

Finding the Minorcan Colonists' Hidden Graves

It's one thing to be lost in the dark, unaware of where the Minorcan ancestors rest. But it is an entirely different kind of tragedy—a wound that refuses to heal—when we do know the general area where the Minorcan colonists are buried, yet we remain powerless to stir enough interest, enough urgency, to uncover their resting place. Their recruitment as indentured servants, and the hardships they endured, have been described in many books and stories. Their strength and resilience allowed their culture to survive, despite a high mortality rate. This issue is of great historical significance. The New Smyrna colony was much larger than the Jamestown colony. "It is the largest importation of white people that was ever brought into America at a time."¹

We know the haunting truth: 1,403 passengers sailed from Port Mahon aboard eight ships. There were 178 deaths and burials at sea, and only 1,225 colonists arrived in British East Florida.² Within six months, there were 450 deaths, and by 1777 the colony failed, and 964 Minorcan colonists had perished and were laid to rest in New Smyrna, Florida,³ on the sprawling plantation of Dr. Andrew Turnbull. And yet, their graves still remain hidden, their stories teetering on the brink of being forgotten.⁴

Where are these graves, and why does finding them matter?

Leaving these graves hidden creates a forgotten history, which diminishes the legacy that should be available to the Minorcan descendants wherever they may be. "A marked grave is a sign of respect or fondness; conversely, a deliberately unmarked grave may signify disdain and contempt."⁵ In New Smyrna Beach, people may unknowingly walk over Minorcan graves every day.

In many minds, hidden graves are associated with spirits that cannot rest peacefully, symbolizing unresolved issues and creating injustice and forgotten suffering. Walking unknowingly over these Minorcan graves highlights how some people can pass through life unaware of what came before and what remains after. It also hints that the living might not fully comprehend the unseen forces or histories lying beneath the surface of ordinary life.

There are many descendants of these missing Minorcans who want to know where they are buried. There may be some people opposed to finding the Minorcan graves because it might evoke a sense of guilt for not trying to find them until now. Finding and recognizing these hidden graves can lead to reflections on the value of remembrance and the importance of honoring the dead.

To add depth to this narrative, Catarina Maria Moll will serve as an example for this story. She lived, died, and was buried somewhere on the Turnbull plantation. Her marriage to Antonio Alzina (Alquina) (Usina) and the birth of her three children⁶ before her death reflect the experiences of many other Minorcans

¹ Colonel James Grant letter to Count Shelburne. *The Minorcans of Florida-Their History Language and Culture*, Philip D. Rasico-First sentence on Page 1

² Jane Quinn-*Minorcans in Florida-Their history and culture*. Page 2

³ Governor Patrick Tonyn letter to Lord George Germaine-December 29, 1777. [The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf](https://minorcans.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf) <https://minorcans.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/The-Letters-Of-Dr-Turnbull-pdf-SEARCHABLE.pdf>

⁴ Jones, Robert P.-*A Minorcan Mystery-Where are they?*

⁵ [Unmarked grave - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unmarked_grave) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unmarked_grave

⁶ Father Pedro Camps' *Golden Book of the Minorcans*': Twin Daughters born to Catarina and Antonio Alquina

who also died and are buried there. Her life on the Turnbull plantation—marked by hardship, resilience, and the relentless demands of survival—provides a glimpse into the lives of countless others who endured the same unforgiving conditions in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. By finding Catarina’s grave, we give voice to the shared struggles, endurance, and legacy of an entire Minorcan community whose lives are woven into the fabric of our history and culture, even as their names fade from memory.

Discovering Catarina’s grave would shed light on a neglected chapter of Florida’s history. The Minorcans endured their time wearing the yoke of indentured servitude and went on to become an integral part of St. Augustine’s culture, from 1777 to the present day. Those who survived the grueling 70-day voyage across the Atlantic Ocean and nine years of harsh indentured servitude finally gained their physical freedom when Governor Tonyn welcomed them to St. Augustine. Of course, true freedom cannot exist without economic freedom,⁷ and for many Minorcans, this would take a few years to achieve. Over time, some Minorcans acquired enslaved Africans⁸ to assist with farming and other types of labor, reflecting the complex and often troubling realities of their pursuit of economic stability. In the 1786 census only 83 male enslaved Africans were listed and only 286 white males were living in St. Augustine.⁹

There are hundreds of efforts underway to locate unmarked graves across America—graves of enslaved people and Indigenous children who died in boarding schools.¹⁰ These efforts are vital because the history they reveal needs to be known, even when it hurts. Similarly, finding the graves of Minorcan immigrants, known to be buried somewhere in New Smyrna Beach, is just as important if we are to complete the pages of our history. Failing to search for these graves diminishes the dignity of individuals like Catarina and perpetuates their suffering as a forgotten people. This lack of recognition and effort reflects the broader historical injustices faced by marginalized groups. The Minorcans were certainly marginalized when they arrived in St. Augustine. Marking these graves would not only honor the humanity of those who suffered and died but also acknowledge and rectify their erasure from history.

There are so many advances in archaeological methods, such as stronger ground-penetrating radar and DNA testing. This makes it feasible to locate these Minorcan graves without extensive disruption. From the very beginning of this effort, it has been stated that there is no intent to hurt anyone’s property—just to find out if the Minorcan ancestors are buried there. This project could attract partnerships between archaeologists, historians, anthropologists, and local communities. Uncovering these graves would deepen the understanding of New Smyrna Beach’s history, enriching both academic knowledge and public appreciation of the area.

Thousands of the Minorcan descendants are still in St. Augustine and other parts of Florida. Knowing where their ancestors rest could bring closure and pride. Marking graves is a universal sign of respect,

Page 6 #13- Son born to Catarina and Antonio Alquina (Usina)_Page 12 #3 Compiled by Leonard J. McCown, 217 West 14th Street, Irving, Texas 75060-5903

⁷ [The causal relationship between economic freedom and prosperity - Atlantic Council](https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/books/the-causal-relationship-between-economic-freedom-and-prosperity/)

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⁸ 1786 census listed Antonio Alcina with one female slave, not baptized. Mills, Donna Rachal, *Florida’s First Families-Volume 1*

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ [U.S. identifies Native American boarding schools and burial sites : NPR](https://www.npr.org/2022/05/11/1098276649/u-s-report-details-burial-sites-linked-to-boarding-schools-for-native-americans)

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crossing all cultures and eras. Without a professional, concerted effort, the story of these colonists risks being lost forever. There are many of us who believe that spirits cannot rest without recognition and remembrance.

This effort could spark public interest in New Smyrna Beach's history, possibly leading to heritage tourism, educational programs, and further historical research. A successful search for these graves could encourage similar projects to locate other forgotten burial sites in Florida and beyond. The archaeologists who find these graves could bring tangible results and lasting recognition to this overlooked chapter of history. Efforts for public and private funding need to be made to start this project, as with every passing year, the physical traces of these graves risk being lost forever due to development, erosion, and time. I encourage archaeologists and stakeholders to act now, as finding even one grave could transform our understanding of the Minorcan experience and ensure their sacrifices are not forgotten.

We have been trying to share what we know about the graves on the Dr. Andrew Turnbull plantation, but we have received little feedback from anyone capable of finding them. We don't know where to turn next, but the interest and desire to find these 'Missing Minorcans' is quite high. So, we will continue crying out in the dark, hoping someone with the expertise and interest will hear us and decide to find at least one grave. Surely, that can be done in a state where it is routine to send men and women into space.

We close this appeal with five observations that stand out to us.

We humbly ask for help.

Historical Impact: The Turnbull Colony is a major but underexplored part of Florida's colonial history. Finding these graves could shed light on this forgotten chapter and elevate the Minorcans' legacy.

Ethical Obligation: Leaving these graves hidden perpetuates historical injustice. Archaeology can help restore dignity to the deceased and their descendants.

Archaeological Feasibility: Advances in technology and interdisciplinary collaboration make this a realistic project.

Community and Cultural Importance: This effort could inspire public pride, deepen local identity, and even have economic benefits through heritage tourism.

Timeliness: The graves are at risk of being permanently lost, making this project a time-sensitive priority.

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