

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

April 6, 1956

Venice of America

Fort Lauderdale, where we have been vacationing for three days, is known as "The Venice of America" and claims to be the fastest growing city in the United States, with a new permanent citizen arriving every hour. The city owns many miles of beach front for the pleasure and use of the people, and there are also hundreds of huge hotels and motor courts for the accommodation of the visitors who come to Fort Lauderdale for the winter months.

We availed ourselves of the opportunity to take a three-hour, 30-mile launch trip the entire length of the enchanting and mysterious New River, so named by the Seminole Indians. Fort Lauderdale is a city of islands and waterways honeycombed by rivers and bays, canals and inlets. A tenth of the city is water surface; 363 miles of inland waterways wind through the corporate limits. The city is actually below sea level, so to provide building lots the canals were cut in and the sod taken out was piled up to form the many beautiful islands which are covered with trees and palms and circled with magnificent homes. Before each mansion is a yacht, probably costing as much as the lot and the house combined.

The area of Fort Lauderdale was settled 127 years ago by Maj. William Lauderdale, who established a fort here in 1838 during the Seminole Indian wars. Growth of the city however, we are told, began with its incorporation in 1915. Today it is the site of the deepest harbor between Norfolk and New Orleans, in the heart of the truck gardening and citrus growing area, near many large beef cattle and dairy farms.

From Fort Lauderdale we motored over the highway next to the Atlantic ocean, passing beach resorts, residential areas and jungle forests of palms, pines and underbrush continual contrasts in scenery. Arriving at Marineland, we visited the Marine Studios which thrilled us for at least two hours. There is presented the most amazing display of live marine specimens probably ever assembled. Through more than 300 portholes in the two giant oceanarium tanks, the mysterious and colorful undersea world can be viewed under conditions comparable to that of the open sea.

Today we ate in St. Augustine, the oldest city in the United States. The statue of Don Juan Ponce de Leon in the Ponce de Leon circle greets the visitors and reminds them that St. Augustine dates back to 1493. On April 3, 1513, during the Easter season, the same season which we are enjoying today, the Ponce de Leon expedition sighted land in the present locality of the city and named it La Florida. With the landing, Spanish claim to Florida was established.

The highlight of our tour of the city was our visit to the "Castillo de San Marcos," a National Monument, and the oldest masonry fort existing in the United States. It was started in 1672 by the Spanish to protect St. Augustine, the first white settlement in this country. The Castillo is four-sided and is surrounded by a moat 40-feet wide, its only entrance is across a drawbridge.

Castello de San Marcos was declared a national monument by presidential proclamation of October 15, 1924. It is administered by the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior and contains 18.51 acres of federal lands. It is open daily from 8:30 a. m. to 3:30 p. m. There is a small admission fee, which is waived for children and educational groups. A national ranger conducts groups through the fort during the day and gives an informative and interesting lecture as those in attendance move from room to room.

There is so much in this old city to remind one of Monterey and its history. We are leaving with some regret, but a great deal of pride in our home city where we have preserved so much and where the State of California has been of such valuable assistance.