

WHERE ARE THE 964 MINORCANS BURIED IN NEW SMYRNA BEACH, FLORIDA?

This photo in my office shows the nine-foot map of Dr. Andrew Turnbull's colony at New Smyrna, surveyed by James Delaire in 1771. I purchased this map from the Dundee, Scotland, archives more than a year ago, and I study it often while working in my home office. Among its many details, the map marks the location of the San Pedro Chapel, a site that has also been identified in at least one New Smyrna historical publication.

There is no doubt in my mind that the principal Minorcan cemetery lies west of the chapel. It was probably not the only burial ground used by the colonists, as 450 men, women, and children died during the first six months at New Smyrna. During that tragic period, it would have been difficult for Father Pedro Camps, Father Casanovas, or the Greek priest, Father Theoclitus, to reach all of the palmetto huts scattered along eight miles of the Hillsborough River, especially at the height of the mortality.

However, as the number of deaths declined beginning in 1770, I am confident that Father Camps and Father Casanovas were able to provide the Last Rites to many of their parishioners. Those who died after the initial wave of deaths were more than likely laid to rest according to the ancient traditions of the Catholic Church, accompanied by the Requiem Mass for the dead.

A historical letter dated December 29, 1777, retrieved from the archives of Dundee, Scotland, confirms that Governor Patrick Tonyn informed Lord George Germain of the tragic deaths of 964 Minorcan colonists between 1768 and 1777 at the New Smyrna colony. The records specifically identify a total of 34 Greeks among the deceased.

The mystery and tragedy of the "Missing Minorcans," buried somewhere beneath the soil of present-day New Smyrna Beach, Florida, are unparalleled anywhere in the United States. While many historic Catholic cemeteries across America contain unmarked graves, such as those at Tolomato Cemetery in St. Augustine, the locations of those cemeteries are at least known.

I have been unable to find any place remotely comparable to the lost graves of so many Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christians. Locating these burial sites would allow the faithful—and especially their descendants—to pay their respects at the sacred ground where their ancestors were laid to rest.

In New Smyrna Beach, not a single Minorcan grave has ever been identified, nor has a systematic archaeological search been conducted under an established archaeological protocol.

What makes the Missing Minorcans unique is not simply the extraordinary number of deaths, but the fact that an entire Catholic and Greek Orthodox community vanished into unmarked ground without a single identified grave ever being found.

There is no doubt in my mind that a Catholic cemetery lies behind the San Pedro Chapel. It was probably not the only place where colonists were buried, as mentioned previously, 450 men, women, and children died during their first six months in Florida. Given the vastness of the colony, it would have been nearly impossible for Father Pedro Camps and Father Casanovas to reach all of the palmetto huts scattered along eight miles of the Hillsborough River.

The Greek priest, Father Theoclitos, ministered to the Greek colonists until his tragic drowning less than two months after his arrival. During those early months of extraordinary mortality, many burials likely took place near the locations where the deaths occurred. Father Camps and Father Casanovas faithfully laid their parishioners to rest in accordance with the rites and traditions of the Catholic Church.

Now that I have published my final historical novel, *A MINORCAN LEGACY*, I plan to devote my efforts to finding the grave of at least one Minorcan colonist before the 250th anniversary of the Minorcans' arrival in St. Augustine. They began at the very bottom of society within the British community. Although they were loyal British subjects, they were often treated as members of a lower social class. Yet through perseverance and determination, they rose to positions of prominence and respect in St. Augustine and throughout America.

Unlike other Catholic cemeteries where the grave markers have vanished but the location of the cemetery is known, the final resting place of these faithful Catholic and Orthodox human beings has been lost. Many, or perhaps most, of the graves may lie beneath modern development, while others could remain concealed near the site of the San Pedro Chapel, which is clearly marked on historic maps. Their descendants long to know where these souls were laid to rest. Even the discovery of a single grave could help bring closure to this chapter of missing history and honor the memory of those who endured so much.

The 'Missing Minorcans' represent more than just an archaeological mystery; they also raise pastoral concerns. These immigrants were baptized Catholics and Greek Orthodox. They underwent extraordinary suffering, stayed loyal to their faith, and passed away far from their homeland.

Their descendants simply wish to discover their final resting place, pay tribute to their memory, and make certain that these overlooked members of Christ's flock are acknowledged by the Churches they devotedly served and loved.

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