1821)

In 1763, following the end of the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), Spain gave control of Florida to the British in exchange for Havana, Cuba, which the British had captured from the Spanish during the war. The British did not control Florida for long, however. After the War for American Independence (1776-1783), Spain gained control of Florida again through the Treaty of Paris. This started the Second Spanish Period.

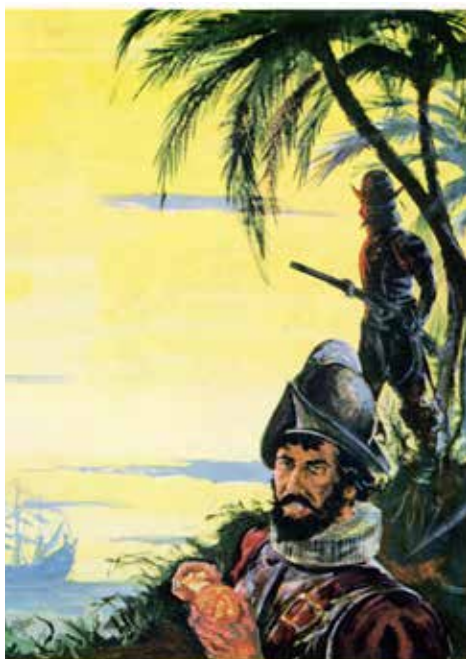
In the early 1800s, tensions were mounting among American settlers, Native Americans, and the United States government. This conflict resulted in the signing of the Adams-Onís Treaty in 1819, which transferred Florida from Spain to the United States. Florida became an official territory in 1821 and eventually a state in 1845.



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## LASTING LEGACY: CITRUS

**O**ranges are not native to Florida. The Sunshine State was not home to the orange until Spanish explorers brought citrus with them in the early 1500s. Currently, Florida is the largest producer of oranges in the United States, accounting for more than 70 percent of the oranges consumed. Without the contributions of early Spanish explorers, the citrus industry would not be what it is today.



### FAST FACTS

- Commercial production of citrus started in the late 1800s when railroads extended into the state and allowed growers to ship countrywide.
- Polk County is the top citrus-producing county in the state.
- The Great Freeze of 1894-1895 destroyed most of Florida's early orange groves.
- To avoid freezes, most groves today are located in the central and southern regions of Florida.
- It takes three to four oranges to make one 8-ounce glass of juice.
- The orange blossom is Florida's state flower.
- Florida citrus is an \$8.6 billion industry, providing more than 45,000 jobs.

## LASTING LEGACY: CATTLE & HORSES

Like citrus, cattle and horses are not native to the United States. Spanish explorers brought the animals to North America and used them to help to establish and maintain missions and settlements, most notably St. Augustine.



STATE ARCHIVES OF FLORIDA

Between conflicts among countries and explorers abandoning their settlements, the horses and cattle were released into the wild. Over time, they adapted to Florida's harsh climate and became ideal animals for later settlers to domesticate in the 1800s. Today, descendants of these first livestock have become breeds officially recognized as Cracker Horses and Cracker Cattle.

### FAST FACTS

- Florida's cattle industry is the oldest in the United States.
- By the 1600s, Spanish ranchers were exporting cattle to Cuba, establishing a trade route that would last more than 300 years.
- Raising cattle became a cultural and economic way of life for the Seminoles, starting in the 1700s.
- During the Civil War, Florida ranchers were paid in Confederate money, which became worthless after the war. The ranchers then demanded to be paid in gold, and millions of Spanish gold doubloons entered the economy through trade with Cuba.

## FLORIDA'S FIRST

Whether they were born in the United States or immigrated, these extraordinary men and women have made strides in Florida history and continue to inspire others to follow in their footsteps.

- **Joseph Marion Hernández** (1788-1857): The first Hispanic member of Congress and the Florida's first territorial delegate (1821-1823). He was born in St. Augustine when Florida was under Spanish rule and not yet a territory of the United States.
- **Maria Mestre de los Dolores Andreu** (1801-?): The first female lighthouse keeper in Florida and the first Hispanic-American woman to command a federal shore installation and serve in the Coast Guard.
- **Robert "Bob" Martinez** (born 1934): Florida's first governor of Spanish descent, elected to office in 1987. He was born and raised in Tampa and served as the city's mayor from 1979 to 1986.
- **Melquiades "Mel" Martinez** (born 1946): The first Cuban-American U.S. senator, elected in 2004. He came to Florida in 1962 as a teenager through Operation Pedro Pan and lived in Orange County with foster families until his family arrived in the United States in 1966.
- **Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (born 1952): The first Hispanic woman elected to Congress, in 1989, representing Florida's 27th Congressional District. She was born in Havana, Cuba, and fled to the United States when she was 8 years old. She has a doctorate in Education and was an educator before pursuing a career in politics.
- **Johanna Lopez** (born 1972): The first Hispanic person to receive the honor of being named Orange County's Teacher of the Year, in 2017. She has taught at Colonial High School for more than 15 years and has been an active leader in the Hispanic Honor Society.
- **Darren Soto** (born 1978): The first Floridian of Puerto Rican descent to serve in Congress, elected in 2016 to represent the 9th Congressional District, which includes all of Osceola and portions of Orange and Polk counties.

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