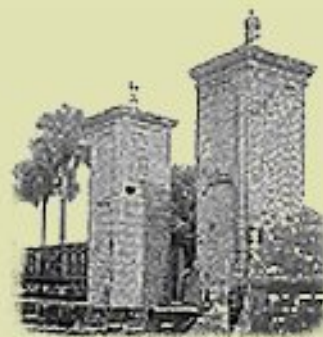




THE ST. AUGUSTINE REPORT

Local news in our Nation's Oldest City



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Heritage plans 'on the front burner'

Our City Commission, in a series of actions Monday night, put our heritage program "squarely on the front burner" in the words of Chief Operating Officer John Regan.

Commissioners approved a land lease to create a new entry and sightseeing vehicle stop along Avenida Menendez, endorsed plans to build a 16th century ship on the former Mary Peck lot adjacent to that entry, discussed joint ticket sales with the Castillo and creation of a non-profit fundraising foundation, approved a funding match for a traffic study of our historic area, ordered monthly public workshops on plans for the 450th, and called for an end to state legislation giving the University of Florida management of 34 state-owned historic properties here.

While development of a solid business plan for our heritage program dominated, commissioners also approved Floodplain Management code adjustments which will better protect historic properties and may reduce flood insurance rates, set hours for Hamilton Upchurch Park at 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. from April through September and 10 to 6 October through March, and authorized \$250,000 from reserve funds to install less expensive LED lighting in our Visitor Center parking facility.





Our Age of Opulence

Henry Flagler takes center stage tonight in the sixth of a seven program series, *Discover First America; Legacies of La Florida*, as he describes in conversation with Mayor Joe Boles *Palaces in Paradise: Flagler's Age of Opulence*.

Flagler will be represented by Flagler College Professor Emeritus of History Dr. Tom Graham, while John Blades, Executive Director of the Flagler Museum in Palm Beach, will overview the oil baron's adventures as his vision carried him south to extend a new age of tourism to the Florida Keys.

The popular *First America* series, a project of the St. Augustine 450th Commemoration Commission, is free and held at the Flagler College Auditorium, where doors will open at 6:30 for visitors to browse numerous organization tables before the program at 7.

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Caging '800 pound gorilla'

Mayor Joe Boles admitted "there are difficult days ahead" getting the state legislature to sunset 2007 legislation giving the University of Florida (UF) management of the historic properties won't be easy.



Mayor Boles

"I believe (State Rep.) Proctor (who introduced the legislation) does not believe the city should have long-term control of these properties," Boles said. "I believe he feels UF will be a more stable steward.

"But we've invited the 800-pound gorilla into our midst," he continued. "UF's Business



Rep. Proctor

Affairs Department stepped in, and they're not interested in some \$27 million in repairs to the properties, but rather building a new \$10 million visitor center they want to be the main entry for visitors."

He said \$600,000 recently announced to be applied to UF plans "is not enough to move us along, and we're running out of time."

A solid business plan

While Boles said the state and UF have failed to develop a plan for the state properties, Heritage Tourism Director Dana Ste. Claire, also executive director of the St. Augustine 450th Commemoration Commission, outlined a "new, contemporary, and exciting" city plan, and described improvements already under way, including greater visibility and improvements in our Spanish Quarter.

Chief Operations Officer John Regan added that an improved revenue stream can support bonding for greater improvements. Key is development of joint ticket sales with the Castillo, which annually attracts ten times the 50,000 visiting the Spanish Quarter. "And that can happen when we have a quality product that measures up to the military experience (of the Castillo)," he said.

Our community pulling together

Mayor Boles noted, "this community pulled together the money to build (the historic properties) for our 400th anniversary. We know best how to interpret our history. We need to control our own destiny."

On the heels of that, Vice Mayor Errol Jones won commission support for monthly public workshops to dialog plans for our 450th and heritage program. City Clerk Karen Rogers will canvas commissioners for the first workshop date later this month.

Asked if the public will be asked for input at this first session, Boles said, "Absolutely. We need all the input we can get."

A ship for St. Augustine

Commissioners questioned plans to build a 16th century tall ship in the Spanish Quarter while plans are being developed for a Castillo orientation center there. "The orientation center planning is a 3-4 year process," Ste. Claire responded. And the ship will be movable at any time they're ready to start."

A Maritime Activities Committee, formerly the Ship Committee of the 450 Community Corps, has been developing plans for nearly two years for a 16th century caravel, a 65-foot "workhorse" of fleets dating back to Columbus. To be named the *San Agustin*, the fully operational vessel will be harbored here and make goodwill and training voyages along the east coast.

Riberia project meeting Thursday

A public meeting has been scheduled for Thursday at 6 p.m. at St. Paul AME Church, to discuss future improvements along Riberia Street from King to Cerro Street.

A city announcement urges business owners, homeowners and other interested persons to attend. Public Works staff and consultants will provide an update, with a question and answer period to follow.

Further information at 825.1040.

Five centuries of Saturday



Ponce Company members describe 16th century life and horsemanship at Saturday muster here.

From the company of Ponce de Leon at the Fountain of Youth Park across town to the model train yard of Bud Harriss, St. Augustine spanned five centuries last Saturday afternoon.

La Compañía de Juan Ponce de León (The Company of Juan Ponce de León) drew living history interpreters to its first muster in preparation for the 500th anniversary of the explorer's discovery of these lands in 2013, complete with rations of the period and demonstrations both afoot and on horseback.

Off Holmes Boulevard, City Manager Bill Harriss' dad, Bud, was hosting



Amtrak among model trains

every kid's joy - an outdoor model rail system with a variety of trains, including a sleek replica of what our city hopes will become reality here - an Amtrak commuter train.

Judging by the grey heads among the "engineers," many never outgrow their fascination with the "Iron Horse."

Signs of our times



Our Castillo is sporting a new entry sign, complete with coquina posts

Two of our city's prominent historic assets are sporting new signage - our 315-year-old Castillo and the younger (a mere 125 years) Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind.

The new Castillo entrance sign features coquina posts reflecting our city gate, and is part of the National Park Service program which also includes setting new coquina blocks along its timeworn ramparts.

Up along San Marco Avenue, the Florida school has signage flanking its main entrance, "Celebrating 125 years of Service."

Opened in 1885 with a \$20,000 state appropriation and five acres of land - St. Augustine offered the best bid to locate the school - today the Florida



School for the Deaf and the Blind is the largest school of its type in the United States.

The school has grown from three small buildings on those five acres to 46 major buildings on nearly 80 acres of land. From the original biennial appropriation of \$20,000, the School has a current operating budget of more than \$40 million.

History's Highlights

Henry Flagler's legacy lives on today

One in a series of historic features as we prepare for our commemorations, drawn from research by George Gardner

It's difficult to decide which of Henry Morrison Flagler's lives was more significant: The twenty years building an enormous fortune in oil, or the thirty years investing it in the building of Florida.

After developing Standard Oil with John D. Rockefeller, Flagler turned to the needs of his wife, Mary. Doctors advised the healthful climate of Florida to ease her bronchitis, and the Flaglers found St. Augustine.

Mary died in 1881, and four years later, Flagler revisited the city, found previously squalid accommodations replaced by a fine new San Marco Hotel (where today's Visitor Information Center is located), and recuperating consumptive visitors replaced by elite northerners.



He saw the potential to build an American Riviera, and the result abounds in our city today - in churches, brick streets, public works, and hotels, dominated by the magnificent Ponce de Leon, today's Flagler College.

Responding to a question about the hotel's construction, Flagler responded:

"I think it more likely I am spending an unnecessary amount of money in the foundation walls, but I

comfort myself in the reflection that a hundred years hence it will be all the same to me and the building

the better because of my extravagance."

Flagler partnered with the city in many projects, but was often frustrated by slower moving government action. Finally, in 1906, he left the city, his irritation showing in a note:

"I have realized from the beginning that St. Augustine was a dull place, but it does seem as though twenty years would stir up some little measure of public spirit; enough at least to keep the only street we have to the railroad in decent condition."

If his mind drove him south, his heart remained here, where today he is at rest with his first wife, Mary, daughter

Jennie, and granddaughter Margery, in the mausoleum at Memorial Presbyterian Church.

The St. Augustine Report is published by the Department of Public Affairs of the City of St. Augustine each Tuesday and on Fridays previewing City Commission meetings. The Report is written and distributed by George Gardner, former St. Augustine Mayor (2002-2006) and Commissioner (2006-2008) and a longtime newspaper reporter and editor. Contact The *Report* at gardner@aug.com

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