

The Caloosa Village *Tequesta* A Miami of the Sixteenth Century

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At the time when the Spanish first reached the shores of Florida, the southern part of the peninsula was the home of two related tribes of aborigines. All the western part, from Tampa Bay to the Keys, belonged to a confederation called the Caloosas.¹ The chief settlement of this area was the village of the cacique Carlos, located on what is now Charlotte Harbor.² During the early decades of the Spanish contact with the Caloosas, two caciques named Carlos, father and son, successively ruled the confederation.³ The east Coast from Capa Cañaveral to the Keys, was the domain of several small independent tribes, all racially, linguistically, and at times, politically connected with the western Caloosas.

The most important of these settlements was Ais, located near Indian River Inlet. Next in importance was Tequesta, located on Biscayne Bay.⁴ Tequesta was the term sometimes used to refer to all the East Coast Caloosas, but more properly referred to the Biscayne settlement and its chief, who was a relative of Carlos. Less is known of this tribe than of their northern neighbors, the Timucuas, because the Spanish made no

1. Daniel G. Brinton, *Notes on the Florida Peninsula, Its Literary History and Antiquities*. (Philadelphia, 1859), pp. 112-13.

2. The Spanish used the same term for the tribe as for the chief on many occasions; Carlos and Caloosa are related.

3. Andrés G. Barcia Caballido y Zúñiga, *Ensayo cronológico para la historia general de la Florida* (Madrid, 1723), p. 295. Barcia tells us that the cacique consented to "Carlos" as the equivalent of his name when he heard of the greatness of Charles V.

4. John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors* (Washington, 1922), p. 331.

direct attempt to colonize their area until 1566. But located as they were, many contacts resulted with the Spanish in the years between 1512 and 1566.

Ponce de León, returning from his voyage to Florida in 1513, discovered the Bahama Channel, which was used by most subsequent expeditions from the South. Ayllón, in 1524, Narváez in 1528, and De Soto in 1539, all led expeditions through this passage on voyages of exploration and conquest in Florida.⁵ A member of the ill-starred expedition of Narváez was captured by the Indians of Tampa Bay region and lived a captive among them many years, until rescued by De Soto. The latter began his overland trek in the Tampa Bay section and furnished an additional contact between the Spanish and the Indians. Laudonnière, the French leader, was well enough acquainted with the Tequesta to leave us a romantic story of an Indian princess of that tribe.⁶ So, contacts were not rare between the Tequesta and Europeans even before the day of Menéndez. The storms along the Bahama Channel drove many ships to destruction and many survivors fell to the mercy of the Caloosas.

In 1565, the Spanish king commissioned the redoubtable Pedro Menéndez de Aviles to drive the French heretics from Florida and colonize the land for Spain. He vigorously began the first part of his work by setting up the Spanish forts San Mateo and Santa Elena and attacking the French in the efficient manner, familiar to readers of Florida history. While the Adelantado was busy in some of the distant parts of this territory, two groups of his soldiers, tired of the hardships of building forts, and suffering from the lack of food, deserted and made their way to the village Tequesta. The party from San Mateo arrived in canoes, while those from Santa Elena seized a ship and attempted the voyage to Cuba. They were forced back to Tequesta, where they met the mutineers from the other fort, who had been in the village for some time.⁷ The Indians received them as friends. The reason for their changed attitude toward the Spanish was the alliance the Adelantado had been making, while the soldiers were toiling on the construction of the new forts.

Menéndez was especially anxious to pacify and settle the southern coast, in order to protect stragglers from the Channel, and to have a port of refuge in case of storm. Leaving the northern forts in 1566, he cruised along the coast "to look for a port and a relief point between the Tortugas and the Mártires (keys)."⁸ On this search he visited the village of Carlos.

5. John Lee Williams, *Territory of Florida* (New York, 1837), pp. 152-173.

6. Brinton, p. 117.

7. Barcia, pp. 338-39.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 295

The two leaders met with ceremony and feasting and an alliance was made. Carlos gave the Adelantado his sister as a wife, and promised to consider becoming a Christian. Menéndez was not so well pleased with Doña Antonia, the cacique's sister, but acceded to the bargain for state reasons, sending her off to Havana to be educated as a Christian.

Carlos, however, was always the secret enemy of the Spanish. Menéndez rescued from his power on this first trip the survivors of a shipwreck on the coast. They had lived among the Caloosas for twenty years, one of their number being sacrificed each year to the devil.⁹ Tequesta, the kinsman of Doña Antonia Carlos, became the real friend of the Spanish, even refusing to surrender Christian captives to Carlos, who wished to kill them.¹⁰ The alliance between Carlos and Menéndez continued on a tacit basis for a long time, each pretending to be ignorant of the underhand efforts of the other against him.

The Spanish considered the task of colonization as one with that of Christianization of the Indians. To aid in the latter, Menéndez sought the aid of the Jesuits. As a result of his petition to the king, a royal *cédula* was dispatched on March 3, 1566, to the head of the Jesuit order, asking for monks to be assigned the work in Florida.¹¹ San Francisco de Borja, the general of the order, appointed to this task three outstanding men, Father Rogel, a native of Pamplona, and Father Martínez, a man of previous missionary experience in Africa, and Brother Villareal, a native of Madriles.¹¹

After being outfitted at the expense of Menéndez,¹² they set sail from Spain on June 28, 1566. After a stop at Havana, where they could not find an experienced pilot to guide them to Florida, they went on themselves spending a month between Havana and the shore of Florida, where they arrived in September. Father Martínez, anxious to set foot on Florida, went ashore in a small boat, in the company of several Spaniards and the Flemish sailors who manned the ship. A sudden storm arose, and drove the ship along the coast, so that contact with the landing party was lost. This party traveled northward overland, and after several meetings with natives, was set upon by them and the greater number killed. Father Martínez attained the crown of martyrdom he had so wished for.¹³ The other two Jesuits, hearing of this inauspicious start,

9. *Ibid.*

10. Tequesta and Carlos fell out about this matter and were reconciled by Menendez, acting in his role of relative.

11. P. Antonio Astrain, *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús* (Madrid, 1905) Tomo II, 286.

12. In the early colonizations and conquests, every expenditure was charged to the leader to be taken from later profits.

13. Barcia, p. 366.

decided to return to Havana, to make another attempt under the protection of the strong arm of Menéndez.

Menéndez, returning from Havana with the missionaries, by way of the village of Carlos, landed in Tequesta in the early part of the year 1567, and established Rogel and Villareal with a fort and a small body of soldiers on Biscayne Bay. Brother Villareal while in Havana had begun the study of the Caloosa language with some natives brought to Cuba. He now continued this work in the fort, while Padre Rogel began the work of expounding the mysteries of true religion. While the natives of Tequesta were well-disposed towards the Spanish, as shown by their protection of the refugees from the cacique Carlos, they did not quickly accept or appreciate the religious teaching. Astraín says: "Rogel had some corn, which attracted the Indians to him to the extent that they heard the doctrine, but when the maize was exhausted their attendance ceased."¹⁴ Some results, however, were attained, as shown by the fact that when Menéndez visited Tequesta later, all the natives "both great and small" took part in devotions twice daily in front of the large cross which was erected in the village.¹⁵

Later the two Jesuits divided forces, Rogel going to the village of Carlos on the West Coast leaving Brother Villareal in charge of the Biscayne mission. We have a letter the latter sent the former in January of 1568. It is most revealing of the situation in the village then at the fringe of the Spanish colonial empire. This letter was discovered and transcribed by Father Ruben Vargas Ugarte of Peru who found it in the Vatican Archives when teaching in the Gregorian University of Rome:¹⁶

My reverend Father in Christ:

I never thought your reverence would be so long in coming to hear confession and to visit this poor people. I was expecting you since you told me Candamo had gone there but it appears my sins merited your non-appearance or rather kept you away. Certainly I have many things to report to you some of which I shall take up in this letter leaving others until the time the Master is pleased to send me there. I failed to write you because I intended to send you from this fort a little flour for hosts and wine for the mass which they gave me in Havana but the Indians told me they were afraid to go there and that ten Indians and two canoes would be necessary for this trip. I was fearful that I would not arrive with so many people nor had I heard

14. Astraín, p. 292.

15. Eugenio Ruidiaz y Caravia, *La Florida, su conquista y colonization por Pedro Menéndez de Aviles* (Madrid, 1894), p. 283.

16. Published in English translation in "The First Jesuit Missions in Florida," *United States Catholic Historical Society, Historical Records and Studies*, Vol. XXV (1935). Father P. Ruben Vargas Ugarte publishes it and other letters of the Florida Jesuits in the original of his book, *Los mártires de la Florida* (Lima, Peru, 1940). The writer had the privilege of studying with Father Vargas during the past summer at the University of San Marcos at Lima.

of the arrival of Candamo. It may be that my negligence has been the principal cause in which case I hope your reverence will forgive me for the love of the Saviour.

I and all of us here remain in good health, glory to God who helps us to endure in this land trials which would appear insufferable in another place. I say this for we have had for the past three months or more a plague of mosquitoes so bad that I spent several days and nights without being able to sleep an hour. On top of this we suffered some days for lack of food. I say no more about this but to add that the only sleep we could obtain was close to the fire and half smothered in the smoke, otherwise one could not endure it. At this time the majority of the Indians went to an island a league from here to eat coconuts and palm grapes. No more than 30 remained here. It was then I went to Havana and spent some twenty days in going and coming. I confessed to the priest and took communion. I brought back some food but very little since there was no boat in which to bring it. I have been teaching the doctrine to the Indians or up to fifteen years of age, the others will not come to the lessons although I believe there is none who does not say he wants to become a Christian but in the matter of learning the doctrine they find great difficulty and thus do not come to the classes. Those who attend, most of them, know the four prayers and nearly all the commandments. There are many here now because some of the nearby villages have come in to help in building a house for the chief. They now have food from the whales they kill and from fish. Before they suffered from hunger for two or three months so that they failed to attend because they all said they were hungry and begged that which I had little to give them. With all this the young chief is very fond of the Christians and it seems he will become one. He had a sick child and brought it to me saying through the interpreter that he didn't want them to do witchcraft over it but wanted me to pray and make the sign of the cross over it. I recited the evangels and made the sign of the cross over it and in another day it was well, thanks to God. He and his wife brought me many turtles but I refused to receive them and they remained very much impressed. Other sick children have got well after hearing the evangels, some of them are very devoted to the cross, I believe they are continuing to improve. Some of the older people will become Christians and nearly all the children will be, if it please the Lord.

On Friday the second of January 1568 there was here an old Indian woman who was very sick and so thin that she was nothing but skin and bone. I asked her whether she wanted to become a Christian two or three days before she said yes. In these days I carried her some food and she said she wished to be a Christian and that she was sorry she had lived in such a bad sect and that she believed in a single God and in Jesus Christ who had died for her and the other things the Christians believe. She always affirmed she was not going to be like another one who had said she wanted to be a Christian and later changed her mind. Seeing her desire and such good things I baptised her because she seemed near the end of her days. Monday on the fifth of the said month she died in my hut because as soon as she was a Christian we brought her there. She kept saying Jesus, Mary until she could speak no more. Those who were with her at the end said that she begged God to pardon her sins.

After this there fell sick a child of four or five months, the granddaughter of one of the principal Indians of this town. They brought her to me so that I might recite prayers over her. I did so and as I saw that she was very ill I asked the permission of the parents and grandparents and of the old chief to baptise her a Christian so that they might have no fear if

she died for she would go to heaven. They gave me this permission and I baptised her in the presence of the captain and the soldiers. As the parents loved her very much and it seemed that she was not getting better, the parents later called the witchdoctors in who performed all sorts of rites squeezing her body till it seemed they would crush her, but as she continued to get worse the witchdoctors said they might have cured her if I had not touched her. It was the Lord's will that she die and we buried her in the fort near a cross where we had previously buried the old woman. I baptised her on the ninth and she died on the eleventh of January. The interpreter told me that if we had not been present, according to their old law they would have sacrificed four other children with her. He also told me that the grandfather had said since the Christian usages had begun with the child he loved so much that he wished to leave the old sect and take the law of the Christians. If he becomes a Christian many will follow him as he is highly respected here. Afterwards in talking to a witchdoctor who is very old I told him that he would die and go to hell where he would suffer great torments if he did not become a Christian. The father of the dead child was present and spoke up and said he believed this, so they all seem better disposed than before.

I need to have your reverence inform me the manner in which I can explain to these people the immortality of souls and also the manner I must use in baptising and whether there are not some doubts or difficulties in administering this sacrament, also whether I should go and visit them when they are sick because then they readily consent to become Christians and I am in doubt whether they do this in fear or in lack of understanding or whether they do it to get some meal of corn. Your reverence will inform me on these matters as these Indians take matters with so little seriousness that I am frightened.

I teach the doctrine in the house of the chief where many adults are present and I believe they learn it too although they do not recite it like the children. I think the chief is learning too, I teach them the prayers and commandments and afterwards the credo. They say the words in their language so they can understand it. I say it in our language and they repeat it in theirs up to where it says "was conceived by the holy spirit." I live in a house with a soldier and we get along well, thank God. Morning and night I commend myself to the Lord, and recite the dictrine. We hold fiestas with litanies to the cross. we have put on two comedies one on the day of St. John when we were expecting the governor. This play had to do with the war between men and the world, the flesh and the devil. The soldiers enjoyed it very much. Some of them however have resented my not going to Havana with Candamo to obtain them more supplies. I did not go because so many Indians were here and I could teach the doctrine to large numbers, there is another reason which I cannot mention here. I am very doubtful about this matter on account of the soldiers.

I have tried to make the Indians like me as your reverence commanded and bought a little corn for this purpose, for as I said I live apart and they give me a ration little larger than that of the others so that up to now I have had nothing to give them and when there is nothing to give them I believe there is little friendship. I shall continue giving them some but seeing the little there is always in this fort I believe it is of more service to give it to Christians. I hope to hear from your reverence whether he excuses me from going to confess. From Tequesta, January 29 of 1568, from your reverence's unworthy servant in the lord.

Francisco

With all the earnest and naïve devotion of Brother Villareal, the South Florida missions did not progress too well. Another Jesuit, Segura, was put in charge of the work in the northern part of the Tequesta territory, but after a few years the Jesuits abandoned the whole field of Florida. Rogel and Villareal were recalled to Havana where the Order was establishing a college in which the sons of Indian chiefs were to be trained. The Jesuits gave up Florida for the more fertile field of New Spain or Mexico. Yet their efforts, and those of their successors, other orders of Catholic missionaries, were not without effect. The Caloosas maintained a political if not a complete spiritual loyalty to the Spanish. In 1763, two centuries later, when England came into possession of Florida, eighty families of Tequestans left for Havana, in order to stay under Spanish rule. This incident has been referred to by Dr. Jorge Roa, of the University of Havana, as the "first Florida immigration into Cuba." The Caloosas, who were referred to as "Spanish Indians" kept in close touch with both Spanish St. Augustine and the West Indian possessions of Spain.

II

The anthropologists and students of the primitive tribes have never given a very complete account of the manner of living and customs of the Tequestans. In the first place no definite idea of the number of inhabitants of the peninsula has been given. The Spanish gave exaggerated figures as to the numbers of their conversions and the size of the forces they fought against, but the population of the whole peninsula probably never exceeded 10,000.¹⁷ Those of the coast were, as their modern successors, "great fishers" (*grandes pescadores*).¹⁸

The Spanish governor of Florida, writing in 1598, said the natives of Southeastern Florida had no settled habitations, as they did not grow maize, but wandered about in search of fish and roots.¹⁹ Their chief vegetable diet was palm-berries, cocoplums, and sea-grapes. There were animals in abundance, such as deer and bear, "and fish they have as plenty as they please." Accounts are also given of the way they obtained alligators for food.²⁰ A good description of Tequestan life was written by Lopez de Velasco. Among other things he says:

17. Brinton, p. 112.

18. Antonio de Herrera, *Desde Los Mártires al Cañaveral in Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas i tierra firme del mar oceano* (Madrid, 1720), Dec. IV, lib. IV, Cap. VII.

19. Swanton, p. 387.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 392.

In winter all the Indians go out to sea in their canoes to hunt for sea cows. One of their number carries three stakes fastened to his girdle, and a rope on his arm. When he discovers a sea cow, he throws a rope around its neck, and as the animal sinks under the water, the Indian drives a stake through one of its nostrils, and no matter how much it may dive, the Indian never loses it, because he goes on its back. After it has been killed they cut open its head and take out two large bones, which they place in the coffins with the bodies of the dead. and worship them.²¹

The clothing of the Tequestans was as simple as their primitive state and the tropical nature of the climate demanded. The men wore a simple breech-clout, made of deer hide and supported by a belt that indicated the rank, in the case of chiefs. The women wore garments made out of Spanish moss, which according to Dickenson "at a distance or in the night looks very neat."²¹ Fontaneda refers to the Indians of Carlos in a similar manner; "These Indians possessed neither gold nor silver and still less clothing, for they go almost naked, wearing only a sort of apron . . . [the dress of the women consists] of moss which grows on trees, and somewhat resembles wool."²¹

The best account of these people comes from the pen of a Quaker, Jonathan Dickenson, who was shipwrecked on this coast in 1699.²² He spent some time among them before his return to civilization and gives us interesting information about their religious and political habits. They had the simple religion of nature worship common to primitive man. They worshiped the sun and moon. "After successful foray, they elevated the scalps of their victims on poles decked with garlands, and for three days and nights danced and sang around them."²³

The Caloosas of slightly north of this area held their principal festival at the first corn-planting. A deer was sacrificed to the sun and its body elevated on a pole for religious veneration.²⁴

There is evidence of the worship of idols, as Carlos refused to have certain idols removed even after his sister's marriage to Menéndez, and after he had allowed the erection of a cross in his village.²⁵ Carlos had combined certain spiritual authority with his temporal power. He withdrew from the village at certain times to perform certain sorceries and enchantments which were thought to cause the earth to bring forth its

21. Swanton, pp. 387 ff.

22. Jonathan Dickenson, *Narrative of a Shipwreck in the Gulph of Florida, Showing God's Protecting Providence, Man's Surest Help and Defence in Times of Greatest Difficulties and Most Imminent Danger* (Philadelphia, 1720).

23. René Laudonnière, *L'histoire notable de la Floride* (Paris, 1586) pp. 8, 101.

24. Brinton, pp. 127 ff.

25. Barcia, p. 395.

fruit.²⁶ It was at his order that a Spaniard was sacrificed yearly to the devil.

Combining his spiritual and political power, Carlos was a sort of emperor over all the Caloosas. He levied tributes on the subsidiary tribes, even including those that lived on the shores of the great lake Mayaimi (Okeechobee).²⁷ The eastern tribes were less under his domination although it was stated that Tequesta had been his vassal.²⁸

The public religious ceremonies of the Tequestans were described in detail by Dickenson. An important part of the formalities in all such occasions was the drinking of a beverage made by boiling the leaves of a certain plant called *caseena*. The ceremonial drinking of this beverage as well as smoking accompanied all serious business. The following is a description of a nocturnal religious ceremony:

Night being come and the moon being up, an Indian who performed their ceremonies, stood out, looking full at the moon, making a hideous noise, and crying out, acting like a mad man for the space of half an hour, all the Indians being silent till he had done; after which they made a fearful noise, some like the barking of a dog, wolf, and other strange sounds; after this, one got a log and set himself down holding the log upright on the ground and several others got about him, making a hideous singing. . . . At length their women joined the concert . . . which they continued till midnight.²⁹

Dancing played a part in many of the religious ceremonies. After ceremonial painting of the body, the Tequestans put on their belts and quivers of arrows and waited until the medicine men inaugurated the dance by shaking rattles and going through a ritual procedure, then they began a stamping sort of dance which continued for several hours, to the point of near exhaustion. Then they retired to the hut of the cacique for the drinking of *caseena*. The next day, the same procedure was followed, and also again on the third day. This last day was the crisis of the ceremony and none of the women could look on the men. If any woman came out of her house, she had to be veiled with a mat.³⁰ Many symbolical meanings are read into the various ceremonies, but the bare account will serve to illustrate the type of culture of the Tequestans.

The fact that they could produce fairly seaworthy canoes points to the possibility of contact with the Bahamas and the islands further south. Another fact which confirms this, the story of a miraculous spring which was told Ponce de León, comes from the mystic interpretation of the

26. Laudonnière, p. 132.

27. Swanton, p. 388.

28. Barcia, p. 374.

29. Swanton, p. 396.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 397.

account of the Florida Indians concerning the beautiful Silver Springs near Ocala.

Although human sacrifice was not unknown among them. their religion was not especially bloodthirsty. Their political development was quite advanced, although agriculturally and economically they were very backward. They had very little pity for old age, differing greatly from the Creeks in this particular. They had peculiar customs of removing the bones of the caciques to be kept as an object of veneration; in the coffin of these relics they also put the bones of the seacow's head, the collection serving as a sort of village *lares*.³¹

Tequesta was, of course, merely another village in the extensive area controlled by the Spanish. There does exist, however, a considerable number of documents referring to it in the collection called *Documentos inéditos* and *Documentos de Ultramar* which were selected and published from the Spanish archives. No doubt much more still exists in those archives. Only the emergence of the modern Miami has made important the annals of what was otherwise a typical Indian village on the frontiers of the far-flung Spanish colonial empire in America.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 389.