

**PLAZA DE LA CONSTITUCION
&
MONUMENTO DE LA CONSTITUCION**

The Plaza de la Constitucion in St. Augustine is named for the monument erected there in 1813 to commemorate Spain's liberal constitution adopted the previous year. The constitution was voided in 1814 by King Ferdinand VII in violation of the pledge he took upon his return to the throne to abide by the document. All monuments erected to celebrate the 1812 constitution, it is said, were ordered destroyed.

The monument that stands in St. Augustine, FL, is considered to be the only remaining structure dedicated to the 1812 constitution. It was constructed under direction of Don Fernando de la Maza Arredondo. Arredondo was a merchant, prominent citizen and military leader in St. Augustine. He assisted in the raising of troops for the town's defense in 1811 and used his personal fortune to aid the city when tax revenues and available resources proved inadequate for defense and survival. Arredondo is also credited with settling Alachua County in 1817 with a 280,000 acre grant from the Spanish king.

It is interesting to note that Arredondo, the person tasked with supervising the erection of the monument, was also considered responsible for allowing Moses Levy, a Jew, to own land in St. Augustine at a time which such ownership was forbidden under Spanish law

The monument erected under Arredondo's supervision in St. Augustine had the following inscription (translation from Spanish to English):

"Place of the Constitution. Promulgated in this city of St. Augustine of East Florida on the 17th of October, 1812, the Brigadier Don Sebastian Kindelan,

Knight of the Order of Saint James, being the Governor. For eternal memory.

The municipal Government erected this monument under the supervision of Don Fernando de la Arredondo the young senior Alderman and Don Francisco Robire.”

Of great interest on the monument is the Masonic Square and Compasses which were clearly visible. According to Rafael Altamira writing in 1918 in his book A

HISTORY OF SPAIN:

“Freemasonry had existed in Spain since about 1750; first depending on centers established in other countries, later with Spanish organization. Not all Masons were revolutionists: but all aided one another and the radical elements used the lodges as a cloak for conspiracy.

In 1819 the Andalusian Masons, especially those at Seville and at Cadiz, where an expeditionary force was being assembled to be sent to the Americas, decided to further the revolution.

It is highly probable that there were Freemasons in St. Augustine, and that considerable liberal sentiment existed there, so that the use of the emblem on the tablet may have received official sanction.”

Interestingly, Altamira notes that there is no “definite authority” that when the 1812 constitution was revoked the monuments erected to celebrate it were dismantled, although, he does write that it was highly probably. Altamira further suggests that the St. Augustine monument may not have been erected by order of the Spanish government but rather was erected voluntarily by St. Augustine’s citizens.

In 1813, after the monument was completed, a young French-Canadian girl passed her time while visiting St. Augustine by sketching things in the plaza. One of the things she drew was the monument complete with the original Spanish inscription and the Square and Compasses at the bottom.

Historic sources suggest that Freemasonry had come to St. Augustine by the 1750s and there is evidence at the Castillo de San Marcos as well as at Ft. Matanzas and the Cathedral in St. Augustine of Masonic inscriptions and emblems.

Others suggest, however, that the Masonic symbols on the monument are the results a Civil War or post-Civil War era practical joke. The symbol on the monument in St. Augustine does not include the "G" they note and that the Square and Compasses without the "G" were common in both Union and Confederate Lodges of the Civil War era. But it must be noted, as well, that the "G" was not used by the European founders of the fraternity. This later fact could also suggest the influence of British Masonry on the monument. Not all British subjects left St. Augustine in 1784 upon the return of the Spanish though Spanish subjects did leave en masse when the British assumed control in 1763.

Those who theorize that the emblems are not truly Masonic also note that the plaque on the monument is missing the typical Masonic date.

In St. Augustine there have been at least 12 Masonic Lodges. Most disappeared as the Catholic Church took an ever stronger position against the organization. But as Altamira noted in 1918, Freemasonry probably existed in St. Augustine.

During the British period in 1768, James Grant, British governor of East Florida, was given a warrant to form a provisional Grand Lodge operating under the Grand Lodge