

Who Was Juan Ponce de Leon?

By CHARLES W. ARNADE

Juan Ponce de León, a potent figure in the age of discovery, marked by his landing in Florida the beginning of recorded Florida history. He is classified in the annals of history as a *conquistador*, which literally translated means "conquerer." The word *conquistador* is constantly used when describing the discovery and early settlement of Spanish America. They are the daring leaders of this conquest, but no one has really ever defined when one of these men qualified for the coveted title of *conquistador*. Indeed it was not an official title but an honor, and not even publicly bestowed—when one's deed became admired he, the one who had performed this deed, was called *conquistador*. The American word "pioneer" is of the same nature. When was one a pioneer in American history?

The able Jesuit historian, John Francis Bannon, has only recently published a most readable but scholarly pamphlet which he entitled "The Spanish Conquistador: Men or Devils". Besides the introduction by Bannon, there are collected in his booklet eleven essays by recognized historians writing about the conquests and the *conquistadores*. The celebrated William Hickling Prescott said in 1847 that the Spanish *conquistador* "was a singular compound of the bigot, the pirate, and the knight errant. He was fierce, rapacious and cruel." And Prescott has only harsh, indeed bad, words for the *conquistador*. All this is summarized when he says that "The magnitude of the evil accomplished by him (the *conquistador*) was unhappily in full proportion to the atrocity of his intentions and character." This represents the 19th century attitude.

At an earlier time the judgments were even harsher. For example, the famous Germat poet, Heinrich Heine, stated unequivocally that the Spanish *Conquistadores* "were bandits." The great Venezuelan writer and historian, Rufino Blanco-Fombona, said in 1922 that "The *conquistadores*, viewed with great objectivity, are no more the bandits of Heine than they are the brothers of Saint Francis. Neither are they the heroic types to which the fighting men of a great and democratic nation of our century must conform." They are to

this Venezuelan historian “simply Spaniards, Spanish adventurers of the sixteenth century. In them are found all the virtues of their nation and of the age to which they belong. And in them, too one finds the national defects of that day...”

The French historian, Jean Descola—well recognized in the words of Father Bannon as a scholar who was “very denitely a Hispanophile”—wrote in 1954 a book which won the *Grand Prix d’Histoire* and was entitled *Les Conquistadors*. Descola said that he might have been a bandit “at certain times” but one thing above everything else characterized the *Conquistador*: he “never lost his sense of grandeur” and he fiercely believed in a powerful God and a powerful Devil. The English professor Frederick Alexander Kirkpatrick published in 1934 his well-known book *The Spanish Conquistadores*, only recently issued in paperback form. In it Kirkpatrick sketches more the main events of the conquest rather than giving the biography and motivating forces of the *Conquistadores*. But he admires their persistence and “their enterprise with invincible constancy...” Kirkpatrick reminds us that we must always remember that in the age when the *conquistadores* lived and conquered inhumanity was a trademark of this century—the Spaniards were not worse than the Englishmen of their time. He writes that “one would hesitate to claim that their work was more efficient or more humane” in the English conquest and colonization of Ireland.

Father Bannon asks the question: “Were the Spanish *Conquistadores* Men or Devils? He does not answer it but provides the judgments of others of all ages. The truth is that the bad opinions associated with the *Conquistadores* are part—indeed the core—of what is known as the Black Legend. And today there are many historians, among them many Americans, who are totally whitewashing the Black Legend. England and Spain after the discovery were, as we all know, locked in a long and ferocious rivalry for mastery of sea and land. It was the English historians who described with colorful exaggeration the negative features of the *Conquistadores*, often using the critical reports of Spanish priests, especially that of the potent Padre Bartolomé de Las Casas of the 16th century. Neither the Black Legend nor the whitewashing of recent days give the truth—the truth is in between. These men to me are a combination of the medieval knight and the American pioneer of the 19th century—maybe a cross between Sir Lancelot and David Crockett. Or as the Spaniard Francisco Morales Padrón put it in 1955, the *Conquistador* showed “fortitude in the face of adversity and suffering.” This

is just like the American pioneer, and again in the words of Morales Padrón, the *Conquistadores* "one and all were motivated by honor and fame." This is the creed of the medieval knight.

Juan Ponce de León certainly showed fortitude in the face of adversity and suffering, and he was motivated by honor and fame. But it must be made clear that Juan Ponce de León is far more famous today—over four centuries since his death—than in his day. He is not conspicuously mentioned and Kirkpatrick has even his name only twice in his rather voluminous book. His exploits lack the dazzling doings and results of a Pizarro or Cortés, or the importance of key thrusts by such men as Balboa, to Panama and the Pacific shores, or Diego Velásquez conquering the Cuban island. It lacked the unbelievable epic features of such expeditions as Francisco Orellana made into the Amazon or that of Pedro Valdivia's conquest of Chile. It even was in want of detailed and colorful reports by participants and therefore has left us a pile of unanswered questions which unfortunately have been colored by a great deal of myths and false claims. And the Ponce de León exploits fail in the excitement of a personal epic like that of Cabeza de Vaca crossing alone from Florida through Texas to Mexico. It also does not compare in importance with the grandiose marches through North America by Hernando de Soto and Juan Vásquez de Coronado.

Maybe the past has been unfair with Juan Ponce de León, and the present is more equitable. At the same time, the historical career from the inconspicuous past to the attentive present of Juan Ponce de León might be of charm to this conquistador but in most parts it lacks factual historical basis. Juan Ponce de León, discoverer of Florida, is a figure involved in riddles covered by a loose shift of weaved myths. And the reason why Ponce de León has become more important as time progressed is a most simple one. His achievement rests in the discovery and settlement of Puerto Rico and Florida. These two areas in the 16th century were not of prime prominence. The expansion of the conquest during the 16th century had a different directional importance—some areas became the basis for movement toward other regions and others simply were deadends. The island of Cuba served as the beachhead for the great conquest of Mexico, and Mexico in turn became the starting point into California, Texas, Central America and the vast Pacific Ocean. The Panama isthmus was the beachhead for the fabulous conquest of Peru, and from Peru the roads lead to many other places in South America. Naturally all these *conquistadores* of strategic areas were

celebrated far more than those men who went into closed passages. Ponce de León conquered Puerto Rico and this island did not develop into a basis for further important conquests. When he left the island for his journey to Florida, there were high hopes that the new land to be discovered would serve as a highway to other great empires in the north. But Florida was a disappointment and the Spanish had a difficult time settling the peninsula and were often ready to give it up. All thrusts into the North American continent ended in failure. Florida under the Spanish was a history of hardships and failures and Florida did not become a road to other riches. Consequently, Ponce de León was not hailed as a man who has brought to his crown great bounties.

Today the story is different. It is needless to say that Florida is a booming area and that Florida can provide statistics showing its phenomenal growth. Florida is a fountain of hope and wealth and it justifies the hope that Ponce de León carried with him when he sailed to discover this land. It took four centuries to fulfill the *conquistadores* dream that Florida was a land of riches or potential wealth. And although there is not a shred of documentary evidence that Juan Ponce de León came to seek a fountain of youth, there remains little doubt that to some extent the myth of the fountain of youth—so abused by amateur historians and business promoters—has partially come true as Florida's economy is based on a great part on the influx of older peoples seeking the sub-tropical sun and the Florida shores for their retirement.

Although the boom of Puerto Rico is not as spectacular as that of Florida, this Caribbean island as a Commonwealth of the United States is certainly an area of great progress. It is today probably the most progressive spot in the Caribbean or the old Spanish Main of centuries ago. While in the days of Ponce de León, Puerto Rico was overshadowed by the valued islands of Cuba and Española. Today the one problem that Puerto Rico faces is its split personality. The Commonwealth is Hispanic in language and ways of life, but Americanization is corroding the Hispanic tradition and this is something much opposed by many of the intelligentsia. Naturally there developed a nostalgic yearning for the past. That this exaggerated look to the past is unrealistic is admitted by a brilliant political science professor at the University of Puerto Rico, who is at the same time an advocate of Puerto Rican independence and a tireless critic of "Americanization." Professor Gordon K. Lewis writes in 1963 that "The American critic who compares the

twentieth-century Puerto Rican with the sixteenth-century *conquistadores*, to the disadvantages of the former, rarely pauses to reflect upon conclusions that might be derived from comparing his own type with the independent American farmer we read of in the pages of Crèvecoeur. The modern Puerto Rican must be judged by what he is, not by what his ancestors were. . . ." But the Puerto Rican is a product of the past and being part of a nation that is predominately non-Hispanic, they constituting a small minority, finds inspiration in the island's past and obviously considers the father of the island, Ponce de León, a man to be glorified and to be elevated on a historical pedestal.

This partly explains the boom in studies about Ponce de León published in the last years in Puerto Rico. On the other hand Florida—with its highly commercialized quadricentennial festivities guided largely by historical amateurs—has shown little interest in Ponce de León. No publication by any of the quadricentennial officials, agencies, etc., was planned. A book published in 1963 by Ethel King went unnoticed, in part due to faulty distribution by a publisher of little prestige who failed to provide review copies to leading journals.

The Juan Ponce de León Florida-Puerto Rico comparison is revealing. He is the official discoverer of both places. This is an undisputed fact. In Florida the Spanish tradition is negligible and the Spanish heritage bypassed or only emphasized for crass commercial benefits, and the rather short American period, starting in 1821, is much more emphasized. This is well exemplified by the amount of time allotted to the Spanish periods in any Florida history course at Florida colleges and public schools. The reverse is true in Puerto Rico where as said the emphasis is to glorify the Spanish heritage and periods, and where historical figures, led by Juan Ponce de León, of the Spanish period are glorified. But then in Florida there are hardly any people, with the exception of a very small core in St. Augustine and a few isolated cases in Pensacola, whose genealogy goes back to the Spanish period. Florida prefers to celebrate its recent heroes and when Mr. Allen Morris, with the help of Mr. Baynard Kendrick through the pages of the Tampa Tribune called for a vote of the five most celebrated Floridians only Juan Ponce de León received a fair number of votes. All others came from the American period.

The reasons why in Florida has been shown little interest in its historical figures of the Spanish period is simply a scarcity of qualified historians

capable by language and paleography to undertake research with primary Spanish documents. On the other hand, Puerto Rican historians are not hindered by these difficulties and such men as Vicente Murga Sanz and Aurelio Tió have done careful studies in ordinal Spanish documents for more Ponce de León data as is exemplified in their recent books. The more emotional approach, making Ponce de León a symbol of the Spanish heritage of the Island is presented in the 1960 book by Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois, whose title in English is "The Colonial Mind of Ponce de León." The 292 pages say little new and the main theme could have easily been reduced into an article. To the author, Ponce de León was a typical example of his time and he summarized the best of the Spanish heritage. This is highly valued in Puerto Rico but it hardly means anything to the Floridian.

One more matter has to be considered when discussing the lack of enthusiasm for Ponce de León in the annals of Florida history. The Florida expeditions by Ponce de León represent only two chapters—and not the most important ones—in the full life of this *conquistador*. His pursuits in Puerto Rico were the most important ones and covered crucial years of Ponce de León's life. While unquestionably documentation for Ponce de León leaves much to desire and historians Murga Sanz and Tió have carefully searched all over the world for new sources, records of the doings of Juan Ponce de León in Puerto Rico are far more available than those in Florida. As a matter of fact, we totally lack primary source material—documents—about Ponce de León's two journeys to Florida. We have only indirect printed information by later reporters whose accuracy is questionable when dealing with details. Every honest and scholarly effort to find in the archives over the world, especially Spain, more Ponce de León data have failed. We know that one of the historians who is our only source, Antonio de Herrera, possessed some of the Ponce de León Florida reports. Herrera lived in the 16th century and he had access to the Ponce de León papers but failed to return them. This loss is tragic and the main source for all later misinformation which resulted in the myths of Ponce de León in Florida.

This sparsity of information is truly frustrating and there is little hope for finding the lost documents or even new data. Consequently no definite biography of Ponce de León is ever possible unless the impossible—the lost documents come to light—happens. And we will not be able to sketch the Florida happenings better than has been done in the past as we are always forced to consult the same sources which are the 15th and 16th century

chroniclers, especially Herrera. Therefore, such a well-intentioned study as that appearing in the *Florida Historical Quarterly* years ago by Frederick Davis is basically correct in its broad outline. But everyone who writes about Ponce de León, even if he has the best intention of doing a scholarly work—searching for the truth—will have to face the Ponce de León myths. And there are many who innocently, because of a vested interest, or especially due to geographical loyalties are fanatically devoted to one or all myths. For example, the most readable Ponce de León biography in English, the 127 page book by the late Edward Lawson, reveals the author to be an intentional victim of one of the two myths, and although Mr. Lawson was well aware of most all available sources, he failed to list some in his bibliography—those not devoted to his beliefs.

Generally speaking the myths can be reduced to three. The first one deals with the story of the Fountain of Youth and Ponce de León's search for those marvelous waters. The second refers to geographical locations, which entails the various claims that Ponce de León was here and there—went up the Gulf Coast as far as . . .—and especially pin-pointing an exact first landfall. St. Augustine has the distinction of claiming both, the Fountain and the landfall! The third myth, and maybe in this case the word "myth" is a misnomer, has to do with the matter of when Florida was discovered, in 1512 or 1513. The biography of Ponce de León that follows takes into account all available sources and is a summary of what we know of the man.

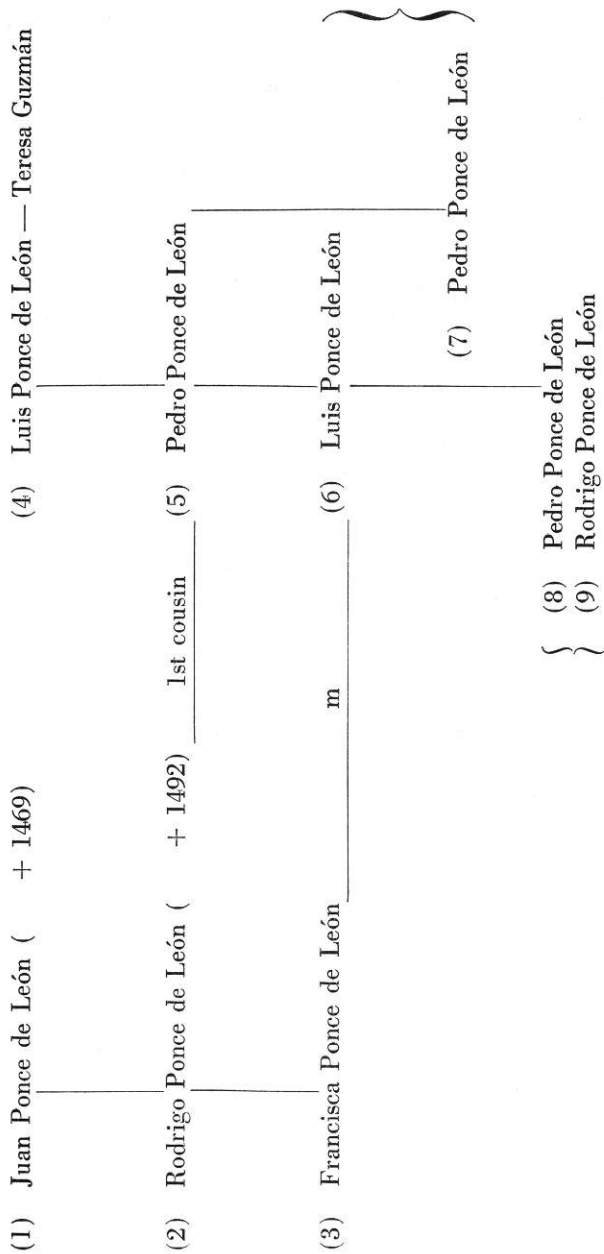
The story of the life of Ponce de León starts out with difficulty—maybe a fourth myth. Since it does not affect personal or business interests in Florida this potential myth has not developed into a controversy in Florida. We simply are not sure about the date of birth and the parents of Juan Ponce de León. We have a near consensus as to the place of birth—Santervás (also spelled Santhervás) in Castilla la Vieja (Old Castille), now known as the province of Valladolid—of the *conquistador*. Tió in his two books claims to have solved the problem. He writes in the 1956 study, "The origin in Spain of Don Juan Ponce de León has always been an insoluble riddle for those researchers who tried to decipher it. . . . All attempts to solve the mystery of the Spanish origin have ended in failure." Tió cites some of those who have tried. Then Tió writes "We have had the good fortune to find the key that permits us to solve the mystery." He cites several new documents in Seville which indirectly refer to Juan Ponce de León. Tió writes "that by a process of elimination we have discovered who was this brother of Juan Ponce de León

[mentioned in the documents] and which was his line of ancestors in Spain." Yet Tió's genealogical explanation which he later amplified in his 1961 tome fails to persuade some readers that he has found the answer. It is simply impossible to understand the Tió presented genealogy and such was mentioned in my review in the *Florida Historical Quarterly* of October 1962. In a long personal letter to me dated May 8, 1964, he provides a somewhat clearer picture. Mr. Tió in this cordial and urbane correspondence said that "simplicity is impossible in a genealogy of men who remarried and had 23 known offspring, each with different family names, according to old Spanish custom."

Tió is quite right in the immense number of offspring. There was a Count also called Juan Ponce de León (1)* (related to the Florida Ponce de León) who was the father of the rather famous Rodrigo Ponce de León (2) (known as the second Cid Campeador.) This Count Juan Ponce de León(1), who died in 1469, had 21 accounted illegitimate sons and perhaps more. One of the "perhaps more" sons of Count Juan Ponce de León could have been the *conquistador* of Florida and Puerto Rico, Juan Ponce de León. This is a supposition presented in the scholarly Ponce de León biography of Murga Sanz which shows more depth and clarity than that of Tió, who has a personal genealogical interest in the Puerto Rican descendants of Juan Ponce de León. Anyhow, the Murga Sanz and the Tió sketches of Ponce de León's origin—one author ignores the other—are not too far apart. The same key figures make their appearance. But Murga Sanz presents them and elaborates only possibilities, while Tió makes confusing deductions to which he is strongly devoted. Manuel Ballesteros Gaiibrois in 1960, ignoring or unaware of the Tió 1956 book, wrote in what to me is an honest statement: "It is curious that such a person like Ponce de León, who in his life will fulfill such important tasks, and who will possess the royal trust and that of men like [Nicolás] Ovando and Diego Colón, has left behind so few tracks about his origins. Really we do not know who were his parents, where he was born and when he was born." Edward Lawson in his English biography simply states that "no record of birth has been found." Frederick Davis' study is not concerned with the life of Ponce de León, but only with his Florida expeditions.

*These numbers in parentheses after names of the family refer to the same numbers on my short genealogical chart.

SIMPLIFIED GENEALOGICAL TABLE



Tió's complicated genealogical deductions make the *conquistador* Juan Ponce de León the brother of Don Pedro Ponce de León (8),** who in 1520 was Caballero of the distinguished order of San Juan de Jerusalén. This is claimed in both Tió's 1956 and his 1961 book. Nothing is known of the brother of Juan Ponce de León. But Pedro's parents, according to Tió's 1956 study, were Don Luis Ponce de León (6), first Marquis of Zara (or Zahara) and the Marquise Doña Francisca Ponce de León (2) a second cousin by marriage. The Florida *conquistador* was the second legitimate son and Pedro (8) was the first. They had other children who all held distinguished titles and positions. Tió writes that "Juan Ponce de León was not of humble birth as it has been claimed." He said that most writers were unaware of the true genealogy of Ponce de León and many "based their claims on an anonymous document which attacked him (Juan Ponce de León.) This 'anonymous of Simancas' said that he had been stable boy of the Prefect Knight of Calatrava Pedro Núñez de Guzmán and that he went to America on the second voyage of Columbus as a foot soldier." Tió, in an unpublished answer of November 16, 1963, to my review of his 1961 book in the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, states that his genealogical discoveries and deductions show that "the solution is inescapable, Juan Ponce de León emerges as a cultured member of Spain's nobility" who later became "an intimate of King Ferdinand."

As said, Murga Sanz in his Ponce de León biography, generally considered the best Ponce de León study, fails to come to such specifics. Murga Sanz also has a Francisca Ponce de León identified as Marquisa of Zahara who was married to her second cousin, Luis Ponce de León (6), who is identified as a lord of Villagarcía and Rota. It should be recalled that Francisca was the daughter of the second Cid Campeador, Rodrigo Ponce de León (2). But while Tió in 1956 makes the Florida Ponce de León the son of Francisca (3) and Luis Ponce de León (6), Murga Sanz cites an interesting document which makes the Florida Ponce de León the cousin of Francisca (3). He says that the *conquistador* might have been an illegitimate son of Francisca's (3) grandfather, the Count Juan Ponce de León (1) (whose illegitimate son Rodrigo (2) was the second Cid Campeador.) The old Juan Ponce de León (1) (grandfather) died in 1469 and his illegitimate son Rodrigo (2) (second Cid Campeador) died on August 27, 1492. Francisca's oldest son named Rodrigo (9) was given the right of primogeniture. Tió too has a

** (8) according to Tió's 1956 book but (7) according to his 1961 book.

Rodrigo as the son of Francisca, but claims that a Pedro (8) was the oldest son. Murga Sanz fails to mention this Pedro, who is the key figure for Tió genealogy since he (Tió) located a document which makes this Pedro—supposed son of Francisca (3) and her legitimate husband (6)—according to Tió's 1956 evaluation a brother of the Florida *conquistador*, Juan Ponce de León.

In Tió's 1961 detailed study he reproduces nearly verbatim, but often expanded, his genealogical deductions but now—most probably because of Murga Sanz's study which he does not acknowledge—writes that "It is possible" that the *conquistador* Juan Ponce de León was the cousin of Francisca Ponce de León (3) and the brother of her husband, Luis Ponce de León (6). In this way Tió and Murga now seem to agree that the *conquistador* Juan Ponce de León was a cousin of Doña Francisca Ponce de León (3), who indeed was the daughter of the second Cid Campeador (2). There is confusion as to where exactly Francisca's husband, Luis (6), fits into the picture. He is a second cousin to his wife Francisca (3), and while Murga Sanz makes the *conquistador* Juan Ponce de León a possible son of an undetermined mother of Francisca's potent grandfather, Juan Ponce de León (1) (+1469), Tió in his revised 1961 work makes the *conquistador* a possible brother of Francisca's (3) husband Luis (6) (second cousin of his wife) and his May 3, 1964 letter shows he is now convinced of this.

One might assume that the Murga Sanz claim is rather a riddle when he affirms that the Florida Ponce de León was a possible son of the venerable Count Juan Ponce de León (1). Since Francisca was his granddaughter, she certainly would have to identify the Florida Ponce de León as uncle rather than cousin, as she does in the valuable document discovered by the same Murga Sanz. At the same time the supposed riddle can be explained. Ballesteros Gaibrois explains that the word *primo* (cousin) did not have the same strict definition and was then used very loosely as someone related, especially if he were illegitimate. Ballesteros Gaibrois rightly insists that the transmission of last names as is done today according to strict traditions was not in vogue at that time. A personal letter to me from Murga Sanz in April 1964 confirms the Ballesteros Gaibrois claim, but is denied in the Tió May, 1964 letter to me. In the letter Murga Sanz says that Francisca (3) was also illegitimate—daughter of Rodrigo (2), the famous second Cid Campeador. He writes that saying "my cousin is like saying my relative." Murga Sanz writes in the letter that this makes it impossible to determine the exact relationship. He

continues saying that it simply means that Ponce de León is a relative to the second Cid Campeador (2)—“the degree of blood relationship cannot be determined with the documents located and available to us.”

Tió disagrees. He states in his lengthy letter of May 8 that under no circumstances can the Florida Ponce de León be a son of the venerable Juan Ponce de León (1) who fathered so many illegitimate children and who died in 1469. (Tió accounts 23 offspring rather than the accepted 21.) Tió has a powerful argument. While the birth certificate of Ponce de León has never been located (this would clear up most all of the confusion) his year of birth is always, by everyone, given as 1460. Murga Sanz states this date “lacks proofs.” But he accepts it as the best we have. Tió insists in his 1961 book that he knows of a document (not reproduced) which is a legal paper dated September 8, 1514, in which Juan Ponce de León declared that he was born in 1474. There are no good reasons to doubt the Tió affirmation but it would have been advantageous for him to have reproduced this key document. It would mean that when Ponce de León discovered Florida he was 39 rather than 53 which does make a difference in our Ponce de León research. It would make the myth of the Fountain of Youth less appealing. This author is willing to accept the 1474 date until a more convincing document is found since the 1460 date has no documental basis and comes to us from unscholarly and indiscriminatory older secondary sources and might be based on “old wives’ tales.” In our own discussion this would make it impossible for the Florida Ponce de León to be the son of the productive Juan Ponce de León (1) deceased in 1469.

Tió finds it most plausible that the Florida Juan Ponce de León is the legitimate son of Pedro Ponce de León (5) and Leonor de Figueroa and therefore, as stated, was a brother of Luis Ponce de León (6) who was married to a second cousin, Francisca Ponce de León (3). So Francisca was indeed a true cousin of the Florida Ponce de León and at the same time sister-in-law. My opinion is that the famous Rodrigo Ponce de León (2), the second Cid, was the first cousin of Pedro Ponce de León (5) who has emerged as the most probable father of the Florida Juan Ponce de León. Tió writes in his explanatory letter of May 8, 1964, “Juan Ponce de León [the Florida discoverer] thus may have been Luis Ponce de León’s (6) brother, his business partner in the New World, second cousin to his wife Doña Francisca (3) and her brother-in-law as well. In the power-of-attorney sworn to by Doña Francisca (3) in her own right (the key document of Murga Sanz),

what mattered was her blood ties as cousin of Juan Ponce de León, and not her ties through marriage as his sister-in-law. Since her husband Don Luis (6) was required by law to consent to her legal wish by signing, so as to validate the document, no mention had to be made that he was also her second cousin. . . . According to my research, Father Murga's conjecture on Juan Ponce de León's ancestry is absolutely groundless." Tió insists that it has "been based mostly on centuries-old misconceptions which probably grew out of an anonymous report to Cardinal Cisneros [who was the Inquisitor General of Spain during the time of Ponce de León], which according to its fiery style could have been only written by [the celebrated] Father Las Casas."

In all this confusion and controversy one thing is apparent. The *conquistador* of Puerto Rico and Florida, Juan Ponce de León (2), is related by blood to the celebrated Rodrigo Ponce de León (2), who died in 1492 and who was a heroic figure in the last phase of the Moorish expulsion from Spain. We know this because Francisca Ponce de León (2)—the illegitimate daughter of Rodrigo who was married to the lord of Villagarcía and Rota, known as Luis Ponce de León (6)—identifies the Florida Juan Ponce de León as a relative. According to Murga Sanz it is conceivable that the Florida Juan Ponce de León was an illegitimate son of Rodrigo's (2) father, also known as Juan Ponce de León (1), who died in 1469. His famous son Rodrigo (2) was illegitimate too. The illegitimacy of the Florida Ponce de León hardly matters. Rodrigo (2) was celebrated and aristocratic; Francisca (3) was illegitimate too and she was a Marquisa of Zahara. She married a second cousin whose title is either Marquis or Count of Zahara and Lord of Villagarcía and Rota (6). The consistency of illegitimacy is responsible for this confusion which results in vast genealogical claims in all directions.

While I am not as anxious to reject as rapidly the Murga Sanz conjectures it is now more conceivable that Ponce de León was not the son of Rodrigo Ponce de León (2) but might as well have been the son of Pedro Ponce de León (5), an aristocratic lord whose complete name and title was Pedro Ponce de León y Fernández de Villagarcía, the fourth lord of Villagarcía, who was a close relative of the second Cid, Rodrigo Ponce de León (2) and who was at the funeral in 1492 in Seville of Rodrigo Ponce de León (2).

In sum, Juan Ponce de León, contrary to some earlier claims, mostly due to the above cited anonymous report to Cardinal Cisneros, was not of humble birth but came from a line of aristocratic lords the leading figure of

whom was the second Cid, Rodrigo Ponce de León (2), a famous hero of blue blood. We still lack his birth and baptismal records and therefore we still cannot assume completely who Ponce de León's father and mother were, but we are quite close to the truth and the possibilities are indeed few. While Murga Sanz has presented a commendable biography he has shown an understandable reluctance to get deeply involved in complicated genealogical search which Tió has undertaken with great competence. Yet he, Tió, has often presented a confused picture. At one time in his letter of May 8, 1964, he claims that Rodrigo Ponce de León (2) was the brother of Pedro Ponce de León (5) which sounds quite inconceivable.

As stated, historians have accepted earlier undocumented statements that the *Conquistador* Juan Ponce de León was born in 1460, but it appears that he was born in 1474. Everyone seems to agree, with some documental evidence but not enough to satisfy the serious historian's requirement for absolute veracity, that the *Conquistador* was born in Santervás de Campos, which today belongs to the county of Villalón in the province of Valladolid. Documents of descendants of Ponce de León provide the historian with the deduction that the *conquistador* came from the village of Santervás. This village in 1460 belonged to the monastery of Sahagún, and Murga Sanz located documents at the Simanca archives which show that the place-name was spelled "Sant Erbas", but Murga Sanz's search in the monastery and village records failed "to show any references to the Ponce de Leóns." He found out that the Ponce de Leóns used two other monasteries in Castille and León because of historical customs and traditions.

The far origins of the Ponce de Leóns are somewhat complicated but have also become a matter of controversy. It has been generally assumed with ample genealogical documentation that the Ponce de Leóns of the 15th century came in the 12th century from southern France as direct descendents of the Counts of Toulouse and Saint Gil. It is said that their common ancestor was Pedro Poncio de Minerva who, according to Lawson, left France in 1142 to become major domo of King Alfonso IX of the kingdom of León. This is hardly possible as Alfonso IX reigned from 1188 to 1230. Lawson takes his data from the genealogical studies of the Puerto Rican Angel Panaigagua, which also were profusely consulted but also corrected by Tió. Tió claims that Poncio de Minerva, who came from Southern France as a young boy, was related to King Alfonso VII, whose reign was from 1126 to 1157. Poncio Minerva was raised in the court of Alfonso VII and from

1140 to 1164 was an intimate advisor of the King (after 1157 Alfonso VIII ruled) and was also Governor of the City of León. There are no reasons to doubt the Poncio de Minerva-Alfonso VII relationship.

The story of the origins of Juan Ponce de León says that with the passing of time the many descendents of Poncio de Minerva (now being called Ponce) split into two branches, located in the south around Seville and Cádiz and in the north around León and Valladolid. The *conquistador* Juan Ponce de León was from the northern branch and it is written that the second Cid Campeador, Rodrigo Ponce de León (2), was a central figure of the southern branch. Lawson, using Prescott's classic study of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic Kings, states that a Pedro Ponce de León (5), Duke of Cádiz [sic: for Rodrigo (2)], was the "head" of the southern branch. (It should be recalled that this Pedro (5) was the Marques of Villagarcía and that his son (7) and grandson (8) were also called Pedro Ponce de León and that either one of these two Pedros (6 or 7) was the brother of the Florida Juan Ponce de León and this brother is the key figure in Tió's genealogy. It must also be recalled that Rodrigo (2), the second Cid and the real Duke of Cádiz, was the father of Francesca (3), who unquestionably was the cousin of the *conquistador* Juan Ponce de León.) We are relatively sure that Juan Ponce de León was born in the north. Therefore a sharp division into the two branches: northern and southern, is apparently not a sure fact. They were interwoven.

Murga Sanz fails to show interest into the early origins of the Ponce de León's, but Tió, after much searching, affirms categorically that Juan Ponce de León did not descend from the famous Poncio de Minerva who came from France. During the reign of Alfonso VII of Castille (1126-1157) and that of his son, Ferdinand of León (1157-1188) three gentlemen called Poncio—Poncio de Minerva, Poncio de Cabrera, Poncio Velaz—lived. Of these, Poncio Velaz was the son of Poncio de Cabrera. Poncio de Cabrera is the ancestor of the Florida Juan Ponce de León and this Poncio de Cabrera was also a high official, indeed mayor domo of Alfonso VII. Poncio de Cabrera was from Cataluña and came from distinguished birth. Therefore Juan Ponce de León is "of pure Spanish descent and he has no blood of the gentleman Poncio de Minerva" writes Tió. The Puerto Rican author is convincing in his presentation and documentation. It is acceptable that the old claims that Juan Ponce de León origins can be traced back to France are erroneous. He comes from an old northern Spanish aristocracy closely

associated with the rulers of León and Castille. His paternal ancestry is from the Osorio family of Castille and his maternal origins are also of blue blood from the House of Cabrera and the Trava of León and Galicia. Also, part of his ancestral genealogy are the Dukes of Urgell and Cataluña. Poncio de Cabrera, mayor domo in the 12th century, is the direct antecedent of Juan Ponce de León.

The Ponce de León Cabrera family was related to another distinguished and most extensive family, Núñez de Guzmán of the house of Toral. For example, the patrician Juan Ponce de León (1)—the one with the many illegitimate sons—and father of the second Cid Campeador (2) had eight children, among them the Cid, with Doña Leonor Núñez de Prado, who belonged to the Núñez de Guzmán family. One of the daughters of the productive Count Juan Ponce de León (1), Ines, was married to Luis de Guzmán and aristocratic lord of Algava. Another daughter was married to Juan de Guzmán, lord of Teva. Furthermore, the grandfather, of the count of Villagarcía and Rota (6) (husband of Francisca Ponce de León) (3), also called Luis Ponce de León (4) (the same as his grandson) was married to Teresa Guzmán of the house of Toral.

At the time of Juan Ponce de León's birth the head of Toral house was Ramiro Núñez of the Núñez de Guzmán family. Ramiro's brother was Pedro Núñez de Guzmán. Later Pedro Núñez de Guzmán became a Grand Master of the Order of Calatrava and a confidant of the Spanish Crown. During his earlier life Pedro Núñez de Guzmán was not too well off financially, but might have fought with Rodrigo Ponce de León, the Cid Campeador, in the reconquest of Granada. Anyhow, the celebrated Chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo tells that the future *conquistador* of Florida and Puerto Rico served as a page and servant of Pedro Núñez de Guzmán. To be a page at that time one had to be of noble lineage and sons of Counts, Marquises and Dukes became pages in noble related houses in order to later "wear the larkspurs of a gentleman" of true blood.

It is not completely clear what his precise duties were as he is referred to as a page boy, a squire and also a servant. Without proof the biographers of the *conquistador* state that he accompanied Pedro Núñez de Guzmán in the war against the Moors during the Granada campaign. As Murga Sanz thinks that Juan Ponce de León is the son of Count Juan Ponce de León (1), he states that it is possible that he, the *conquistador* Juan Ponce de León,

fought on the side of Rodrigo (2), the Cid Campeador, in the conquest of Granada. It is assumed that he fought as the squire of Pedro Núñez de Guzmán. Fernández de Oviedo tells us that when Ponce de León arrived in America he was an experienced military man who had learned his trade in the war against the Moors.

There is nothing else available about Juan Ponce de León in Spain. The next we hear about him was that he had joined Columbus in 1493 and was accompanying the great discoverer in his second voyage to America. Most all biographers object to the citations of the celebrated Father Las Casas in his famous history of America, published in the 16th century as a witness of most of the events, that Ponce de León was a stable boy of Núñez de Guzmán and a footsoldier when traveling to America. Two matters are cited to refute the Las Casas statements. First of all we possess documents that contain the signature of Ponce de León, which is that of a man who knew how to write well, and this knowledge was in those days reserved only to upper ranks and not to stable boys and footsoldiers. Furthermore, his name is not listed among the officials and to some this means that Ponce de León paid his own passage, which is a most convincing argument that he was not a footsoldier, but a gentleman.

It should be said that this matter of not being listed creates a doubt that Ponce de León traveled in 1493 with Columbus. No single document has been found in which the name of Ponce de León is listed among the voyagers of Columbus. The information simply comes from Fernández de Oviedo. But we have also claims that Ponce de León accompanied the 1502 expedition of Nicolás Ovando to America. Ovando had been sent to America to replace Columbus, who had assumed too much power. Ovando sailed in 1502. Murga Sanz states that the name of Ponce de León is also unavailable in all documentation consulted which deals with the Ovando voyage in 1502 to America and Murga Sanz is inclined to think—mostly on emotional grounds—that Juan Ponce de León came with Columbus in 1493. Tió, although he shows little interest in this matter, is also emotionally inclined to accept the 1493 journey to America. It is he who insists that the absence of the name of Ponce de León on the official traveling logs of Columbus shows his aristocratic origins. His contentions are based primarily on the well-known Samuel Eliot Morison's biography of Columbus where Morison states that Columbus in his second voyage carried with him around 200 enlisted young aristocrats, veterans of the recently won Granada campaign against the Moors. These

men, after the Granada victory, had nothing to do and on their own initiative and paying their own expenses boarded the 1493 Columbus ships to America. No list of these men of good birth is available. García y Gararafa, in his genealogical dictionary, expresses serious doubts that Ponce de León came to America in 1493. Lawson refuses to discuss the issue and simply states that Ponce de León "came to Haiti on the second voyage of Columbus."

Ballesteros Gaibrois, who in his biography of Ponce de León evaluates the primary documents unearthed by such scholars as Tió and Murga Sanz, is inclined to dismiss the claims that the *conquistador* of Florida came to America in 1493. It is a fact that no record of Ponce de León activities in America until 1504 have come to light. In that year he shows up as a protegee of Ovando in the province of Higüey in northeastern Haiti. After rendering valuable services in an Indian campaign at Higüey, Ponce de León in reward was made governor of the province. From 1493 to 1504 is a long time for a man of such energy and background as Ponce de León not to be mentioned in the fast-moving events in Española, the island center of Spanish activities of those days. Furthermore, Ovando came in 1502 to renovate the power structure established by Columbus and his followers. It is reasonable to assume that Ovando would use the men of his confidence, the ones who came with him, in his key operations. Indeed, this is what he did. It is therefore unlikely that if Ponce de León came with Columbus he would be used by Ovando. Therefore, it is my opinion that Juan Ponce de León probably came in 1502 to America with Ovando but that documentation to prove this has not been located. At the same time the claims that he came in 1493 with Columbus are much more unlikely. He does make his recorded appearance in 1504 leaving us with 30 years (since his birth) of total obscurity in regard to his person, although competent historians and paleographer have searched long and conscientiously in all kinds of dusty archives for new documentation.

From the time he assumed the governorship of Higüey in 1504 until his death in 1521, the life and doings of Ponce de León are far better known, and with few exceptions are clearly written up. The main exception is his 1513 Florida trip, which therefore gave rise to those three mentioned myths. He did a good job in Higüey, where he acquired a considerable estate raising crops and possessing many horses and cattle. It is said that he built himself a substantial house. It is here that Father Las Casas, who participated in the Higüey campaign, met Ponce de León and had much discourse with the future

conquistador of Florida. Juan Ponce de León stayed put for six years in Higüey, bringing peace and prosperity to the region. The island adjoining Higüey is today known as Puerto Rico, but was then called San Juan de Borinquen. The Indians called this medium sized island "Borinquen" and the Spanish discovered it during the second trip of Columbus, naming it San Juan Bautista (Saint John the Baptist). It should be recalled that some claim that Juan Ponce de León was on this second trip of Columbus. There had been some interest in the island and the natives had established some contact with neighboring Higüey. In 1508 Ovando gave incentive to Ponce de León to cross over to San Juan de Borinquen and explore the island and possibly establish settlements.

Undoubtedly, Juan Ponce de León was most successful in his endeavors in Puerto Rico and this phase of his life is well sketched and hardly pertinent for Florida history. At the same time, Ponce de León had to face tremendous odds. The island he had brought under Spanish rule had been known, and it was near and within easy access to Española (Hispaniola), which after all was at this time the center of the Spanish colony in America. Many wanted to divide the Puerto Rican pie and at the same time a struggle was occurring for ultimate leadership and royal favor to run all the overseas empire of Spain, which still was restricted to the Caribbean. The Columbus family was ferociously fighting for their rights and the Crown was under all kinds of pressures from all angles. Although Ponce de León had a strong "in" with the King, Ferdinand, through his old master, Núñez de Guzmán, who had risen to a confidant and aide of the King, and although the King seemed to have taken a strong liking to Ponce de León, the Crown felt that it was not a convenient move and in the best interests of the Crown to make Ponce de León the one and only "boss" of the island of San Juan. The correspondence of the King shows a deep and honest sorrow for slighting Ponce de León, and the Crown was most interested that this good servant of Spain should be offered new opportunities if Ponce de León wished to undertake new ventures beyond Puerto Rico. Indeed, the King suggested such a move. This, then, is the initial phase of the conquest of Florida. It originated not with Ponce de León, but rather from the King.

King Ferdinand began his suggestions on July 25, 1511 when he told his Treasurer General in America "that, because I have held him (Juan Ponce de León), and continue to hold him a servant of the Crown he should talk with you and should discuss all that appears to him in which I can do him

a favor and he can serve us; especially if he should wish to take any new settlement in his charge as he did the island of San Juan." On September 9, 1511 he wrote to Puerto Rico requesting all officials to "show good will and much love for Ponce de León." On the same day, King Ferdinand wrote a letter to Ponce de León, thanking him for his communication and the dispatch of gold and suggesting "that he (Ponce de León) should get to know if there are nearby islands ready for Spanish conquest." On November 1 of the same year, the King ordered that the *residencia* of Ponce de León for his various duties, including the governorship and the conquest of the Island of San Juan, should be taken. A *residencia* was an obligatory and public review that any official had to face before a job transfer or retirement. This move by the King meant, among other things, that he wanted Ponce de León to be ready for a possible departure from the island.

The next letter that has been found dates from February 23 and is from the King to Ponce de León, and it is a key letter in the discovery of Florida. On the same day a more or less identical letter was sent from the King to the royal officials of Española in which was included a contract for Ponce de León to "discover the island of Benimy." Here then in both communications appear the island spelled either Benimy or Biminy in the communications but later written as Bimini. As we all know, the royal contractual search for Bimini by Ponce de León, a product of the correspondence with the king, led to the definite discovery of Florida. When Ponce de León arrived on the Florida shores in 1513, indications tend to confirm but do not provide total proof that he thought Florida was the island of Bimini.

From where the King or Ponce de León got the notion of the island of Bimini is yet unresolved, and we are only dealing in the realm of possible answers. Again we have the case of a missing document, unlocated by everyone who has searched for it in the many archives. The letters of February 23, 1512 by the King, giving Ponce de León a contract to go to Bimini, are in response to a letter from Ponce de León to the King, of unknown date. In this missing letter, Ponce de León unquestionably talked to the King and his officials, especially to the general treasurer, and mentioned in the letter and in the talks the island of Bimini. The King wrote to the royal officials in the February 23 letter, "Juan Ponce de León wrote me that which you will see by the enclosed letter [the lost one] about the settlement of an Island which is called Binyny." If we had this letter we

might know more from where the Bimini information came and who had already been at Florida before the arrival of Ponce de León.

Two matters in the royal correspondence are of interest. First of all, in the letter of September 9, 1511, in which the King suggested that Ponce de León get to know if there are nearby islands to conquer, King Ferdinand speaks of "the secret of these islands." Ballesteros Gaibrois asks what this means. He thinks that the information that has come to the attention of the Spaniards (and we don't know to whom and by whom) has more than the usual information and has excited the attention of the Crown. That a story or stories of supernatural people or powers of this Bimini island had reached the Spaniards is quite conceivable. Maybe this King's letter is the real origin of the Fountain of Youth myth.

The second point of interest refers also to a letter of King Ferdinand and this one is dated February 23, 1512 to the Royal Officials in Española, which contains the contract for Ponce de León to conquer and settle Bimini. The King wrote, "I think that he [Ponce de León] has reason to be content, because the Adelantado don Bartolomé Columbus (the son of Columbus) talked to me here that he wished to discover this island [of Bimini]. I believe he might have discovered it with better advantage to our treasury than we will do with Juan Ponce de León. . . ." This means that the story of Bimini was not something that Ponce de León alone had acquired, but that it was of common knowledge among the conquistadores of Española. It must have been information (myths) of an exciting nature to attract the attention of Bartolomé Columbus. That the King was not willing to let the second Columbus discover and settle Bimini (Florida) is nothing surprising, as Ferdinand was not willing to extend more the rights of the Columbus family, which in fact he was trying to reduce. Consequently, and in view of the Puerto Rican matter, he felt he could discharge his obligation and set his conscience at peace by giving Ponce de León the chance to discover Bimini.

The Bimini contract given to Ponce de León by the crown was of a new type and less rewarding than those of earlier days given to other *conquistadores*. The King wrote to the Royal Officials in the letter already mentioned that "all that now can be discovered is very easy to discover and this is not taken into account by those who want to discover [new lands]. They rush to the contract that was made with the Admiral [Christopher Columbus, when he discovered America]. They do not reflect that then there was no hope of

what was discovered and neither was it thought that such a discovery was possible." The letter indicates that Ponce de León indeed, after having been encouraged by the King to look for new lands, had mailed to Ferdinand a contract draft which the King found "very immodest and devoid from reason", words used by Ferdinand in his letter to the Royal Officials.

The contract that the King mailed for Ponce de León's acceptance was dated February 23, 1512. A good English translation is available in the Frederick Davis study and in the book by Lawson. Let us only state the 17 key points, with the help of the excellent summaries of Ballesteros Gaibrois and Murga Sanz: (1) He had three years to do the task and 12 months to initiate the expedition from the day the contract was duly signed and registered by everyone concerned; (2) The expenses of the expedition would be the responsibility of Ponce de León; (3) He was allowed to recruit people from Spain and Española; (4) Ponce de León had a priority in his claims of Bimini and the lands discovered if he initiated the expedition within one year; (5) Ponce de León should assume the executive and all the judicial functions in the new territory; (6) He should have the ownership of all the houses and estates that he will establish with his own funds in these new lands; (7) The construction and direction of forts is a royal prerogative and therefore not under the jurisdiction of Ponce de León; (8) Ponce de León shall receive for 12 years from the day of the discovery the appropriate "tenth" of all the revenues and profits, with the exception of those specified as royal properties; (9) The distribution of the Indians to the Spanish lords should be done by the Crown, but the Crown will give priority in the allotment of Indians to those who have participated in the Ponce de León expedition; (10) Gold and precious metals, plus other possible valuable commodities, shall be the property of Ponce de León and his men, with the exception of the "tenth" during the first years to the Crown; thereafter, the tax had to be a ninth for the second year, an eighth during the third, seventh for the fourth, sixth for the fifth year, and from then on, one fifth; (11) Ponce de León should receive the governorship of all the discovered neighboring islands of Bimini as long as these places are unknown and unassigned; (12) Ponce de León is given the title of *Adelantado* of Bimini and of the other lands that he would discover. This title was a desired one, going back many centuries, and was "a kind of royal deputy placed over an extensive territory and endowed with civil and judicial functions," according to C. H. Haring. And Professor Haring tells us that "Of the seventy or more individuals who in the sixteenth century contracted with the Crown to subdue

or colonize new areas in America, the rank of *Adelantado* was vouchsafed to somewhat less than half . . . ; (13) The exploitation and collection of gold, if there were some, would be the same as done in Española or as ordered by the King; (14) Ponce de León was forbidden to have in his expedition foreigners and people not resident in Spain or Spanish dependencies and colonies; (15) Everyone in the forthcoming expedition to Bimini before leaving must deposit before the Royal Officials of Española valid bonds; (16) Any frauds and other dishonesties must be reported to the Crown and its appropriate officials and anyone who was negligent of dispatching such reports should be as severely punished as those guilty of fraud; (17) Ponce de León was required to mail detailed reports of his discoveries.

The King had signed the contract on February 23, 1512 but Ponce de León did not register the expeditionary force until January 29, 1513 at the port of Yuma in the province of Higüey on the island of Española. According to the contract, he had one year from that date to discover Bimini. Although time meant nothing in those days, some historians show concern about this delay. Furthermore, in a letter dated August 12, 1512 the King personally addressed Ponce de León, showed concern and "commanded" Ponce de León to come to see him in Spain to have a personal conference. There is no doubt that Ponce de León and the contract for Bimini faced difficulties. The Columbus group was still anxious to go in search of Bimini and obviously did much behind the scene to kill the Ponce de León contract. Ponce de León, even before the King had suggested that he go in search of new islands, had wanted to go to Spain for a private royal conference. His rivals and enemies had impeded such a trip. Furthermore, it is possible—Lawson is of such opinion—that Juan Ponce de León was quite disappointed with the contract which, as the King had said, was much scaled down from his original demands.

Again we face a dark spot in the life of Ponce de León, as we have no record that proves that he went to Spain. Lawson writes, "There can be little doubt that he made this voyage, as the urgent tenor of the King's command would not permit its being disregarded." The Lawson assurance lacks a certain logic. The Murga Sanz biography, based on painstaking research, fails to mention a trip to Spain. Furthermore, the time element is a good argument against such a trip. The King requested his presence in a letter of August 12, 1512. This indeed was a rapid mail, as letters usually took much longer. Furthermore, Ponce de León's *residencia* was not finished until October 6, 1512, something told to us with documentary evidence by Lawson

himself. The next day, October 7, Ponce de León filed an appeal of the decision of the *residencia*. This meant he was still in America. Then on January 29, 1513 he registered in Española his Bimini expeditionary force, which we know because of a newly discovered and important document in the Archives of the Indies in Seville, found by Murga Sanz.

On March 3, 1513 the Ponce de León expedition for Bimini lifted sail from the Port of San Germán in Puerto Rico. Therefore, we know that Ponce de León was in America in October, 1512, January, 1513 and March, 1513, when he left for Bimini. The King's request to come to Spain to discuss Bimini was dated August, 1512 and reached America in September or October. How could Ponce de León have been in Spain to discuss the forthcoming Bimini expedition between October, 1512 and January, 1513, or between January, 1513 and March, 1513? Usually a trip to Spain and back, taking into account connections, etc., took more or less one year. Any historian dealing with the period is aware of this. This is one reason why Murga Sanz does not even discuss the matter.

If Ponce de León did not go to Spain to talk about Bimini, then we are unaware what reason he used to excuse himself from the appointment with the King. It is possible that the King wanted to persuade Ponce de León to go and therefore accept the contract, although it was somewhat disappointing to Ponce de León. Somehow, Ponce de León was persuaded or came on his volition to accept the contract without seeing the King. This, then, would have made unnecessary the long journey to Spain. Furthermore, conditions had improved in Puerto Rico and apparently had made Ponce de León less bitter. And this certainly was a situation the King wanted to smooth over. At any rate, Ponce de León apparently did not go to Spain and seemingly was busy collecting men and provisions and getting boats. As said, on January 29, 1513 he registered his expedition and this document of registry discovered by Murga Sanz represents so far the best new data unearthed in the Florida discovery by Ponce de León.

Still the data are not complete. Juan Ponce de León sailed to Florida (Bimini) with three ships. These were named Santa María de la Consolación, Santiago and San Cristóbal. Apparently Ponce de León initially had hoped to make the trip to Bimini with two ships—the Consolación and the Santiago. These two sails Ponce de León registered in January 1513 at Yuma, on the island of Española. Ponce de León sailed with the Consolación and Santiago

to San Germán in Puerto Rico, where they arrived in February, 1513. In Puerto Rico Ponce de León acquired a third ship, called San Cristóbal, which was captained by Juan Pérez de Ortubia. We do not have the registry of the San Cristóbal and therefore do not know its crew. As we possess the registry of the Consolación and the Santiago, we now know about two-thirds of the force that came with Ponce de León when he discovered Florida in 1513. Indeed, it is a pity that the identity of the San Cristóbal crew has not been located. It would complete the roster of the brave force that officially discovered Florida.

The Consolación carried Ponce de León himself, and its captain was Juan Bono de Quejo. The registry unfortunately does not give us the tonnage or description of the ship. Since some of the material that Ponce de León carried was duty free, it was therefore not registered. The crew, however, was registered. The Consolación carried ten sailors, ten civilians and eight cabin or ship boys. Among the civilians was one woman, identified only as Juana Ruíz, and therefore she was the first European woman to come to Florida. Among the cabin boys was one named Jorge, who was identified as a Negro, and this one is then the first Negro in Florida. Among the civilians, there is listed a "Fernandico, Indian, slave." No other identity is given. It is conceivable that he was a native of some Caribbean island captured in an Indian war, which was the only permissible way of making an Indian a slave. It is also possible that he was an Indian who knew Bimini or Florida, and was taken as an interpreter and guide. Another individual among the civilians was "Juan de León, slave." Since he is not identified as an Indian, it is conceivable that he too was a Negro, although such racial identity is not given as was the case of the shipboy, Jorge. All the names except two, which were totally illegible, who traveled to Florida in the Consolación are listed in the Murga Sanz book. The same is true of the Santiago. This unspecified ship carried eight naval men and six cabin boys. The captain, identified as "mainmaster", was Diego Bermúdez. Aboard was also the mare of Juan Ponce de León.

As said, the two ships arrived in the port of San Germán in Puerto Rico—near today's San Germán—on February 8. We have no information why Ponce de León selected San Germán as the embarkation point for his Bimini expedition. It should be stated that he had founded San Germán and certainly must have strong reasons—which might have been purely personal—for selecting the spot. It might have been that he still found opposition,

mostly based on jealousy, from his rivals in Puerto Rico and Española. These men had openly abandoned their objections to the Ponce de León Bimini venture under pressure from the King. Fifteen days after Ponce de León with his three ships had left San Germán for Bimini, the official in Española reported to the King, and Ferdinand answered, "It is with great pleasure that I have received your news that Juan Ponce de León has left for Bimini." The King forcefully requested all the officials to aid in every way possible Ponce de León's effort to discover Bimini and other islands. The King requested the officials to report to the Crown every piece of news about the Ponce de León trip and the planned discovery. The Columbus family and its partisans, composed of many high officials, regardless of their promises of good will to the King were not ready to let Ponce de León get away with new discoveries. There is hardly any doubt that Diego Columbus, the discoverer's son, dispatched a trusted lieutenant to spy on Ponce de León or to discover Bimini ahead of Juan Ponce de León. This man was the sailor Diego Miruela, whom Ponce de León found apparently shipwrecked on Bahama Island on their return trip from Florida in July, 1513. It was quite ironical that Ponce de León came to the aid of Miruela and carried him back home. We know next to nothing of the results of the 1513 Miruela spying trip, and this includes the answer to the often asked question of whether Miruela reached Florida ahead of Juan Ponce de León, or if he got lost in the Bahama islands. At any rate, Ponce de León failed to find a great rich island called Bimini, although he sailed in the Bahamas but did not touch what we call Bimini today. He did find a new land he called Florida, and he maintained his rights and title to Florida, and it was not taken from him by the Columbus family.

Ponce de León returned to Puerto Rico from his Florida discovery on October 15, 1513 and he had left on March 3. He and his crew sighted Florida, which they thought at first to be an island, on April 2, 1513. The evening of the same day they anchored off the coast and stepped ashore, more probably the early morning of April 3 than the night of April 2. Either on April 2 or 3, they named the new land La Florida. Florida had been officially discovered and its continuous history had begun. When he and his expedition reached Florida on that day of April 1513, he was unaware that this land he discovered would one day become a booming civilization. And he was unaware that he left great controversies which gave rise to many myths. On that day of April 2 he was in Florida, but history would not let us decide where, in what spot, he was. Only one source, composed three quarters of a

century later, has come down to tell us of the 1513 trip—even in the year of when the trip was taken this source is wrong, as it vaguely claims 1512, which has proven to be incorrect. This is the Herrera account. And the Herrera part that describes the Ponce de León discovery of Florida—really quite short—has been used by innumerable authors, and many of them have done all kinds of interpretations, interpolations and calculations to make Ponce de León land at their favored spot. A few others have honestly tried to deduce the exact landing site.

In April, 1513 Ponce de León with his three ships, *Consolación*, *Santiago* and *San Cristóbal*, reached Florida somewhere between Cape Kennedy and the mouth of the St. Johns River. It is a good bet that the landing was closer to the St. Augustine area than any other spot in this 200 mile range. But it is most doubtful that Ponce de León entered what is today the St. Augustine harbor. After remaining a few days at their original landing spot, Ponce de León and his crew sailed in Florida waters and in this way started the recorded history of Florida. Unquestionably other European sailors had seen Florida and even landed on its shores. The early pre-1513 cartography of America and the Caribbean prove this assertion. But to Ponce de León goes the honor of the official discovery of Florida, in 1513, which took place not too far away from the present-day site of St. Augustine.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

There has been done thorough and intense research on Juan Ponce de León but in all instances by Spanish speaking, especially Puerto Rican, historians. Two of them have produced key works which are absolutely necessary for any Ponce de León discussion. These are the able Catholic prelate and the celebrated historian Vicente Murga Sanz and the dedicated amateur historian Aurelio Tió. Both men have, with ample funds and time available, searched with patience and persistence in all archives of Spain for Ponce de León material. One can hardly duplicate these efforts and only unexpected discoveries by chance in unexpected corners or boxes in public or private archives might bring to light new information. The documentation located is still sketchy in many parts, especially those dealing with Ponce de León's early life and his Florida ventures. This has given cause for various deductions and since Murga Sanz and Tió competed in their search they have become rivals and presented the reader and researcher with different interpretations and deductions of what they considered their important archival

discoveries. Father Murga Sanz has written a well-annotated biography of Ponce de León which today represents the most definitive study of the Florida discoverer. Mr. Aurelio Tió has two books which contain much Ponce de León material, including valuable documentation he has discovered. He has not written a biography of Ponce de León.

A third Spanish-writing author is the Spaniard, Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois, Professor of History at the University of Madrid. His Ponce de León book is not an original study based on primary sources nor is it a straight biography, but rather an interpretative monograph and in this capacity it is first rate. The document index, organized chronologically and containing 254 key documents or bundles of documents related to Ponce de León, is one of the most valuable research aids in any Ponce de León research. But since the book was published in 1960 it did not include the second Tió book information. Unfortunately the Ballesteros Gaibrois book is hardly known by Florida historians.

To the Florida reader and those who do not know Spanish there is only one slim biography, written by the late Edward Lawson of St. Augustine. Today the book leaves much to be desired in view of the new documental discoveries by the Puerto Rican researchers. But for the unspecialized student and the interested man on the street the Lawson book stands as a readable and concise biography which in its broad outlines tells the truth as we know it from better-known sources which are listed. Only in one spot does Lawson permit his prejudice enter the picture. He was devoted to a preconceived belief that Ponce de León landed in St. Augustine and he later published under contract for a private tourist business two pamphlets in which he tried to prove that the Fountain of Youth was located in St. Augustine at a known spot advertised to tourists. But this should not mean that his earlier biographical book is not of value. Unfortunately, a recent biography in English of Ponce de León published by an obscure publisher in Brooklyn is an utterly defective book as explained in my review in the *Florida Historical Quarterly*. It suffices to say that among the legion of mistakes is one which confuses the Spanish word caballero (gentleman) for caballo (horse). There is one article by Frederick Davis in one of the older issues of the *Florida Historical Quarterly*, but this is not biographical and only deals with Ponce de León's expeditions to Florida. It is a solid and unbiased article and since practically no new documents dealing with the Florida phase of Ponce de León have come to light the Davis article is basic

to this phase, and in my mind is far preferable to the Lawson chapters dealing with the Florida Ponce de León expeditions. As a final word: anyone interested in further sources of studies dealing with or marginal to Ponce de León should especially consult the Murga Sanz footnotes and bibliography and do the same with regard to the Aurelio Tió books and that of Ballesteros Gaibrois. Before terminating this study, I would like to warn that it is conceivable that very little new Ponce de León material will be discovered in the future and that we might have reached a near termination point of Ponce de León research which will leave many questions unanswered. Hope has not been abandoned of a sudden and unexpected find of additional data. But no one should bet on it.

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PERSONAL LETTERS

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Charles W. Arnade to Aurelio Tió, May 15, 1964.

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