

Colonial Spanish Quarter Village

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One of the great delights of St Augustine is the pride its residents take in their heritage and the legacy they cherish. For the most part, the town has been carefully preserved to maintain the "old St Augustine" atmosphere while offering a clear look back into the past. One of the best places in St Augustine to see the past up close is at the Colonial Spanish Quarter Village, located at 29 St George Street.

Every time I visit The Colonial Spanish Quarter Village, I can't help but wonder if looking into the past, we might build a better future?

Lying along St George Street, across from the Castillo de San Marcos, the Village is a living history museum where interpreters become residents and 1740's St Augustine is a way of life. The village operates exactly as St Augustine did when it was young(er). Each resident offers a skill that provides what the village needs, just as they did over four hundred years ago.



A self-guided walk through the Village allows close-up glimpses into the homes of soldiers and their lives with their families. The houses in the village are reconstructed from archeological findings and research into the history of the structures that once stood along St George Street. Structures are built by hand, using tools of the period, and crafts and art such as spinning, weaving, sewing, tatting, lacemaking, carpentry, candlemaking, woodworking, gardening, leathercrafting and blacksmithing are all done by hand at the village. Much of the clothing worn by the residents is spun, woven and sewn on site. Tools are either made or acquired as best the residents are able to find them. Food for meals in the village is grown on site in the Spanish Quarter gardens, and lunch cooks at the Village most days.

I have roamed about the Colonial Spanish Quarter Village for all the years I have been roaming around St Augustine, and I have thoroughly enjoyed talking to the residents and getting an inside look at what it was really like to live in my favorite city. It's one thing to live in St Augustine - it is an entirely different thing to *live* there. Many of the interpreters at the village are not "portraying" a character while they are



on the timeclock - some actually incorporate much of the 1740's Spanish lifestyle into their own daily lives. I once spoke with an interpreter there who told me she often dressed the same out of the village as she did when she came to work - she sensibly pointed out that the clothing was far cooler and more practical for her way of life.

I have always been fascinated with the Spanish implements and tools of the time period, and the construction of the Spanish houses. Visit the Casa de Gallegos; wouldn't cooking a meal be so much more

enjoyable if you could sit comfortably on a wide, low "kitchen counter" to prepare your family's food, while a breeze wafted in through the wide, open windows, and your pet blue jay chattered at you from the top of your shutter? And how much easier would it be to keep a house with only two rooms, when you rolled up your sleeping mats and swept your floor each morning? The idea has its merits, I think.



The sense of community is strong here. It is easy to feel the bond that exists between the people who "live" here; and it clearly paints a living picture of what life in St Augustine in 1740 was really like. It was not just a good idea to band together for a common purpose - it was crucial to the very existence of these people to band together for a common purpose - survival. They had only what they had - what they could repair, make, or barter for. Money had little value, really, for if ships couldn't bring goods from Spain, what was there to buy?

When the town had money, and had things to buy with it, times were good. And when pirates attacked, or General James Oglethorpe, and his sidekick, Noble Jones, came up from Georgia to cause problems for St Augustine, everyone grabbed their chickens and their cow or their pig, whatever belongings they could carry, and huddled in the Castillo and hoped for the best.



But, most times, soldiers could be found socializing in the tavern and housewives chatting over the fences or through the windows. When a Spanish ship was sighted in the Atlantic, great celebrations broke out, for a new load of goods was arriving and stocks and stores would be replenished. Soon a new belt would appear here or a new skirt there, new bowls and pots and pans and materials to make all manner of new and useful things, and everyone felt wealthy!

Today, many of the interpreters who work in the village will tell you that doing what they do makes them feel wealthy.

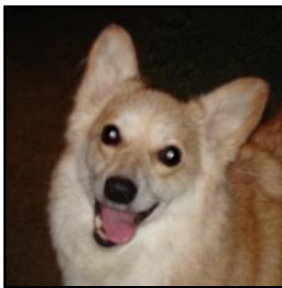
The Colonial Spanish Quarter Village now opens the Taberna del Gallo (Tavern of the Rooster) to visitors on selected evenings. Visit the Taberna for a true St Augustine experience offered nowhere else - socializing in an authentic 18th-century Spanish tavern while enjoying cool drinks.



Be sure and visit the Colonial Spanish Quarter Village Museum Store. It is filled with delightful things like crafts and games for children, unique gifts, wonderful T-shirts, and household items that look as though they belong in an 18th-century Spanish home, but are beautiful and functional in any home. You can also purchase items made in the Village, such as iron hooks and nails, handmade beeswax candles, and wooden kitchen goods. I never leave St Augustine without bringing home something from The Colonial Spanish Quarter Village!

I spoke with one of the village craftsmen recently; I watched him hammering away for a few minutes, and then I asked him, "What would you be doing if you weren't doing what you are doing right now?"

He pondered the question for a moment and then he replied, "I'd be doing this somewhere else!" He went on to tell me how content he is to live in St Augustine, and how he himself has incorporated so much of the Spanish Quarter lifestyle into his own life. And I told him I thought he was one of the luckiest people I know!



This article was created with the help of my Pembroke Welsh Corgi, Sera, who loves St Augustine and insisted on sitting in my lap and punching the keyboard as I designed the page. Sera says that if Pedro Menendez had had Corgis with him when he landed, Spain would rule the world!