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Chapter 16
Fort San José, a Remote Spanish Outpost in Northwest Florida, 1700–1721

Julie Rogers Saccente and Nancy Marie White

16.1 History of Fort San José

In 2013, the "Viva Florida" celebration commemorated the 500th anniversary of the Spanish arrival in the state of Florida. Juan Ponce de León landed on the Atlantic coast in April 1513, naming the land "La Florida" after the rich landscape and flowery Easter season. His search for adventure and treasure was the first documented entrance of Europeans into what is now the USA. He was followed by many more explorers, including those who ventured into the Gulf of Mexico. But they did not enter northwest Florida's Apalachicola delta region (Fig. 16.1). Then came colonists and missionaries, until the Atlantic coast had a string of missions that also extended into the interior. By the mid- to late seventeenth century, Mission San Luis, in modern Tallahassee, was a major Apalachee Indian and Spanish center and supplier of goods to St. Augustine on the Atlantic and to Cuba (Hann and McEwan 1998). The port for Mission San Luis was at San Marcos (St. Marks) on the Gulf. At modern Pensacola, to the west on the Gulf, a 1719 presidio followed earlier settlement (Bense 1999). However, geographically in between these centers, the great, resource-rich delta area of the Apalachicola valley was ignored by the old-world intruders. Only a handful of Spanish goods filtered into aboriginal protohistoric sites (White 2011) until the Spanish established a short-lived lookout-type fort in 1701 and then the sturdier Fort San José in 1719 on St. Joseph Bay. The fort was located at the very tip of the barrier peninsula across from the mainland, in what is today Gulf County, within the T. H. Stone Memorial St. Joseph Peninsula State Park

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Fig. 16.1 Location of Fort San José on the Gulf of Mexico coast in northwest Florida

and across the bay from the modern town of Port St. Joe (Fig. 16.2). Fort San José (official state site number: 8Gu8) is the only identified Spanish colonial site in the entire Apalachicola Delta region and was the only known Spanish occupation on the coast between Tallahassee/St. Marks and Pensacola.

There is historic documentation of this fort, and its location was verified by archeology in the 1960s. Hale Smith of Florida State University was invited by local landowners farther down the peninsula to investigate a prehistoric site, but when a girl showed him a piece of Spanish pottery from the tip of the peninsula, he forgot about the first site and immediately went to dig the fort. Unfortunately, he never reported his work, though his materials are still curated at Florida State. The University of West Florida later did a survey of the area (Benchley and Bense 2001). Recently a large private collection of artifacts from the fort was made available to us at the University of South Florida by a collector who obtained it 40 years ago and valued his artifacts enough to construct a small building in the back of his house to hold them all. In addition, local historian Wayne Childers has done work on Spanish archives in Mexico pertaining to the region. His 2001 *History of T. H. Stone Park, St. Joseph's Peninsula*, and other works provide great background and details about life at the fort.

Fig. 16.2 Location of Fort San José on the St. Joseph Peninsula, with modern towns of Port St. Joe and Apalachicola

Since Florida became the first region of North America north of Mexico to be invaded by the Spanish (Cabeza de Vaca et al. 1993 [1542]; Clayton et al. 1995; Wood 1989, p. 51), numerous exploratory expeditions passed by or stopped at the St. Joseph Peninsula. The bay appears early in history as the Spanish developed some awareness of their territory. It is first shown by name on the famous 1584 map by Abraham Ortelius (Fig. 16.3). The exact circumstances of why the bay was named St. Joseph are so far unknown, though many other saints' names were given to islands and bays in the region, possibly commemorating the date of first recording. The 1718 French map by Jean Beranger (Fig. 16.4) is the most detailed historic document we have found that shows the St. Joseph Peninsula. This map was created just 1 year before Fort San José was established near the tip of the peninsula. The location where the small Spanish lookout was established in 1701 is called "Pointe aux Chevreuil" (Deer Point). This tiny settlement lasted only a few months, but apparently set the fouudations for the establishment of Fort San José about 18 years later.

St. Joseph Bay is 5–8 km wide and is a salty, nonestuarine lagoon. It offers a deepwater port, as opposed to the shallow Apalachicola Bay, which is approximately

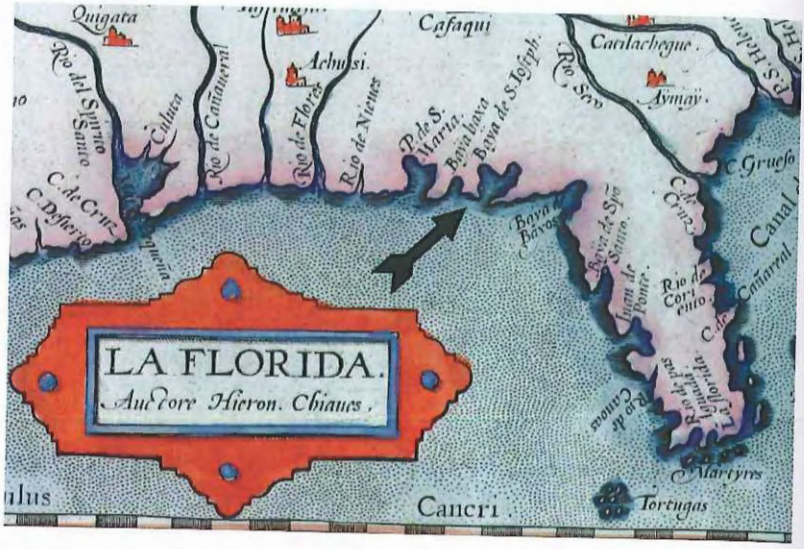

Fig. 16.3 Excerpt from the La Florida map by Abraham Ortelius (1584); adapted from the original, courtesy of Diana Zaragoza; *arrow* indicates "Baya de S. Ioseph"

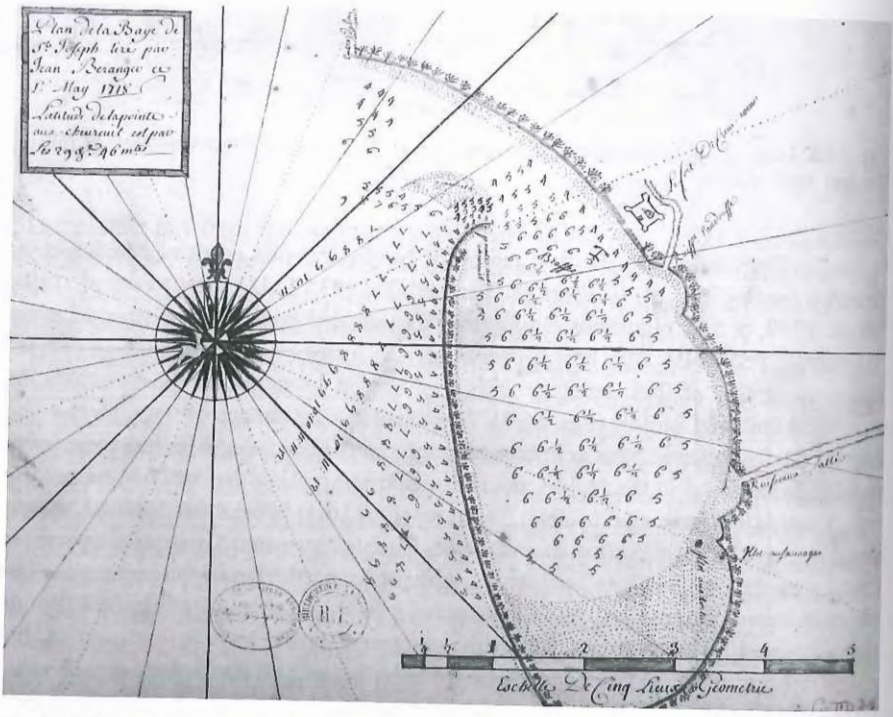

Fig. 16.4 Excerpt from the Plan de la Baye de St. Joseph by Jean Beranger (1718); adapted from the online Newberry Library Cartographic Catalog; the tip of St. Joseph Peninsula is labeled "Pointe aux Chevreuil"; across from it on the mainland is "Le forte De Crève coeur" (the French Fort Broken-heart or Heartbreak) shown on a stream labeled "Ruisse l'au dousse" (freshwater creek)

Fig. 16.5 Photo of Fort San José location today, with white sand beach, native pines and palms, and St. Joseph Bay in the right background

56 km by ship, east of St. Joseph Bay. Access to a deepwater port made St. Joseph Bay an ideal location for the Spanish with their heavy ships. Thomas Hutchins, explorer and mapmaker, visited the St. Joseph Peninsula in the late 1700s and described the bay as an excellent harbor in which the best place to anchor was just within the peninsula, opposite from the ruins of Fort San José. Hutchins warned against bringing boats too close to the shore as the bay becomes very shallow in these areas (Hutchins 1968, p. 85).

The shoreline of the St. Joseph Peninsula is constantly reworked by waves and currents, including seasonal storms and the occasional hurricane, which reveal material evidence of the fort on the beach and in the water. Because of the dynamic nature of the shoreline, any structural evidence of the fort is not apparent, and the only remaining physical evidence of the site are the artifacts that wash out (Benchley and Bense 2001). The dynamism of this environment would have affected anyone trying to settle there (Davis 1997). The site today is pristine white sandy beach that is used for recreational purposes (Fig. 16.5) and has won awards for its beauty.

Settlers obtained both aquatic and terrestrial species to supplement provisions supplied by the Spanish Crown. Aquatic resources are available seasonally and are restricted to saltwater species found in St. Joseph Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. Saltwater fish found in St. Joseph Bay include Spanish mackerel, bluefish, redfish, speckled trout, and flounder (Hubbell et al. 1956). Shellfish such as whelk, conch, and scallop would have been seasonally harvested from the bay, and their use by prehistoric people is reflected in numerous prehistoric occupation sites in this area (White 2005). Some of the fish that would have been present in great abundance in the 1700s include cod, grouper, and red mullet (Hutchins 1968, p. 86).

The first Spanish occupation of St. Joseph Bay in 1701 was by Mexican, Spanish, and Portuguese soldiers and sailors, as well as some of the local Chacato Indian population. The inhabitants brought with them skills they learned in their various professions; they included a shoemaker from a family of shoemakers in Mexico

City, weavers, and a stonecutter (Childers 2001, p. 8). What apparently led most of them to St. Joseph was not a thirst for adventure or even employment but rather the need to make reparations for a criminal past that for many included, murder and thievery.

Construction details of the Spanish lookout on the peninsula and a small garrison on the mainland are unknown. A large banner with Spain's coat of arms was reported to have been flown from a pole and seen far out to sea to alert the passing ships to the location of the entrance of the bay (Childers 2001, p. 8). Childers (2001, p. 7) speculates that houses probably consisted of small huts made from pine poles thatched with palm, materials being used in Pensacola and readily available in the St. Joseph Bay area. Such houses would typically have a hearth in the middle of the room and a smokehole opened in the roof. There were two churches established, one for the soldiers and another for the Chacato Indians. The churches were called St. Joseph and Our Lady of Guadalupe, respectively.

The exact date of the Spanish withdrawal from the first outpost at St. Joseph Bay is unknown. Weddle (1991, p. 374) states it was abandoned after a few months due to lack of provisions. Faye (1946, p. 177) believes the final withdrawal was in 1704 under orders of the Mexican commandant at St. Joseph Bay. The Spanish did not visit St. Joseph for at least the next 13 years as far as we know. Other than possible visits by native groups moving through the area, no other settlements are recorded here either from this time.

In early 1718, to the west in French territory, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville (the founder of Mobile, Alabama) was ordered to occupy St. Joseph Bay (Weddle 1991, p. 208, 216). Bienville knew from the onset that the Spanish claim to this area would not be the only problem with occupying this site. He noted to the Navy Council that the entrance to the bay was very wide and could not be easily defended. Once inside the bay, there was no shelter for the vessels. Additionally, the soil was sandy, with no streams or rivers flowing into the bay, and Bienville commented that the drinking water was very bad here (Childers 2001, p. 13).

By May 1, 1718, the French had constructed, on the mainland opposite the tip of the peninsula, a fort with four bastions garrisoned by a company of 50 men (Faye 1946, pp. 185–186; Weddle 1991, p. 208, 216). The exact location of this French fort has yet to be verified archeologically. Beranger (Fig. 16.4) shows "Le forte De Crève Coeur" ("Broken Heart" or "Heartbreak" Fort) on the mainland across St. Joseph Bay, just opposite the point of the peninsula (Weddle 1991, p. 208). Our attempts to locate this French fort have turned up no evidence so far, though it was probably located adjacent to the only small freshwater stream in the area. St. Joseph Bay is more saline than the Gulf of Mexico because hardly any freshwater streams flow into it. European settlers would have wanted to be near fresh water.

Spanish response to the new French fort did not take long. Captain Juan Manuel Roldan, the acting governor of Pensacola, was notified of a French ship anchored inside St. Joseph Bay and sent scouts and then finally went himself to tell the French to leave. After Bienville presented his apprehensions about continuing to occupy St. Joseph to the colonial council in July of 1718, they decided unanimously to abandon and burn Fort Crève Coeur and leave St. Joseph Bay (Childers 2001, p. 14;

Hann 2006, p. 172). By August 20, 1718, the French were gone, having stayed there only 2 months.

While the French were packing their bags and setting fire to their fort, the Spanish were preparing to reoccupy St. Joseph Bay on the sandy beach of the peninsula. The Council of the Indies in Madrid considered the French issue at St. Joseph Bay a sign that the Spanish needed to strengthen their hold on the Gulf (Faye 1946a). On March 29, 1719, 800 men belonging to four companies arrived from Veracruz and Pensacola to occupy St. Joseph Bay under the command of Don Gregorio de Salinas Varona (Childers 2001, p. 15). Salinas picked the St. Joseph Peninsula for the location of this new fort, since his prior experience at Santa Rosa Island showed him that forts surrounded by water were easily defensible (Weddle 1991). This location was also ideal as a deepwater port, since the depth of the channel running into St. Joseph Bay drops to at least 9 m, making this port easily accessible for large ships. It is a good strategic location; however, it has a lack of readily available fresh water and the barrier formation of constantly shifting soft sands changes shape with every storm. The Spaniards constantly ignored this last point and were often rebuilding settlements around Pensacola and elsewhere which they had built on barrier islands.

After Pensacola fell to the French, Fort San José became the most important Spanish occupation in the Florida panhandle for the next 3 years. By 1720, the fort was mostly completed and its presence apparently deterred a French fleet of four warships and a storeship that had anchored just outside of the harbor of St. Joseph Bay from attacking (Childers 2001, p. 17).

Historical documents from Spain's archives translated by Childers (2001) suggest that Fort San José was modeled after standard Spanish construction plans. It had four sides and at least two bastions. The French priest, Pierre Charleviox saw the fort in May of 1722 and described it as "built only of earth but ... well lined with palisades and defended with numerous artillery." (Charleviox 1761, p. 345). There were officer's quarters, a chapel, a powder magazine, storehouses for military equipment and rations, a guardhouse or living quarters for the common soldiers, and lodging for the officers within the northern part of the fort. Fort San José's floors were covered with ladrillos, red clay tiles, many of which were recovered during the excavations and some of which still wash up today on the shore of the site, visible in the clear bay water. But remains of the fort itself are gone, beyond some depressions amid the white dunes.

At the end of the War of the Quadruple Alliance, Spain demanded the return of Pensacola, and after much negotiation, a treaty was passed on March 27, 1721. Bienville received orders to hand over Pensacola to the Spanish on April 6, 1722. The desire of Spain to reinforce its foothold in Pensacola is the very reason the occupation at San José was so short-lived, as the orders also called for the abandonment of Fort San José. By early 1723, Fort San José had been dismantled and its people and resources moved to strengthen Pensacola (Childers 2001, p. 30). Of those residing at Fort San José, at least 179 soldiers and sailors, 24 forced laborers, an unknown number of women and children, and an unknown number of Indians, said to be Tocobaga and Apalachee, moved to Santa Rosa in Pensacola, according

to historical correspondence from Spanish Lieutenant Colonel Alejandro Wauchope to the Viceroy in 1723 (Childers 2001, p. 30). The remaining residents of Fort San José were transported to Veracruz (Bense 1999).

The abandonment of Fort San José marked the end of the Spanish presence in the Apalachicola delta region. When the Spanish had returned to Pensacola Bay, they resided at Presidio Santa Rosa in Pensacola from 1722 to 1752. Santa Rosa was located on a barrier island, and after a devastating hurricane, its population was relocated to the mainland in 1752, where they resided at the Presidio San Miguel (Clune and Stringfield 2009; Bense 1999). By 1763, the Spanish had abandoned this settlement to Great Britain.

16.2 Archeology of Fort San José

Who was at Fort San José? Documents indicate a rich social and multicultural mix. There were priests, Spanish officers with their families, Mexican convicts, and even Mexican prostitutes sent by the church (!) to keep the men company (Childers 2001). There were also native Americans, and apparently lots of Southeastern Indians. Though ethnicity is not always easily inferred from the material record, each of these peoples left portions of the archeological evidence.

We studied a total of 2851 artifacts (weighing 72,541 g) from Fort San José, representing all the known extant material culture from the site, including private and state-owned collections. The most dominant artifact type in the assemblage by number is historical European–American ceramics, followed by aboriginal ceramics and brick and mortar (Table 16.1).

Aboriginal ceramics make up 25% of the total artifact assemblage by number. Only 5% of the aboriginal pottery was able to be classified by established ceramic

Table 16.1 Artifacts recovered from Fort San José by category, with percentages of the total assemblage by number and weight

Type	*N*	Percentage	Wt (g)	Percentage
Aboriginal ceramics	704	24.69	7216	9.95
Historical European–American ceramics	1070	37.53	20,830	28.71
Indeterminate clay	5	0.18	260	0.36
Metal	390	13.68	5286	7.29
Glass	95	3.33	1990	2.74
Ground stone	5	0.18	1594	2.2
Brick and mortar	525	18.41	34,640	47.75
Historical lithics	11	0.39	75	0.1
Pumice	4	0.14	33	0.05
Fauna	14	0.49	132	0.18
Shell	28	0.98	485	0.67
Total	2851	100	72,541	100

Fig. 16.6 Aboriginal pottery from Fort San José. 2 Ocmulgee Fields Incised, Lamar Complicated-Stamped (*Top, left to right*); 2 Lamar Plain, sand-tempered, notched, and incised with an appliqué rim (Lamar?) (*Bottom, left to right*)

types (Deagan 1987; Noël Hume 1962; White 2009; Willey 1949). These types include Ocmulgee Fields Incised, Lamar Plain, Lamar Complicated-Stamped and Leon Check-Stamped with folded, punctated rims, and unique pottery such as a sand-tempered rim with a notched appliqué strip below the rim in a Lamar form but also unusual parallel-line incisions (Fig. 16.6).

None of the aboriginal ceramics are from the original natives. The late prehistoric indigenous people here had a material culture called Fort Walton, characterized by temple mounds and large villages, representing powerful chiefdoms (Marrinan and White 2007; White 2011). But they became extinct by around 1700 from the disruption and disease brought by the Spanish. It is unclear which other Indians moved into the empty land of the Apalachicola delta region, or where they came from, since these ceramic types at Fort San José are not Fort Walton but could have been made by Apalachee, various groups of Creeks, or other historical Indians. These peoples may have been fleeing the destruction of the Spanish missions by the English and their Creek Indian allies who moved south from Georgia to bring intensified violence and extinction of Florida's native peoples.

Thirty-eight percent of the Fort San José assemblage is ceramics imported by the Spanish, the majority of which is majolica. These types include El Morro, coarse earthenware, Guadalajara Polychrome, and kaolin pipes (Fig. 16.7). Majolica (37.9% by number) is the most common imported ceramic ware, followed by olive jar (23.3%), much of it made in Mexico (Fig. 16.8). The abundant presence of majolica shows the efforts by the Spanish to maintain traditional practices, but the high numbers of native wares suggest that the Indians who were around were intensively interacting with the fort's inhabitants and probably living there.

A wide variety of metal artifacts came from Fort San José, representing multiple artifact classes, including various activities, arms, and clothing. The metal

Fig. 16.7 Imported Spanish ceramics from Fort San José. El Morro ware rim, coarse earthenware (*Top, left to right*); Guadalajara Polychrome, kaolin pipe (*Bottom, left to right*)

Fig. 16.8 Majolica and olive jar sherds from Fort San José. Puebla Blue-on-White majolica, Abo Polychrome majolica (*Top, left to right*); San Luis Polychrome majolica, olive jar (encrusted with barnacles) (*Bottom, left to right*)

objects reveal a lot about the occupants' everyday lives. The abundance of specimens in the arms group (46% of the metal by number) supports the interpretation of the site's function as a military settlement. Daily chores such as woodworking and forest clearing are represented by an axe head, and hand-rolled lead net weights indicate fishing activities. These items also reflect the self-sufficiency of the residents, which would have been important at this small and mostly isolated fort. Pestles represent kitchen activities; a pestle fragment recovered from Fort San José is nearly identical to the one pictured by Spaniard Diego Velázquez in

Fig. 16.9 Metal buckles from Fort San José

his 1618 painting "Old Woman Cooking Eggs" and to another one displayed in the Mary Rose Museum in Portsmouth, England, among other items recovered from the Tudor ship that sank in 1545.

Personal metal items at the fort include those owned by high-status individuals, such as the numerous beautiful buckles (Fig. 16.9) and an engraved pocket knife handle. The buckles have a variety of designs and are all made of brass. Buckles were used on belts, straps, hats, stocks, and shoes. Noël Hume states that shoe buckles do not typically occur at American sites prior to 1700 and that they would be rare after 1815 (Noël Hume 1991, p. 86). One buckle (Fig. 16.9, top center) is a plain, figure-8 type that was common in the first half of the seventeenth century and continued in use until the early eighteenth century (Noël Hume 1991, p. 87).

The historical documents describe illegal trade with the French, and the ornate belt buckles that are not standard Spanish military issue suggest that interaction with other groups was definitely occurring. Since trade with the French was officially prohibited, this could be counted as smuggling. Most of the valuable personal items were probably carried away when the site was abandoned.

Other metal objects include nails, which were the only architectural metal items recovered. The small number of nails ($N=37$) supports the interpretation that any salvageable architectural items were taken to Pensacola when Fort San José was dismantled (Childers 2001, p. 22). Metal items in the arms group include 63 pieces of lead shot and three cannonball fragments. This artifact group makes up the largest portion of the metal artifacts.

The historical records tell us about fabulous parties and wedding celebrations that occurred at Fort San José (Childers 2001). The glass artifacts, especially gin case bottles, support the interpretation that there was certainly some recreation. Gin case bottle fragments made up 73% of the glass. This type of bottle is often referred to as a "Dutch Gin" bottle. It was one of the most common bottles used in the first

half of the seventeenth century and continued to be popular through the nineteenth century (Beare 1965, p. 62; Noël Hume 1991). One dark olive-green bottle base was from a vessel that was free-blown and shows the pontil scar with a stamp in the shape of two crosses. Glass makes up 3.3% of the total artifact assemblage. All of the glass found at Fort San José represents the kitchen artifact group. None of the glass was identified as window glass.

One metate, two manos, and two pestles of stone were recovered from Fort San José. There is no way to determine if they were used by the native, Spanish, or Mexican residents. Manos and metates were staples of food preparation for all three groups. All of the ground stone represented here is basalt. Based on both the raw materials and the artifact styles of these five artifacts, an association with Mexican native traditions is most probable.

Building materials that were recovered from Fort San José are ladrillos (bricks), oyster shell mortar, tabby, and just one piece of concrete. Brick and mortar make up 18.4% of the assemblage by number and 47.8% by weight. Ladrillos are flat bricks made of unglazed coarse earthenware and are found throughout Spanish colonial sites in Florida, although they are relatively absent from St. Augustine (Deagan 1987, p. 124). They were imported, often as ballast in the bottom of ships, and were sometime made on-site. Ladrillos were typically made by masons rather than potters (Deagan 1987, p. 124). They are variable in size, and those found at Fort San José range from 29 to 30 cm in length and 14 to 18 cm in width. Ladrillos at Fort San José are larger than those found at Santa Rosa in Pensacola (Deagan 1987, p. 125).

Oyster shell mortar and tabby (a mixture of sand, shell, and lime) were used for building construction and would have been used in between timbers or as flooring. Oysters are not found in St. Joseph Bay because the water is too salty, but an abundance of oyster shell would have been found in the Apalachicola Bay, 56 km (35 miles) by ship to the east of the fort.

Four pieces of pumice have been recovered from Fort San José. Pumice is a porous, lightweight, volcanic rock that is formed from quickly cooling lava that, when hardened, shows holes where the gas bubbles were expelled during volcanic eruption (Hassan 2008). Pumice can be used to make concrete and as an abrasive. It does not occur naturally in the region, but has been found in at least 30 archeological sites throughout Florida, including at least two in the panhandle, near Pensacola and Tallahassee (Kish 2006; Wheeler 2006). The closest sources to Fort San José are the Lesser Antilles island arc and Mexico (Wheeler 2006, p. 191). Veracruz, Mexico, is one source of pumice; it was the place of origin for many of the supplies and people sent to Fort San José. Kish (2006, p. 231) has studied the original sources of pumice found in Florida and believes that, rather than human activity, pumice was brought to Florida via the Florida Loop Current within the Gulf of Mexico and the Florida Current flowing in the Florida Straits between the Florida Keys and Cuba. Pumice occurring in the Florida Panhandle could have traveled there in the Florida Current, which is restricted to deep water except near the panhandle, where this current has a limited near-shore presence.

16.3 Summary Analysis of Fort San José

At first, the short 4-year occupation of Fort San José seems almost inconsequential compared with the large, more longstanding Spanish fortifications and settlements on either side of it at Pensacola and Tallahassee during the great European struggle for control of the Gulf Coast. But a lot happened there during its brief existence, and what Fort San José really shows us is intent. The Spanish had no desire to make this spot only a brief waypoint for displaced Spaniards and fleeing Indians. The effort put into establishing a fort exactly where the Spanish thought the French wanted one as well, the amount of both everyday and fancy goods shipped to this fort, and the presence of families and homes, all represent Spain's strong assertion that the Gulf Coast was under its control. Despite Spain's lack of an inland presence in this delta and its horribly inadequate geographical knowledge of the land it claimed, there was no intent to let the territory go.

But the history and archeology of Fort San José show that intent quickly turned to desperation and then withdrawal. The fort was abandoned in 1723, apparently because it was too remote and too much trouble and expense to continue to support. It was dismantled and any usable material was taken to Pensacola to strengthen the fortifications there. Such a process is evidenced by the material record, since furniture, arms, military objects, and personal items make up a very small amount of the artifact assemblage (only 3.3% for all these categories combined). A small amount of architectural remains (22%) is present and almost all is broken and would not have been usable at Pensacola. The activities group makes up 47% of what was left at Fort San José, the majority of which is the aboriginal pottery and broken olive jars, also not very useful for strengthening Pensacola. St. Joseph Bay was not significantly resettled until American merchants established the short-lived port town of St. Joseph well over a century after the departure of the Spanish.

Fort San José could have been a major center of Spanish Gulf coast dominance. It was established for international and very political reasons and inhabited by a very socially and ethnically diverse population. The history and archeology of this remote settlement indicate that its placement was a strategic move by the Spanish, however it failed, and that even the smallest of outposts can play an important role in the larger stage of globalization, immigration (or in this case colonization), and transformation.

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