

# Kids Page

Lowndes County Historical Society  
November-December 2007

## First Christmas in the Americas

### When was the first Christmas celebrated in the New World?

The first Christmas in the New World was celebrated by Christopher Columbus and his crew. La Navidad was established in 1492 when Columbus flagship, the *Santa Maria* struck a reef and sank. On Christmas Eve, 1492, Columbus and his crew were trading and entertaining some of the local Indians on the north coast of Haiti. Only the ship's boy was awake and at the helm when the *Santa Maria* ran aground.

On Christmas Day, the men unloaded the cargo, assisted by the Arawak Indians. The ship was taken apart and used to build a settlement about one kilometer from where the ship sank. The settlement was called La Navidad because it was established at Christmas. Thirty-nine men stayed at the settlement and the rest continued with Columbus. When he returned on his second voyage eleven months later, the settlement and nearby Indian village was burned and the men were dead. Their supplies were found dispersed among the surrounding Indian villages. What actually happened at La Navidad remains a mystery.



*DeBry engraving of Columbus trading with the natives.*



*Engraving of Hernando de Soto.  
This engraving was done in the 1700s.*

In 1539, Hernando de Soto and 600 men landed at Tampa Bay, Florida to explore the interior of North America. The coast had been explored by others including Ponce de Leon, but the interior remained unexplored.

In October of 1539 the De Soto expedition established their winter camp at the town of Anhaica, an abandoned Apalachee Indian village (present-day Tallahassee, Florida). Here Spaniards would celebrate the first Christmas in the interior of the Southeast. Based on accounts and research by historians and archaeologists, it was not a "happy holiday." The Apalachee people were not pleased with the Spaniards presence and denied them food. The Spaniards at Anhaica were under siege—the Natives tried to burn the camp and the Spaniards did not leave the camp unarmed or alone.



*Beads like these chevron type are found in many sites visited by Hernando de Soto.*



*Nueva Cadiz beads were among the earliest type traded in the Americas.*

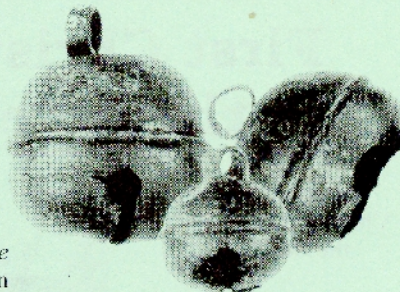


For more about history ask your parents if you may visit our web site at [www.valdostamuseum.org](http://www.valdostamuseum.org)

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**Did you know** that little brass bells called Hawks Bells were among the early items traded by Spanish explorers? The bells are very similar to the little jingle bells we have today. We can only speculate about what Christmas was like in the New World. To reenact the first Christmas at Mission San Luis in Tallahassee, Florida, they studied Christmas traditions in Spain. Perhaps the same or similar traditions came over with the explorers, their crews, and later with Spanish missionaries.

Around 1623, the first missions were established in what is now Lowndes County, Georgia. The one mission excavated by archaeologists, Santa Cruz de Cachipile, yielded beads and brass artifacts. Bells and beads were traded to the local Indians. Perhaps bells and beads were among the first Christmas presents.



For more information about Spaniards in the New World:

*First Encounters: Spanish Explorations in the Caribbean and the United States, 1492-1570.* Edited by Jerald Milanich and Susan Milbrath, University of Florida Press, 1989.

**WORD FIND - Are you up to the challenge?**

M I S A N T A M A R I A T M L A  
 A R M C H M A H I F Y S L A P P  
 C H R I S T M A S A E S A Y I A  
 A P G A S S I N D A D I V A N L  
 N I A H O S B K L O R A C D A A  
 S P H N O L I E A M I S S I L C  
 N B L A H T S O L T T I A L L H  
 O E N N N H U I N L N L R O I E  
 I A A T S A B V H S S O K H K E  
 T D S T O N M I R O E H A I T I  
 I S T E R N U E V A C A D I Z S  
 D A R W E A L G S E T W G L X O  
 A H A O O T O S E D I T I O N S  
 R E V N L A C E T U T I T S N I  
 T A M P A B A Y E B E L G N I J

Find the following words. They are written forward, backward and upside-down.

- |           |          |           |             |            |
|-----------|----------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| CHRISTMAS | COLUMBUS | TAMPA BAY | NUEVA CADIZ | TRADITIONS |
| APALACHEE | BELLS    | HAITI     | ANHAICA     | MISSIONS   |
| DE SOTO   | BEADS    | NAVIDAD   | SANTA MARIA | HOLIDAY    |