

The French Arrive

Gaspard de Coligny, Admiral of France and champion of the cause of the Huguenots, visualized the new land across the sea as a place where his unhappy countrymen might live according to their own ideals and at the same time build up a new dominion by colonization, thereby extending the possessions of France. It was a dream of colonization upon the republican principle of freedom of thought; but in it also was another idea — that of conquest. Coligny had already attempted to plant such a colony in South America, in the harbor of Rio Janeiro, but it had perished. However, he did not despair, and early in 1562 he despatched another expedition of two vessels from Havre de Grace to seek a place of settlement for the colony that was to follow. The command of these vessels was given to Jean Ribault, a native of Dieppe and a Huguenot.

* Ribault's name was spelled in different ways by the historians of the 16th and 17th centuries. French—Ribouldus (rare), Ribauld, Ribault, Ribaut; the form with the "l" is the older. Spanish—Ribao. English—Ribault.

Second in command of this expedition was Rene Goulaine de Laudonniere, likewise a Huguenot. Ribault steered a new course across the Atlantic north of the West Indies and came in sight of the Florida coast near the present site of St. Augustine on the last day of April. The weather being favorable he sailed northward and just before sunset came to the mouth of a large river (the St. Johns), but did not enter it. He anchored outside the bar.

At dawn the next day, which was May 1, 1562, Ribault and several officers and soldiers crossed the bar in their shallops (large rowboats with a number of oarsmen) for the purpose of exploring the river. They soon saw natives coming down to the bank of the river in a friendly manner, even pointing out to them the best place to land. Ribault and his party went ashore. An Indian approached and Ribault gave him a looking-glass. He ran with it to his chief, who took off his girdle and sent it to Ribault as a token of friendship. The two parties now approached each other. The natives greeted the white men with dignity and without indication of fear. After the greeting, the Frenchmen retired a short distance,