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## Not the 'oldest house' but still an oldie

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# Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



## NOT THE 'OLDEST HOUSE' BUT STILL AN OLDIE

By HAMPTON DUNN

ST. AUGUSTINE --- There's plenty of authentic history to the quaint little house at 14 St. Francis St., even though it doesn't meet its original claims of being the "Oldest House in the United States."

There have been houses standing on this site since the 1600s, but the present building was erected around 1727---which is plenty old! When the British troops swept into St. Augustine in 1702, they didn't leave a single house standing.

When this town began attracting tourists in sizeable numbers, the house was billed as the oldest in the nation. The Saturday Evening Post, aware of the old houses in New England that date back to the 17th Century, challenged the claim. The house promoter sued the magazine and won it because the Post could not disprove the claim, even though the promoter could not prove the correctness of his claim.

Later the St. Augustine Historical Society acquired the property and thoroughly investigated the antiquity of the rugged house. Now it is promoted simply as the oldest house in the oldest city. Tomas Gonzales y Hernandez was the first occupant in the early 1700s.

The first floor walls are constructed from the natural shellstone called coquina quarried on nearby Anastasia Island. The floor is of tabby---a mixture of lime, sand and shell.

There is much about the home that reflects life in the Spanish colony during the 18th century. The Historical Society maintains an outstanding museum and an excellent library in the building.

