

Sightings... In St. Augustine, Florida
Donald L. Snyder (Clayton MO)



St. Augustine, Florida (29°53'N, 81°18'W) is the oldest city in the U. S., having been established by the Spanish admiral Pedro Menendez de Aviles in August 28, 1565. The Cathedral-Basilica of St. Augustine at the corner of Cathedral and St. George streets in the center of the city was founded on September 8, 1565 and has been continuously active since, making it the oldest Catholic parish in the U. S. A rectangular building 42 feet wide and 120 feet long formed the original structure, with the walls constructed of coquina, a rocklike amalgam of sea shells used as a construction material for many buildings in the city, including the Castillo de San Marcos, which is a large fort that overlooks the Atlantic Ocean nearby. A fire destroyed much of the Cathedral in 1887, but the walls survived. The reconstruction includes a new bell tower at the South end of the Cathedral. A vertical sundial on the South wall of the tower bears the inscription "pereunt et imputantur" (The hours pass, and you will be held accountable.) The photograph below shows the dial at 12:30 p.m. EDT on March 12, 2001. The shadow line cast on the dial is at about 2:15, an unfortunate two-hour error for a dial on such an important historic site. The rod gnomon appears to be bent near its point of attachment. Whether this is an awful error or the work of a vandal is hard to tell. The dial is about 15 feet above ground level, so this defacement would not seem to be easily accomplished by a vandal.

Donald L. Snyder
7621 Westmoreland Avenue
Clayton MO 63105
dls@ee.wustl.edu

