St. Augustine’s founder was born to a noble family in the city of Avilés along the rugged coast of northern Spain’s Asturias region. He went to sea at a young age and was foremost a sailor, an innovator in ship design and navigation, and a highly respected admiral. He was also an entrepreneur. He set his sights on and devoted his personal wealth to the conquest of the Province of La Florida and future land grants stretching from the Gulf coast and the Florida Keys to the Chesapeake Bay. As Florida’s governor and captain-general, he defeated the French and quickly established two towns, St. Augustine and Santa Elena (present-day Port Royal, South Carolina), provisioned his colonies and, in 1573, was summoned by the king to Spain to build an armada and defend the West Indies. He and his wife, Doña María de Solís, had three daughters and one son. Juan, their son, was lost at sea in a hurricane in 1563. Menéndez unexpectedly died on September 17, 1574, in Santander, Spain, at age fifty-five.

Ribault knows where Menéndez is unloading. In 1562 and 1564, he and Laudonnière had sailed by the island (today called Anastasia) and had noted the ocean inlet that now leads into the Spanish encampment.

On September 7 and 8, Menéndez’s smaller ships enter the inlet on incoming tides. Soldiers, married men, wives, and
children disembark with provisions, artillery, and munitions. Pe- dro Menéndez disembarks after noon on September 8 in a small boat launched from the San Pelayo, which is still anchored off the coast. He crosses the sandbar and lands with ceremony, trumpets, artillery fire, and Catholic ritual led by his chaplain, Francisco López de Mendoza Grajales. Menéndez is sworn in as adelantado, captain-general and governor, and officially takes possession of St. Augustine, named after the fifth-century Catholic saint and bishop of Hippo (Algeria).

The day and the saint hold particular significance and symbolism for Pedro Menéndez. September 8 is the feast day of Our Lady of September, the patron saint of Menéndez’s home region of Asturias in northern Spain. A solemn mass is held in her honor.

Observing Indians seem friendly. One eyewitness writes that Menéndez has “the Indians fed and dines himself,” a Thanksgiving cocido undoubtedly with a Spanish shipboard flavor—salt pork, beans, and garlic, hardtack and wine—but hopefully enlivened with Indian corn, squash, a fresh fish catch, and berries.

Unbeknownst to the Indians, Menéndez has a contract with his Catholic king to establish two or three Spanish cities as a base for conquest, exploration, and governing the Atlantic coast of

---

Our Lady of September

Eyewitnesses at the 1565 landing and founding of St. Augustine noted that September 8 was the feast day of Our Lady of September, the Virgin of Covadonga, patroness saint of the Asturias region in northern Spain where Menéndez was born. According to Spanish legend, her appearance gave great hope and courage to a small band of Christians led by a nobleman, Don Pelayo, first king of Asturias, and inspired them to defeat the Moors in A.D. 772. Their victory is the symbolic beginning of the Reconquest of Spain. Huge crowds today continue to pay homage to her shrine in a cave at Covadonga in the Picos Mountains, close to the site of the victory.
La Florida, claimed for Spain and named by Ponce de León in 1513, stretching from the Keys to Newfoundland.

In the dark early hours of September 10, Menéndez sends the partially unloaded *San Pelayo* away to prevent its capture by the French. He writes the king on September 11 that he will inspect the site that seems the most suitable to fortify, because “where we are is not suitable.” He plans to do this before the enemy finds them. He writes that he can make the move and build defenses in eight days.

The place where Menéndez disembarks, unloads, and encamps has long been inhabited by Timucua. In 1565, they are subject to a local chief (cacique) called Seloy. The paramount chief of the larger Timucua region that stretches northward and includes the St. Johns River inlet is Saturiwa. It will not be long before Saturiwa wants to be rid of the Spanish.

**THE MASSACRES**

Ribault and his French fleet arrive at the ocean inlet to St. Augustine, but they do not attack. They sail around looking for the *San Pelayo*. A strong northeaster starts to blow, and the winds