

had a light supper on the verandah and the wind blew so hard
took us over to see the Old Spanish Mission in the moonlight and
it was so romantic! I thought William was going to propose right



Early twentieth-century views of the sugar mill.

Period photographs and postcards courtesy of Dot Moore and Tom Baskett, Jr.



Over the years, this one-time sugar factory became a source of local building materials and myths. Salvagers carried off coquina blocks, and the massive machinery went to the Dunlawton mill, in present-day Port Orange.

Even so, enough remained to keep the New Smyrna landmark romantic and popular with visitors. In 1894, the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine published a story about the ruins by a well-known travel writer. Bradford Torrey liked the mill's dreamy setting and wildlife, and he also noted a curious claim—that the structure had been built as a chapel, perhaps “by Columbus himself!”

Torrey could laugh, but the Spanish story took root. Early postcards labeled this site a “mission” or “convent,” and the ruins’ owner— Mrs. Jeannette Connor— promoted the Franciscan fathers theory.

Columbus's Chapel?

By 1941, journalist Charles H. Coe had seen enough. In a scathing critique of the “so-called Spanish mission,” Coe rejected that origin and argued for a nineteenth-century sugar factory. Modern students of the ruins agree, but also credit Mrs. Connor with helping to preserve this special place.

