

“Scenes in Florida in Picturesque America”

With Illustrations by Harry Fenn,
1872

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Peggy B. Perazzo
Email: pbperazzo@comcast.net
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“Scenes in Florida” in *Picturesque America*

With Illustrations by Harry Fenn, 1872, pp. 118-119, 185-195

“The quaint little **city of St. Augustine, Florida**, the oldest European settlement in the United States, is situated on the Atlantic coast, in a narrow peninsula formed by the Sebastian and Matanzas Rivers, on the west side of a harbor which is separated from the ocean by the low and narrow island of Anastasia. It lies about forty miles south of the mouth of the great river St. John’s, and about one hundred and sixty miles south from Savannah, in Georgia....”

“The most conspicuous feature in the town is the old fort of San Marco, which is built of coquina, a unique conglomerate of fine shells and sand, found in large quantities on Anastasia Island, at the entrance of the harbor, and mined with great ease, though it becomes hard by exposure to the air. It is quarried in large blocks, and forms a wall well calculated to resist cannon-shot, because it does not splinter when struck.

“The fort stands on the sea-front at one end of the town. It was a hundred years in building, and was completed in 1756, as is attested by the following inscription, which may still be seen over the gateway, together with the arms of Spain, handsomely carved in stone: ‘Don Fernando being King of Spain, and the Field-Marshal Don Alonzo Fernando Herida being governor and captain-general of this place, St. Augustine of Florida and its provinces, this fort was finished in the year 1756. The works were directed by Captain-Engineer Don Pedro d Brazos y Garen.’



(photo caption) “Fort of San Marco, St. Augustine.”

“While owned by the British, this was said to be the handsomest fort in the king’s dominions. Its castellated battlements; its formidable bastions, with their frowning guns; its lofty and imposing sally-port, surrounded by the royal Spanish arms; its portcullis, moat, draw-bridge; its circular and ornate sentry-boxes at each principal parapet-angle; its commanding lookout tower; and its stained and moss-covered massive walls - impress the external observer as a relic of the distant past: while a ramble through its heavy casements - its crumbling Romish chapel, with elaborate portico and inner altar and holy-water niches; its dark passages, gloomy vaults, and more recently-discovered dungeons - brings you to ready credence of its many traditions of inquisitorial tortures; of decaying skeletons, found in the latest-opened chambers, chained to the rusty ring-bolts, and of alleged subterranean passages to the neighboring convent....”



Coquina Quarry, Anastasia Island.

(photo caption) “Coquina Quarry, Anastasia Island.”

“In 1740, war again existing between Spain and England, an expedition against St. Augustine was organized by the famous General Oglethorpe, then Governor of Georgia. He obtained assistance from South Carolina and from England a naval force of six ships. About the first of June his forces reached

St. Augustine, which was defended by a not very numerous garrison commanded by Don Manual de Monteano, the Governor of Florida, a man of energy and resolution. After a siege of five or six weeks, carried on chiefly by bombardment from Anastasia Island, Oglethorpe became satisfied that he could not take the place, especially as his fleet had withdrawn in apprehension of bad weather, and he accordingly embarked his troops and sailed away on July 9th.

“Two years later, the Spanish Governor of Florida, the energetic Monteano, having received reinforcements from Cuba, sailed from St. Augustine with thirty-six vessels and three thousand men to the system of Vauban. Half a mile to the north was a line, with a broad ditch and bastions running from the Sebastian Creek to St. Mark’s River; a mile from that was another fortified line, with some redoubts, forming second line of communication between a staccato fort upon St. Sebastian River, and Fort Moosa, upon the St. Mark’s River. Within the first line, near the town, was a small settlement of Germans, who had a church of their own. Upon the St. Mark’s River, within the second line, was also an Indian town, with a stone church built by the Indians themselves, and in very good taste. These lines may be still distinctly traced. The churches spoken of, outside the city, as well as Forts Moosa and Staccata, have long since disappeared, but their sites are known.

“During the English occupation, large buildings were erected for barracks, of sufficient extent to quarter five regiments of troops. The brick of which they were built was brought from New York, although the island opposite the city afforded a much better building material in the coquina stone. The lower story only of the British barracks was built of brick, the upper story being of wood. These barracks stood at the southern extremity of the town, to the south of the present barracks, and the length and great extent of the buildings front on the bay added greatly to the appearance....”



The City Gate.

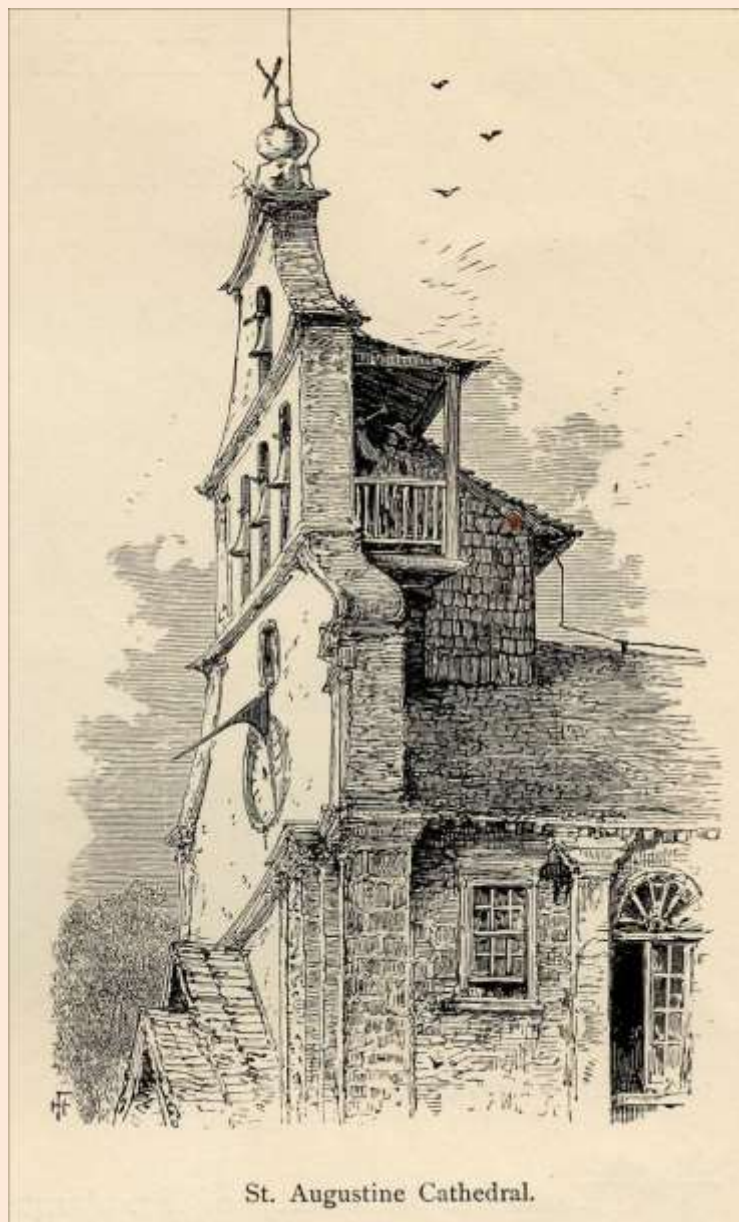
(photo caption) “The City Gate.”



(photo caption) "The Convent-Gate."

“...The old Convent of St. Mary’s is a suggestive relic of the days of papal rule. The new convent is a tasteful building of the ancient coquina. The United-States barracks, recently remodeled and improved, are said to have been built as a convent, or mastery. The old government-house, or palace, is now in use as the post-office and United-States court-rooms. As its rear is a well-preserved relic of what seems to have been a fortification to protect the town from an over-the-river or inland attack. An older house than this, formerly occupied by the attorney-general, was pulled down a few years ago. Its ruins are still a curiosity, and are called (though incorrectly) the governor’s house.

“The ‘Plaza de la Constitucion’ is a fine public square in the centre of the town, on which stand the ancient markets, and which is faced by the cathedral, the old palace, the convent, a modern Episcopal church, and other fine structures. In the centre of the plaza stands a monument erected in honor of the Spanish Liberal Constitution.



(photo caption) “St. Augustine cathedral.”

“The old Huguenot burying-ground is a spot of much interest, so is the military burying-ground, where rest the remains of those who fell near here during the prolonged Seminole War. Under three pyramids of coquina, stuccoed and whitened, are the ashes of Major Dade and one hundred and seven men of his command, who were massacred by Osceola and his band. A fine sea-wall of nearly a mile in length, built of coquina, with a coping of granite, protects the entire ocean-front of the city, and furnishes a delightful promenade of a moonlight evening. In full view of this is the old light-house on Anastasia Island, built more than a century ago, and now surmounted with a fine revolving lantern.

“The appearance of St. Augustine to the visitor from other parts of the country is as quaint and peculiar as its history is bloody and varied. Nothing at all like it is to be seen in any part of the United States. It resembles some of the old towns of Spain and Italy. The streets are quite narrow; one, which is nearly a mile long, being but fifteen feet wide, and that on which a principal hotel stands being but twelve feet, while the widest of all is but twenty-five feet. An advantage of these narrow streets in this warm climate is that they give shade, and increase the draught of air through them as through a flue. Indeed, some of the streets seem almost like a flue rather than an open way; for many of the houses, with high roof and dormer-windows, have hanging balconies along their second story, which seem almost to touch each other over the narrow street; and the families sitting in these of a warm evening can chat confidentially, or even shake hands with their over-the-way neighbors.

“The street-walls of the houses are frequently extended in front of the side-garden - the house-roof, and perhaps a side-balcony, covering this extension - or the houses are built around uncovered courts, so that, passing through the main door of a building, you find yourself still in the open air, instead of within the dwelling. These high and solid garden-walls are quite common along the principal streets; and an occasional latticed door gives you a peep into the attractive area beyond the massive structure, with perhaps a show of huge stone arches, or of a winding staircase between heavy stone columns, or of a profusion of tropical vegetation in the winter-garden, bringing to mind the stories in poem and romance of the loves of Spanish damsels, and of stolen interviews at the garden-gate, or elopements by means of the false key or the bribed porter. The principal streets were formerly well paved or floored with shell-concrete, portions of which are still to be seen above the shifting sand; and this flooring was so carefully swept that the dark-eyed maidens of Old Castile, who then led in society here, could pass and repass without soiling their satin slippers. No rumbling wheels were permitted to crush the firm road-bed, or to whirl the dust into the airy verandas, where in undisturbed repose sat the Spanish dons and dames.

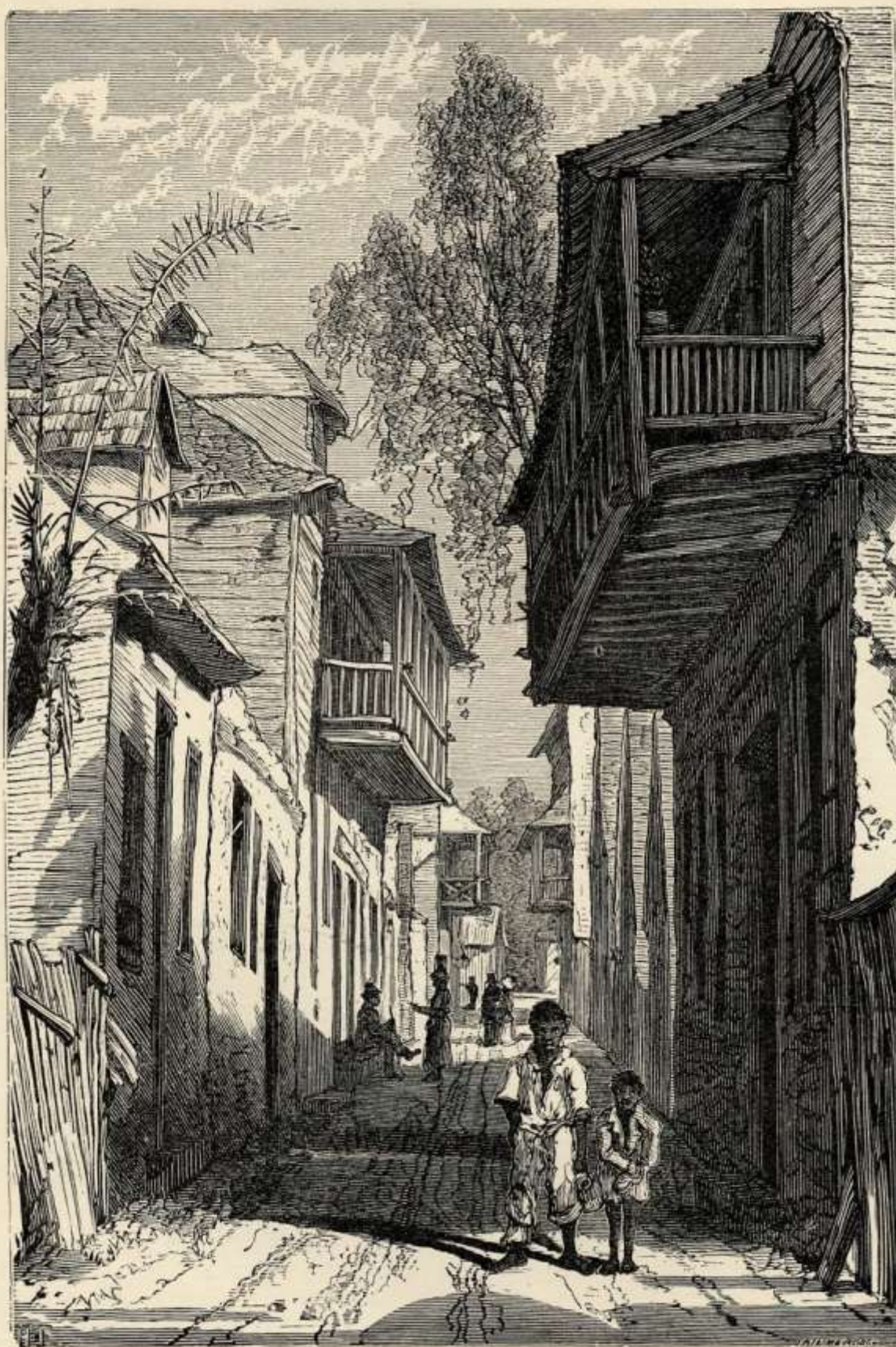
“There are two convents in St. Augustine, whose nuns are mainly occupied in the education of young girls. There are among them a number of nuns brought over from France a few years since, who teach, besides their own language, the art of making lace....”



(photo caption) "St. Francis Street, Augustine."



(photo caption) "Interior of St. Mark's Castle."



A Street in St. Augustine.

(photo caption) "A Street in St. Augustine."



Ruins of a Spanish Fort at Matanzas Inlet.

(photo caption) "Ruins of a Spanish Fort at Matanzas Inlet."



SCENE IN ST. AUGUSTINE.—THE DATE PALM.

(photo caption) "Scene in St. Augustine – The Date Palm."



A GARDEN IN FLORIDA.

(photo caption) "A Garden in Florida."