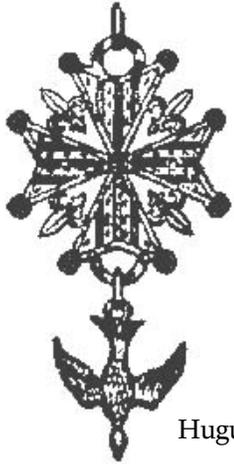




The Huguenots



Huguenot Cross

In April 1564 French colonists and soldiers under the command of Rene de Laudonniere came to Spanish controlled *la Florida* with the intent to build a permanent settlement at the mouth of the River of May (St. Johns River.) The settlement was originally planned as a commercial venture, but as conflicts with the Catholics continued in France, Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, a Huguenot, proposed that it also become a refuge for the Huguenots. The name give to the settlement was “*la Caroline*” after France’s young monarch, Charles.

Who are the Huguenots?

Huguenots are the followers of John Calvin. The name Huguenot (oo-ga-no) is derived either from the German “eidgenossen” meaning “confederate” or from “Hugeon,” a word used in the

province of Touraine to denote persons who walk in the night because their own safe places of worship were dark caves or under the night sky.

Who was John Calvin?

In the early 1500’s Protestantism was gathering momentum all over Europe. John Calvin (Jean Cauvin, 1509-1564), a young law student in Paris, read the writings and beliefs of Martin Luther. Calvin, who had previously studied to enter the priesthood, began to consider the Protestant call to put the scriptures first and to reform the church.

In 1533 Calvin began to write about his own salvation experience. He followed this with a speech attacking the Roman Catholic Church and demanding a change like Martin Luther had initiated in Germany. Instead of initiating reform in the church, Calvin’s speech caused an

explosion of anti-Protestant sentiment. Calvin wound up fleeing France and settling in Geneva, Switzerland.



John Calvin

Political and Religious Climate in France

In their struggles for religious freedom, the Huguenots were driven to become a political party headed by some of the greatest French nobles. By the mid sixteenth century, their numbers and influence had aroused the fears of the Catholic party and the powerful family of Guise. The Duke of Guise, Francois, was a military hero, and his brother the Cardinal de Lorraine was a formidable scholar and statesman. During the reign of Frances II, the Duke's power was absolute. The Catholics believed that "one faith", the Catholic faith, was necessary to maintain civil order and to keep God's favor.

After King Francis II died in 1560 his mother, Catherine de Medici, assumed regency to rule in the name of her ten-year-old son Charles IX. She tried to win

the support of both the Catholics and the Huguenots, giving them a limited right to worship as they chose. These concessions embittered the Catholics, while the Huguenots still wanted complete freedom. The passion of religious fanatics on both sides of the controversy foretold failure of Catherine's policy of moderation.

The first of eight separate religious wars began in 1562 when the Duke of Guise and his followers attacked a congregation of Huguenots assembled for worship in a barn. Catherine admitted that she lacked the power to punish the duke for what became known as the "Massacre of Vassy."

First Attempt at Settlement

Gaspard de Coligny was a close friend of Catherine. During these troubled years he convinced her to support a plan for a possible Huguenot settlement in Florida. Such an enterprise would provide an opportunity for French Catholics and Protestants to work together toward a common goal.

To lead the expedition Coligny chose Jean Ribault of Dieppe and Rene de la Laudonniere as second in command. Three ships sailed from France on February 18, 1562. Though the majority of these passengers were Huguenots, some were French Catholics. The rest were of various other nationalities. They landed on May 1, 1562 at the mouth of the River of May (St. Johns River). Once ashore they fell to the ground and praised God for a safe trip. Ribault and his men erected a column at the site to stand as a monument

to their journey. They then headed north to the coast of present-day South Carolina.

Ribault hastily left thirty people at Charlesfort, South Carolina to begin a settlement while he returned to France. In less than a year the people of Charlesfort became desperate over the challenges of founding a new colony in a remote land, built a ship and sailed back to Europe.

Second Attempt at Settlement

In 1564 Coligny persuaded Catherine to attempt a settlement for a second time. Rene de Laudonniere commanded a group of three ships with 300 people and supplies. The majority of the people were Huguenot. They arrived at St. Johns Bluff in late June 1564 and gave thanks to God for their successful voyage and the auspicious beginning of the colony by singing a psalm of thanksgiving and asking for God's blessing that "our enterprise that all might turn to His Glory."

Those blessings seemed granted as the colony enjoyed religious freedom and a peaceful relationship with the native people, the Timucua. Unfortunately those hopes would soon be dashed as the colony struggled along without supplies and relations with the Timucua disintegrated. Ribault finally arrived in August 1565 with seven ships full of much needed supplies and settlers, just in time

to restore the colony's morale. However, it was a temporary respite, and a new challenge was on the horizon.

On September 4, 1565 Pedro Menendez's Spanish forces, sent by King Phillip II to rid la Florida of foreign trespassers, pirates, and heretics, discovered Ribault and the Huguenots. Luck and circumstance favored Menendez. In God's name he not only took the fort but slaughtered most of its defenders.

Ribault and over 300 of his soldiers, who had set out by ship to attack Menendez in St. Augustine encountered a hurricane and were blown south of their destination. Their ships destroyed, the survivors were captured and executed by Menendez's forces, in part for their reformed religious beliefs.

Huguenot Wars

The Huguenot wars ended in 1598, when Henry IV—who, though a Huguenot, had agreed to convert to Roman Catholicism—issued the Edict of Nantes.

This gave the French Protestants political rights, religious freedom, and the possession of certain fortified towns. Despite the edict, the Huguenots were still harassed and persecuted. When

Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685 all protection of law was withdrawn from the Huguenots. Although they were forbidden to leave France, hundreds of thousands still fled. They carried French arts, manufactures, and culture to England, Germany, the Netherlands, and eventually North America.

Today

Today, high atop a bluff overlooking the site where French Huguenots first landed in America rests a tall stone monument to Ribault and his fellow explorers. It stands as a beacon for all of those people who come to America's shores seeking religious freedom.

The column was dedicated in 1924 and became part of the National Park Service's Fort Caroline National Memorial in 1958, which is now a part of the Timucuan Preserve.

Learn more at <http://www.nps.gov/timu>