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CATHEDRAL FACADE TRULY A LANDMARK

By HAMPTON DUNN

ST. AUGUSTINE --- For nearly two centuries, the handsome church has overlooked the main plaza in this ancient city. This true landmark was the most significant physical addition made here during the second Spanish occupation. Now housing the Cathedral of St. Augustine, it was built during the period 1793-97 as the Church of St. Augustine and was consecrated as a cathedral in 1870.

The facade is a precious remain of the original church. It sweeps up in graceful curves to form a belfry surmounted by a cross. This is of the old Spanish mission style. A statue of the city's patron saint, Saint Augustine, features the entrance. The bells are the oldest in the country, one dating back to 1682.

Although this was a Spanish colony at the time, two Irish priests---Thomas Hassett and Michael O'Reilly---were credited with key roles in getting the church built. King Charles III of Spain okayed the project, assigning Spanish Engineer Mariano de la Rocque to the job. It was financed largely from the royal treasury (cost 16,000 pesos), but parishioners donated produce, materials and labor. It was dedicated on Dec. 8, 1797, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The church was gutted by fire in 1887, remodeled then and again in 1965. In its earlier remodeling the present clock tower was added, which includes a sundial which keeps time an hour earlier than Eastern Standard, having been placed there before Florida changed from Central Standard Time in 1919. There's also a clock that keeps the "correct" time. The original structure now forms the nave and the main entrance is the original door of the old church.