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ASTURIAN FOOTPRINTS IN AMERICA

By E. J. SALCINES, J.D.



HISTORIC CENTRO ASTURIANO CLUB HOUSE

... Landmark at 1913 N. Nebraska Ave.

-Photo from HAMPTON DUNN COLLECTION

Asturias is a historic region in the northwestern part of Spain with a population of more than 1,300,000 inhabitants. Some say Asturias has been "walled in by the hand of God" with its million variations of green practically wrapped in mist, cliffs, peaks, slopes, valleys, rough coastline, beaches,

coves, plateaus and rivers. The language of its people is Castilian but in many of its remote mountain villages one can quickly identify certain words and descriptions as the old "bale asturiano" (the regional dialect of old Astures). The name Asturias is a combination of two Basque words, Ast and

This presentation was made on April 7, 1989, to commemorate the donation of the Centro Asturiano of Tampa archives to the University of South Florida Library.

Ura, meaning "mountain water."

Its coastline, to the north, is today called the Bay of Biscay, but the Spaniards still refer to it as the Cantabrian Sea. Its southern boundary is the large Cantabrian mountain range, extending 300 miles from the Pyrenees mountains in the Basque region in the far east to the provinces of Galicia in the west. This mountain range has long been referred to as the Picos de Europa (Peaks of Europe). With peaks reaching almost 9,000 feet, navigators approaching the northern coast of Spain from the Atlantic could see these peaks as navigational marks identifying the continent of Europe.

The Cantabrian tribes stoutly resisted domination by the Roman invaders. The Roman armies considered the tribes of this area of Hispania to be one of the most untamable, independent and freedom-loving people. The Romans first attacked them about 150 B.C. and took almost 130 years to subdue this relentless enemy, partially annihilating these cantabrian-celtiberian tribes. In fact, the Cantabrian tribes gave the Romans more trouble than any other people in the Empire.

The Kingdom of Asturias began in 739 and it became a Principality in 1388. Oviedo had been the capital of Christian Spain since the 9th century and became the capital of the Principality.

MENENDEZ CITED

That rugged Cantabrian coast and the unique mixture of bloodlines produced intrepid leaders, excellent navigators and cartographers that were used in the early explorations and colonization of the New World. Among many of these was Pedro Menendez of the town of Aviles. The King

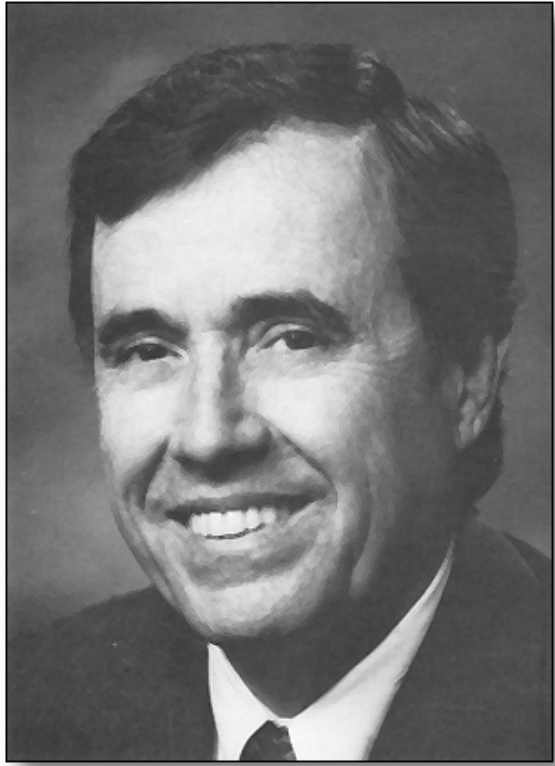


CENTRO ASTURIANO LADIES

...Photo taken Nov. 8, 1942

-Photo from HAMPTON DUNN
COLLECTION

of Spain had singularly chosen him to succeed in establishing the first permanent European (Spanish) settlement in that vast land mass called La Florida, which extended from what is now the State of Florida north to the State of Virginia and west to what is now Texas. Other Spaniards had attempted to establish permanent settlements in the panhandle of Florida, the Atlantic coastline of South Carolina and Virginia, but all had failed. In his flagship San Pelayo, Pedro Menendez de Aviles (as he is better known), at age 46, succeeded as the founder of San Agustin de la Florida on the feast day of Saint Augustine in 1565. He presided in the first historically documented "thanksgiving feast" in what is now the continental United States, with Indians and Europeans dining together 55 years before the Mayflower and



LOUIS DE LA PARTE.

-Photo from HAMPTON DUNN
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the Pilgrims. That took place here in Florida on September 8, 1565 following a solemn Mass concelebrated by four Spanish priests in honor of the birth of the Blessed Virgin.

Many more settlers followed from Asturias and other parts of northern Spain. Spanish names were given to important landmarks including the St. Johns River and other waterways. The archaic Spanish-Asturian dialect of the time would pronounce the name John (Juan) as "Xuan" pronounced "shoe-ah-nee" and the Little John (River) was "Xuani", pronounced ""shoe-ah-nee" and some say that is probably why we have what is known today as the Suwannee River. One prominent Asturian name is the town of Oviedo, northeast of Orlando, named after the capital of Asturias, but the town's people today pronounce it "Oh-vee-dah" rather than



GOV. BOB MARTINEZ

-Photo from HAMPTON DUNN
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the Spanish pronunciation of "Oh-vee-eh-doe."

Many missions were established by order of the Asturian Pedro Menendez in the lands surrounding St. Augustine and they were furthered in their development by many of the Asturians that followed Menendez. Many missionaries were killed by the Indians of the area.

As the Governor of Florida, Menendez visited around Tampa Bay, Fort Myers, Jacksonville and other areas. Four hundred twenty years later and fifty-two Hispanic Governors of Florida, another product of Asturian descent occupies the Governor's chair - not in St. Augustine or Pensacola - but in today's capital of Tallahassee. Governor Bob Martinez is the grandson of immigrants from Asturias who came to Tampa with the cigar industry at the turn of this century. Among the many descendents



**ASTURIAN AL LOPEZ, BASEBALL HERO
... Legend Being Interviewed**

By Hampton Dunn.-WTVT-TV Photo

of Asturians involved in the contemporary history of Florida are Mayor Xavier Suarez of Miami; Federal District Judge Jose Gonzalez of Fort Lauderdale, son of former Tampa Postmaster Jose A. Gonzalez (Past President of the Centro Asturiano in Tampa); Florida Secretary of Labor Hugo Menendez, now in Tallahassee; Chief Circuit Judge Dennis Alvarez (formerly on the Board of Directors of the Centro Asturiano in Tampa); others in the Tampa judiciary, Circuit Judges Roland Gonzalez, Manuel Menendez and Robert Bonanno (Fueyo); Former President of the National Education Association Braulio Alonso of Tampa, and former President of the Florida

Senate Louis de la Parte of Tampa, just to name a few.

During the first half of this century, Tampa became the single largest Spanish and Asturian population center in the United States. Asturians in Tampa were found in every level of community life enriching daily the economic, social, educational and cultural vitality of Florida. Among them were giants of industry, personal friends of dignitaries (including the King of Spain) to lectores (readers in cigar factories), escogedores (the elite selectors in the cigar factories), dairymen and restauranteurs.

**FIRST LT. BALDOMERO LOPEZ
TAMPA NATIVE AWARDED
CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR**

During the Inchon invasion in Korea, September 15, 1950, Marine 1st Lieutenant Baldomero Lopez's platoon was engaging the enemy. Exposing himself to hostile fire, he attempted to hurl a grenade into the pillbox whose fire was pinning them down. Wounded, he fell and dropped the grenade. Dragging his body forward, critically wounded and unable to grasp the grenade, he sacrificed himself rather than endanger the lives of his men. With his wounded right arm, he cradled the grenade under him absorbing the full impact of the explosion. With courage and devotion to duty, he gallantly gave his life for his men and his country.

Historical marker erected 1981, by the citizens of Tampa with the cooperation of the Tampa Historical Society.

In Tampa, the Spanish pride, self-confidence and independence were evident by the establishment of the first mutual aid societies in the United States. The Centro Espanol de Tampa was formed by immigrants from Galicia, Asturias, Santander, Barcelona, the Canary Islands and other areas of Spain, Cuba and Italy. Thereafter, the large influx of more Asturians generated the formation in 1902 of their own club, El Centro Asturiano (The Asturian Center) and their first mutual aid society hospital (sanatorium) in 1904. They reverently called it (Sanatorio de) "La Covadonga" in honor of the Blessed Virgin, who had inspired Pelayo. A statue of Our Lady of Covadonga may be seen in its shrine today at the Centro Asturiano Hospital in Tampa.

The origin, formation and structure of the original Asturian Club in Tampa was copied from its parent organization in Havana, Cuba, which was organized in 1886 and

called El Centro Asturiano de la Habana. Members of the club had reciprocal medical, pharmaceutical and hospitalization benefits should a member of the club become ill while visiting another country with a sister club. A similar club was formed in Miami.

In Tampa, the proud American-Asturians acknowledge that their ancestors had the vision to establish in this advanced health care provider protection many decades before the advent of Medicare, Medicaid, HMO's or other hospitalization plans. They rightfully boast that their law-abiding ancestors' hard work and independence permitted them never to become a burden or public charge to the American taxpayer. Their club membership not only entitled them to these and other health care benefits, such as nursing care facilities, but also entitled them to burial in the clubs' cemeteries.

Cultural enrichment was an integral part of the life of Spaniards in Tampa at weekly theatrical performances, musical presentations and zarzuelas (Spanish light opera), where major artists from Europe and the Americas appeared. There was an insatiable desire to "saber y estar al tanto de las cosas" (to know and be aware of current events) sparked daily by the "lectores" and the discussions and debates that followed in the cafes of West Tampa and Ybor City. The club had a plentiful and constantly replenished library where books, newspapers and magazines in both English and Spanish from Spain and other Spanish-speaking countries were available. These people were among the best informed workers in the world.

In Tampa, Spanish folklore was always in abundance. Many recreational activities (romerías, verbenas and fiestas) were sponsored annually, where typical Asturian

foods such as fabada Asturiana (a stew of butterbeans with Spanish chorizo, ham, blood sausage and bacon), tortilla Asturiana (Spanish omelette containing potatoes, onions, chorizo or ham and eggs), arroz con leche (a milky rice pudding flavored with cinnamon and lemon rind), plenty of apples, cherries, strawberries and fruits similar to those in the old country as well as an abundant supply of cold sidra (apple cider from Asturias) were served. Folk songs were accompanied by the Asturian drum and gaita (a bagpipe similar to the Scottish bagpipe except that the Asturian bagpipe has only one pipe whereas the Scottish has three) and the dancing of the regional jotas (folk dances) of that region. Many men would wear the typical Spanish boina (beret) and women would wear their regional colorful outfits. In the main ballroom of the clubhouse, formal dances have regularly had overflowing attendance enjoying excellent orchestras and bands both from this country and from Spain. The dance floor was always packed when they played the "pasodoble" (two-step) - Spain's national dance which resembles the polka.

The American flag has always been respectfully displayed at the Centro Asturiano de Tampa together with the flag of Spain and the regional flag of Asturias. They are still there in the Board Room of the Centro Asturiano Clubhouse in Tampa. The blood, lives and limbs of American-Asturians have been proudly given for the Stars and Stripes. The same love of freedom and independence of their ancestors was evident whenever the need arose and the United States was under attack. Pictorial Honor Rolls of the men and women serving in the Armed Forces were prominently displayed in the Clubhouse of the Centro Asturiano during the World Wars.

Medals for bravery, Purple Hearts, field commissions and distinguished service were commonplace. During the Korean War, a son of an Asturian father and Italian mother, Marine Lt. Baldomero Lopez of Tampa, a graduate of the United States Naval Academy, received posthumously this nation's highest award, the Congressional Medal of Honor. He is buried here in Tampa in the Cemetery of the Centro Asturiano, his childhood club.

The Spanish presence and the Asturian footprints and those of their descendents have been left all over America, though not always as documented or as visible as the fantastic archives, books, photographs, minutes and resolutions found in the documents given by the Centro Asturiano of Tampa to the University of South Florida Library. But every day, somewhere in the front pages or back pages or somewhere in the news, whether TV, radio, newspapers or magazines, Spanish and Asturian footprints or presence are there. Consider these names in the headlines during the past few weeks: Valdez, Alaska; Cordova, Alaska; Cape Canaveral; Seve Ballesteros; Al Lopez; Lou Piniella; David Magadan; Frank Lorenzo; Manuel Lujan; Lauro Cabazos; Tony LaRussa (Cuervo)...

SOUTHERNMOST POINT

Looking at a map of the United States our most southern point is Cayo Hueso, now pronounced Key West. From east to west you find St. Augustine (the oldest city in the U.S. founded by the Asturian Menendez) and Cabo Canaveral (meaning Cape Sugar Cane) in Florida [discovered on Pascua (Easter) Florida (flowery)].

As we prepare for the 500th anniversary of the Encounter of the New World

(1492-1992), let us reflect and remember, as descendents of Spaniards, Asturians, Cantabrians and others alike, that before the trees were grown to get the lumber to build the Mayflower and the boats that came to Plymouth Rock (1620) and Jamestown (1607) - the Asturians and other Spaniards were not only in the United States... they had already established the oldest city and the oldest state capital, the earliest missions in this country and found the Grand Canyon (1546). Their fellow countrymen had already explored and settled other parts of the Americas, established three universities in the New World (1538, 1551, 1553) and had also circumnavigated the world (1522). By the time the Puritans and the Pilgrims were trying to adjust to their new diets, the Asturians and their children were already in urban renewal in San Agustin de la Florida.

Asturians, Spaniards, native Americans, English, Italians, Irish, Poles, Germans and other Europeans, Africans, Asiatics and many others form our great and glorious United States of America. Regardless of our ancestry, we are all children of this great country.

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