

Rediscovering Pensacola's Lost Spanish Missions

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Abstract

In 1763, 108 Yamasee and Apalachee Indians accompanied the Spanish evacuees from Pensacola to a new home in Veracruz, and two years later just 47 survivors laid out a new town north of Veracruz called San Carlos de Chachalacas, electing dual mayors representing each ethnicity. These expatriates were the remnants of two Pensacola-area missions that had been burned by Creek raids in 1761—San Antonio de Punta Rasa and San Joseph de Escambe. This paper will explore the origins and history of these missions, and the ongoing search for archaeological traces of their existence.

Paper presented at the 65th Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Archaeological Conference, Charlotte, North Carolina, Nov. 15, 2008.

In 1763, Spanish forces withdrew from Presidio San Miguel de Panzacola as part of the terms of the Treaty of Paris ending the Seven Years War (1756-1763) (Gold 1969). Among the 722 evacuees enumerated that summer were 108 “Christian Indians,” including both Yamasee and Apalachee Indians who had been living in a makeshift mission community just outside the fort since their twin mission villages had been burned by Upper Creek Indians in 1761 (Bernet 1763; Escudero et al. 1763; Siebert 1932; Gold 1965, 1969; García de León 1996). Just two years after the evacuation, a new town was laid out for the 47 surviving Pensacola Indian refugees just north of Veracruz, Mexico, called San Carlos de Chachalacas, where the residents elected twin mayors, one Yamasee and one Apalachee, to serve under a single elected governor (Amoscotigui y Bermudo 1765a-e; Amoscotigui y Bermudo and Sánchez de Mora 1765; Palacio y Varros 1765). In a move that was clearly no coincidence, the first Apalachee mayor of San Carlos was a man named Don Juan Marcos Fant, who based on other contemporary documentation would have been in his mid to late 60s at that time (Fant 1761). Noted to have been an “Ancient Cacique of the Apalachee,” Juan Marcos had been the ruling leader of mission San Joseph de Escambe at the time of its destruction in 1761, and for many years previously. Indeed, he also appears to have been the very same Apalachee chief Juan Marcos who descended from the Creek Indian country nearly half a century before, in 1717, to renew diplomatic ties with Spain after the disastrous Yamasee War two years previously (González de Barcia Carballido y Zuñiga 1723: 330; see also Salinas Varona 1717a-b). He and several Creek Indian leaders were even sent all the way to Mexico City that year to meet the Viceroy of New Spain, where he was given the formal title of “Governor of the Apalachees” before returning to Pensacola. The following year, in 1718, Juan Marcos led a band of Apalachee Indians to end their 14-year exile among the Creeks, returning to Spanish territory and settling along the

western margins of Spanish Florida near Presidio Santa María de Galve at Pensacola (González de Barcia Carballido y Zuñiga 1723: 341-342).

Presuming this interpretation is accurate, Juan Marcos Fant appears to have been born sometime in the mid to late 1690s in the Apalachee mission province, and was likely taken as a young child into the Creek country following the devastating English-sponsored slave raids of 1704, and raised there among the Creeks as one of several hundred Apalachee Indians in exile. Only when he was a young adult did he finally return to Spanish territory as an Apalachee chief, ultimately establishing what would become a long-term Apalachee presence in the vicinity of Pensacola Bay, neighboring a series of three successive Spanish presidios through 1763. When he finally boarded a Spanish vessel bound for Veracruz in 1763, it was actually his second trip to Mexico, this time as a permanent immigrant. From the time of his birth in Apalachee to his death in Mexico, the life of Chief Juan Marcos Fant exemplified the turbulent history of the native peoples of the northwest Florida Gulf coastal region, and their connection to the fate of Pensacola's three successive presidios during the First Spanish Period. Despite this, at present we know remarkably little about the bulk of his life, and about the many other Native Americans who lived in and around Pensacola during the 18th century. Though in the past decade historians and archaeologists have conducted extensive new archaeological and historical investigations regarding Pensacola's three successive presidios (e.g. Bense 1999, 2003; Harris and Eschbach 2006; Childers and Cotter 1998; Clune et al. 2003, 2004), and have also finally begun to explore the subject of Native American participation and interaction with these presidios in greater depth than was ever possible before (e.g. Dysart 1999; Harris 1999, 2003, 2005, 2007a), much still remains to be uncovered. This is perhaps most notably the case with regard to the actual locations of the towns and missions in which Pensacola's 18th-century Native American

inhabitants lived and died over the course of many decades. My hope in this paper is to explore the origins and history of these as-yet poorly-known mission communities, and to provide a broader context within which their archaeological remains may eventually be found and interpreted.

At the time of the 1698 establishment of Presidio Santa María de Galve, not only had Pensacola Bay's indigenous 16th-century populations been gone for well over a century, but its subsequent 17th-century immigrants, the Pensacola Indians, were by that time also in severe decline, soon to join the Mobila inland to the west (Harris 1999: 8-22; 2003: 257-269; 2007b; Clune et al. 2003: 28; Dysart 1999: 61-64; see also Hann 2006: 69-78). The immigrant Pensacola coincidentally also lent their name to the bay that had originally been known as Ochuse during successive Spanish expeditions between 1539 and 1561 (e.g. Hudson 1997: 144-145, 411-412; Hudson et al. 1989). Following the disastrous failure of Tristan de Luna's 1559-1561 colonial attempt at Pensacola Bay, and the subsequent success of Pedro Menéndez de Avilés's establishment of St. Augustine in 1565, the Pensacola Bay region was almost wholly ignored by Spain until French explorers finally descended the Mississippi River into the Gulf of Mexico in 1682. As a result of this incursion, the 1680s and 1690s were marked by a significant flurry of competing Spanish and French activity along the northern Gulf coast, capped off by the establishment of the first Spanish presidio in Pensacola Bay in 1698, and parallel French settlements just west in Biloxi in 1699 and Mobile in 1702 (e.g. Dunn 1917; Ford 1939; Manucy 1959; Coker 1999: 6-11). The end result of this process was the establishment of a remote Spanish military outpost in the midst of a largely depopulated zone along the newly-established French-Spanish borderlands. Supplied almost exclusively out of Veracruz, Mexico, the new presidio of Santa María de Galve had every reason to seek out and welcome any Native

American support it could find, though this was difficult to realize during the presidio's first years.

Not insignificantly, Santa María was established at the zenith of the Indian slave trade era in the American Southeast, when Native American groups armed by the English were actively engaged in slave raids across a vast region along the margins of greater Spanish Florida (e.g. Gally 2002; Worth 2008). While Westo Indians had savaged much of the Southeast between 1659 and 1680, it was their successors the Creek and Yamasee who took the Indian slave trade in the lower Southeast to its peak level of activity between 1685 and 1715 (e.g. Crane 2004: 26-161; Hahn 2000: 110-232; 2004: 40-80). While this was in part the reason for the initial absence of Native American populations in the vicinity of Pensacola Bay, it was also eventually responsible for the arrival of what would become Spain's principal Indian allies and neighbors there during the 18th century, namely the Apalachee.

Though early in its history the Santa María presidio was supplied in part from the populous Apalachee mission province to the east, the wholesale annihilation of Apalachee by Creek and Carolina English forces in 1704 put an early end to this practice, and resulted in a complete rearrangement of the social landscape of greater Spanish Florida (Clune et al. 2003: 54, 60; Covington 1972; Hann 1988: 60-62, 264-317, 385-397). In the aftermath, subsequent raids against remaining Timucuan missions resulted in the complete withdrawal of all Florida missions to St. Augustine by 1706 (Hann 1996: 296-304; Worth 1998: 145-149). Not only was Santa María de Galve left far more vulnerable without a nearby Spanish garrison, but it was also cut off from a nearby stable source of Indian labor and foodstuffs. However, an unexpected boon from the 1704 raids on Apalachee was the arrival in the summer of 1704 of a large band of Apalachee Indian refugees along the Spanish-French borderlands (Covington 1964; Hann 1988: 305-308;

Harris 2003: 269-272; Clune et al. 2003: 28-29). Spanish and French reports late that summer indicate that some 800 Christian Apalachee and Chacato who had fled west from their homeland arrived first in Spanish Pensacola, with most subsequently passing west to French Mobile by August and September (Higginbotham 1991: 189-194). From 1704 onward, the Apalachee presence at Mobile Bay was both substantial and long-lived, including the routine appearance of Apalachee Indians in French parish registries through mid-century, as well as the common occurrence of Apalachee pottery in archaeological contexts in Old Mobile (e.g. Cordell 2001). These French-allied Apalachee were still present when France delivered this territory to British authorities in 1763, and the descendants of this group still live in Louisiana today (Hunter 1994; McEwan 2004: 674).

What is important to realize, however, is that not all the Apalachees chose to relocate to French territory, and that a not insubstantial number of these refugees remained in Spanish territory. In 1705, Apalachee leader Don Joseph de la Cruz Cui requested tools, church ornaments, and seed corn for the ongoing establishment of a new village of 120 adults, not including children, along the Perdido River some 2 ½ leagues distant from Santa María, just east of the French-Spanish border (Cui 1705). Within a month, rations were issued for 20 “principal men,” and the community is documented to have survived at least until the following September, when contact was officially prohibited between the Spanish residents of Santa María and their Apalachee neighbors in order to avoid abuses (Mendo de Urbina 1705a-b; Landeche 1706). Even after devastating Creek raids against the presidio in 1707, there is clear evidence for the continued presence of some 80 Indian laborers receiving rations at Santa María de Galve in subsequent years (Childers and Cotter 1998: 87-91; Harris 2003: 270-274). It is presently unclear what proportion of these local Indians may have been living among the Spanish at Santa

María at any given time in comparison to those who lived in a distinct community, but given the turbulence of the Indian slave trade era, it seems likely that these proportions may have fluctuated over time depending on circumstances.

Despite the fact that many of the Apalachee refugees remained in French territory near Mobile after 1704, the Apalachee would nevertheless ultimately form the backbone of Pensacola's local Indian population through 1763. Part of the reason for this has to do with the impact of the Yamasee War of 1715, when Yamasee and Creek slavers sparked a widespread rebellion against their English sponsors, ending what had been a virtual diplomatic and economic monopoly by Carolina in the interior regions of the lower Southeast for many decades (e.g. Crane 2004: 162-186; Hahn 2004: 81-120; Oatis 2004; Ramsey 2008). Apart from resulting in a general withdrawal of Yamasee and Creek towns from the Carolina frontier—the Creeks moved west to their original homeland along with part of the Yamasees, while most of the Yamasees moved south to Spanish St. Augustine—another long-term impact of this rebellion included the eventual return of a number of Apalachee Indians who had been living in exile among the English-allied Creeks since 1704 (Covington 1972: 374-378; Hann 1988: 289-291, 294-305). The original number of these Apalachee expatriates was not small, including as many as 638 individuals living in two distinct villages along the Savannah River enumerated on a South Carolina census dating to 1715 (Nairne et al. 1715). Moreover, this figure did not include other Apalachee families said to have been living among 11 Lower Creek towns on the Ocmulgee River in central Georgia in 1708, and an uncertain number of Apalachee slaves held both by the Lower and Upper Creeks by the time of the Yamasee War (Johnson et al. 1708; González de Barcia Carballido y Zuñiga 1723: 332, 339-340; Boyd 1949: 21-22). The majority of these Apalachee exiles presumably retreated westward with the Creek towns in 1715, settling at least

temporarily in the Chattahoochee River homeland of the Lower Creeks, not counting those that are known to have been held among the Upper Creeks.

The first appearance of the Apalachee exiles at Pensacola dates to 1718, when, as noted above, following his diplomatic visit to Mexico, Governor Juan Marcos established a new Apalachee town at a location near the mouth of the River of the Chiscas (the modern Escambia River), some five leagues north of Santa María de Galve (González de Barcia Carballido y Zuñiga 1723: 341-342). Not only did this settlement contain Apalachee Indians drawn from Santa María, but it also included a number of Apalachees who relocated from French territory at that time, as well as an indeterminate number of freed Apalachee slaves and likely others who descended from the interior Creek country voluntarily, either shortly before or after Juan Marcos' visit to Mexico (Salinas Varona 1717a-b; González de Barcia Carballido y Zuñiga 1723: 331-340). The town was originally designated Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, y San Luís, and was said to have 100 residents upon its foundation, a number that was said to be growing each day. In a related move, the following year Juan Marcos established yet another new Apalachee settlement far to the east, near the recently-constructed Spanish fort at San Marcos de Apalache, including some of the residents from the Soledad mission (González de Barcia Carballido y Zuñiga 1723: 347-348). Based on admittedly scant documentation, both new Apalachee communities appear to have survived as nuclei of Native American populations adjacent to the two westernmost Spanish garrisons in greater Spanish Florida over the next two decades, despite the French capture of Santa María in 1719, the temporary retreat of Spanish forces to St. Joseph's Bay, and the eventual establishment of a new Spanish presidio on the barrier island of Santa Rosa beginning late in 1722 (e.g. Peña 1720; Solana 1726; Morales et al. 1735; Ojitos 1736).

Unfortunately, available documentation for the next decades makes surprisingly little reference to the specific mission communities surrounding the island presidio of Santa Rosa, apart from routine ledger entries for rations designated for up to 120 “domestic Indians” who were said to “come and go” as laborers in the presidio, and occasional references to ongoing conversion efforts among the local Indians (e.g. Urueña 1724a-b, 1725a-b, 1740a-b, 1741a-b, 1743, 1752, 1753a-b; Primo de Ribera and Almonacid 1727). Nevertheless, in 1740 and 1741, two sets of events of significance to Native American relations in Pensacola are documented to have occurred. First, the devastation wrought by a hurricane in September of 1740 prompted the interim commander Nicolás Ximénez de Florencia to begin construction in 1741 of a more secure warehouse on the mainland at the location known as San Miguel, along with a brick oven for constructing a more secure fort at the mouth of the bay (Urueña 1741b, 1753a). These constructions not only formed the basis for the later transfer of Presidio Santa Rosa to San Miguel in 1756, but more importantly established a resident Spanish presence on the mainland, in the form of a small detachment of soldiers.

The second set of events, while independent, was also crucial, in that Spanish accounts note the formal establishment in 1741 of an entirely new mission, called the “pueblo of the Chiscas,” during the same period as the construction of the warehouse and brick oven noted above (Urueña 1741a). Additional rations totaling just 30 individuals were added to the existing total of 120 Indians already rationed at Santa Rosa, and a completely new set of church furniture and ornaments was requested. Given that the original Chisca Indians had been forcibly ejected from their palisaded town, probably on the upper Escambia-Conecuh River drainage, in 1677, some 64 years previously, and seem to have been long extinct as a people by this date, the most likely explanation for the mission’s name would be its location in relation to the river itself,

which had retained the name “River of the Chiscas” throughout the early 18th century (Lajonk and Siscara [n.d.]; Galloway et al. 2004: 176-177; but see also Hann 2006: 52-68). This town appears to have represented a second mission town in the vicinity of Pensacola, since the mission named San Luís was also noted in this same document (Urueña 1741a). Presuming that San Luís was the descendant community to the earlier Apalachee mission of Nuestra Señora de Soledad y San Luís, then the new Chiscas mission most likely represented a recently-arrived group to the Pensacola Bay area.

It is probably no coincidence, therefore, that Florida Governor Manuel de Montiano later reported in 1747 that in the aftermath of the English seige of St. Augustine in 1740, a number of terrorized mission Indians living in that vicinity “resolved to pass to Pensacola, where those that managed to arrive there have remained ever since” (Montiano 1747). Given the predominance of Yamasee Indians among the refugee missions around St. Augustine during that period, as well as later evidence for the presence of twin Apalachee and Yamasee missions in the vicinity of Pensacola during the 1750s and 1760s, it is hardly a stretch to suppose that the “pueblo of the Chiscas” was in fact a group of fugitive Yamasee who settled along the Escambia River or Escambia Bay the year after Oglethorpe’s 1740 seige on St. Augustine, forming the nucleus for the later Yamasee mission so well documented toward the end of the First Spanish period in Pensacola.

From 1741 on, therefore, Presidio Santa Rosa appears to have had two neighboring mission communities: an earlier Apalachee mission, and a later Yamasee mission. While documentation is sparse for the next years, by the end of the decade there is reason to believe that these Apalachee and Yamasee communities were engaged in an increasingly substantial interaction and trade with the Creek Indians of the interior. This trade seems likely to have been

facilitated by the presence of one of the allied Upper Creek towns, named Tawasa, not far up the Escambia River from the Bay. As early as 1738, this town was noted to be the nearest Upper Creek town, at only 18 leagues from the Spanish presidio of Santa Rosa, and subsequent evidence regarding the precise location of this site in 1759 suggests this may have been measured as river miles, making the straight line distance even closer (Tijanape Valero 1738; Roman de Castilla y Lugo 1759; see also Galloway et al. 2004: 186-187). Tawasa during this period seems to have been principally an Upper Creek outpost, since all remaining towns were noted in 1738 to be clustered on the order of 70 leagues inland. This and later documentation strongly implies that there was a major trade route up the Escambia River and into present-day Alabama, where trade and interaction with the Upper Creeks was carried out routinely during the early 18th century.

In about 1749, one of the mission towns was noted to have moved from its original location just 2 leagues from the Spanish outpost at San Miguel across Escambia Bay to a place called Punta Rasa (Yarza y Ascona 1750). Later evidence strongly suggests that this represented the initial establishment of the Yamasee mission later known as San Antonio de Punta Rasa, which comprised one of the two surviving missions a decade later. The move was evidently designed to allow greater access to trade with English-allied Creek Indians, particularly by placing the mission across the bay at a greater distance from the Spanish detachment of 8 men located at San Miguel. Subsequent complaints by Spanish officials regarding the increasing degree of commerce and interaction between the Apalachee and Yamasee Indians and the nearby English-allied Indians prompted orders from the Viceroy of New Spain to reverse this trend, but even as late as 1753 the Pensacola commander reported that he had been unable to spare enough

soldiers to place within the Indian towns themselves, and that the illicit commerce continued unabated (Güemes y Horcasitas 1751; Yberri 1753).

Perhaps at about the same time, the local Apalachee mission town under Governor Juan Marcos was re-established under the name San Joseph de Escambe, known from later documentation to have been located some 12 leagues by water up the Escambia River (Ullate 1761: 238r, 245r). In 1761 a Spaniard named Antonio de Torres (1761) had reportedly resided in this town a total of 11 years, suggesting that its establishment might date to as early as 1750. The Escambe mission, which would ultimately lend its name to the river that had once been known as that of the Chiscas, would also survive through the 1760s as the final incarnation of the Apalachee mission near Spanish Pensacola.

In the interim, however, circumstances ultimately prompted the Spanish to move closer to the Indians on the mainland itself. The near-total destruction of the Santa Rosa presidio as a result of a November hurricane in 1752 ultimately provided sufficient reason to justify the relocation of the vulnerable Santa Rosa presidio to the existing mainland outpost at San Miguel beginning in the summer of 1754, and on July 14, 1756 the transfer was officially formalized, including the authorization of a new cavalry company, fifteen members of which were later stationed in Mission San Joseph (Eraso 1754; Yberri 1756; Ahumada y Villalón 1756; Ullate 1761).

While the Seven Years War between 1756 and 1763 of course ultimately led to the Spanish evacuation of Pensacola, it also resulted in a remarkable abundance of documentary information regarding the Native American neighbors of the new Presidio San Miguel, in part due to the fact that these two mission communities ultimately played a significant role in

defining Spanish relations with the Upper Creeks, who at that time were entertaining simultaneous alliances with French, English, and Spanish powers. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the Upper Creeks included several competing factions, some of which were allied to the French at Fort Toulouse, others of whom were allied to the English traders living nearby, and still others of whom were clearly interested in relations with the Spanish at Pensacola (e.g. Hahn 2004: 229-270). While the richly-documented details of this period in Pensacola are far beyond the scope of this paper (see, for example, Griffin 1959: 259-262), suffice it to say that Andrés Escudero, the young Yamasee chief of Punta Rasa and then principal leader of the Pensacola-area mission Indians, ultimately brokered a formal peace treaty between the Spanish and the Upper Creeks on April 14, 1758, eventually leading to an increase in direct commerce between the Creeks and the Spanish mission Indians, and the establishment of two new Upper Creek communities near Spanish territory (one at the previous site of Tawasa just north of Escambe). Documents from this era indicate that the trade network became so well developed that the horses used by the Spanish cavalry unit at San Miguel and Escambe were purchased not in Mexico, but instead in exchange for rum from the Yamasees at Punta Rasa, who themselves are likely to have acquired the horses from Upper Creeks or English traders in their villages (Ullate 1761: 223r-225r). Nevertheless, despite this increased interaction, or perhaps in part because of it, wartime trouble eventually flared, and both the Apalachee mission at San Joseph de Escambe and the Yamasee mission at San Antonio de Punta Rasa were burned to the ground by Creek raiders in 1761, even though by that time small Spanish garrisons had been emplaced in both (Roman de Castilla y Lugo 1761; Eraso 1761; Escobar 1761; Ullate 1761). The survivors fled south to Presidio San Miguel, where they ultimately spent their last two years in Florida before the evacuation to Veracruz. By the time that the elderly chief Juan Marcos Fant

set sail in 1763, he had likely spent three-quarters of his life living in a mission near Spanish Pensacola, and had witnessed an important and poorly-known era in the history of Northwest Florida's turbulent colonial period.

As a final note, it is important to acknowledge that none of the Native American missions or other communities discussed above has yet been identified archaeologically. However, extensive and sophisticated analysis of the comparatively abundant sample of Native American pottery found in archaeological excavations at all three of Pensacola's Spanish presidios has recently been performed by Norma Harris (1999, 2003, 2005, 2007a), providing an important window into the material culture of these groups, which clearly shows varying degrees of influence from contemporary Apalachee, Yamasee, and Creek traditions. Ongoing work by Jennifer Melcher (2008) also focuses on aboriginally-produced Colono Wares in these same presidios, and promises to provide additional fine-grained insights into the Native American presence in and around Pensacola, and their economic role within these frontier presidios. What remains to be done, however, is to conduct systematic archaeological reconnaissance and testing designed to locate one or more of the Pensacola missions themselves. Given the extent to which both Apalachee and Yamasee ethnicities appear to be spatially segregated on the landscape (e.g. Micon 1761: 123v), while both groups simultaneously engaged in extensive and long-term interaction with both Spaniards on the coast and Upper Creek Indians in the deep interior, there would seem to be immense potential for asking and answering important questions regarding the cultural dynamics of the colonial era. Not least among these questions is the extent to which either Apalachee or Yamasee immigrants to this region may, or may not, have retained their prior material culture in the context of the new and dynamic social landscape of 18th-century

northwest Florida, and particularly in such close proximity to other Native American groups as well as Europeans. This paper, I hope, represents one step toward that goal.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful for the generous help and thoughtful input provided by the following colleagues and students during the development of this paper: Elizabeth Benchley, Norma Harris, and John Phillips of the Archaeology Institute at the University of West Florida (UWF); Judith Bense of the Office of the President, UWF; Jennifer Melcher in the Department of Anthropology, UWF; and Judith Hernández Aranda of the Instituto Nacional de Arqueología e Historia (INAH) in Veracruz.

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