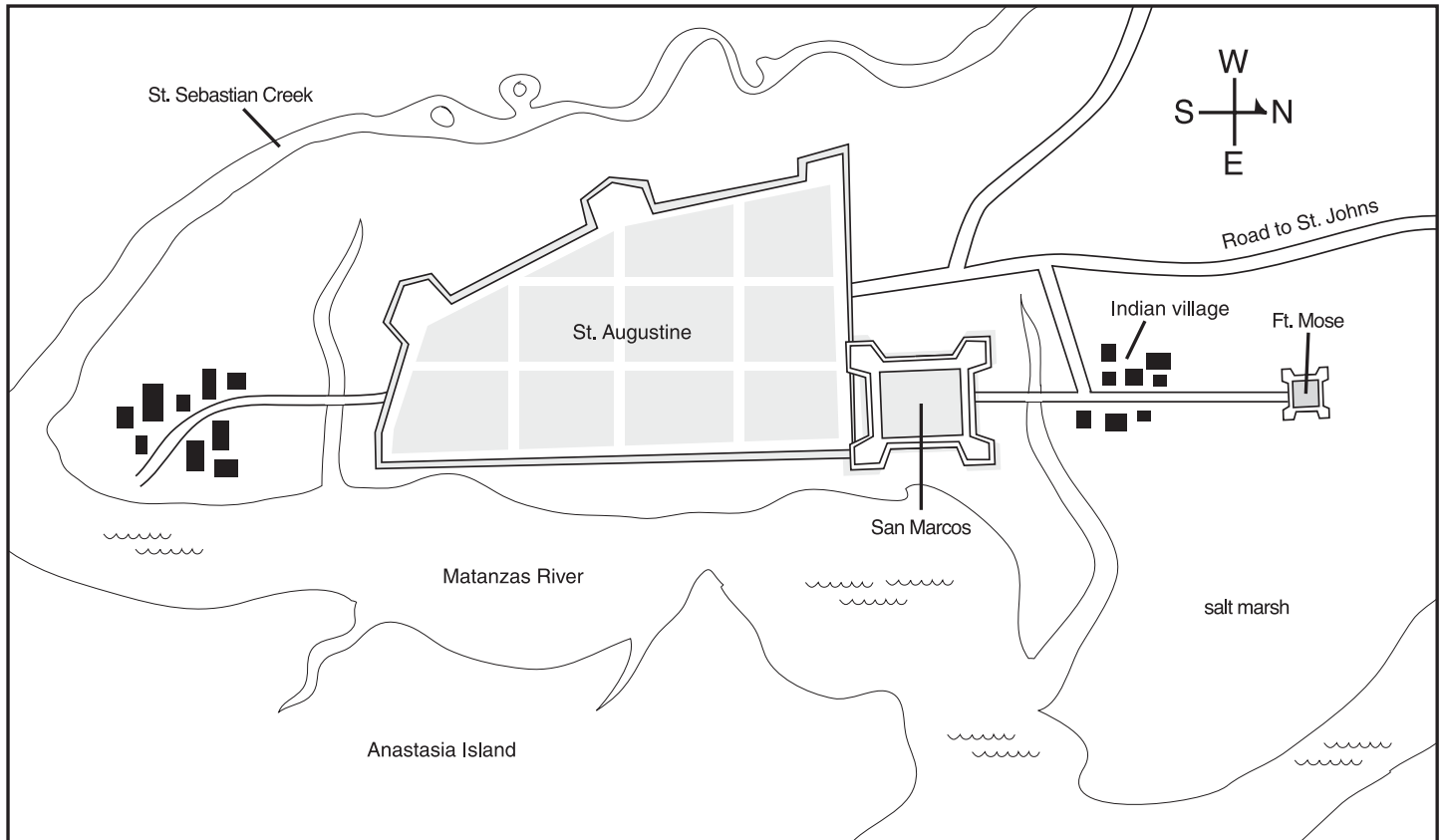# African Americans Settle in Fort Mose

The first African Americans came to Florida in the late 1500s. The Europeans brought them here from Africa. Most were enslaved in the British Colonies, but there were some free Africans who settled in St. Augustine.

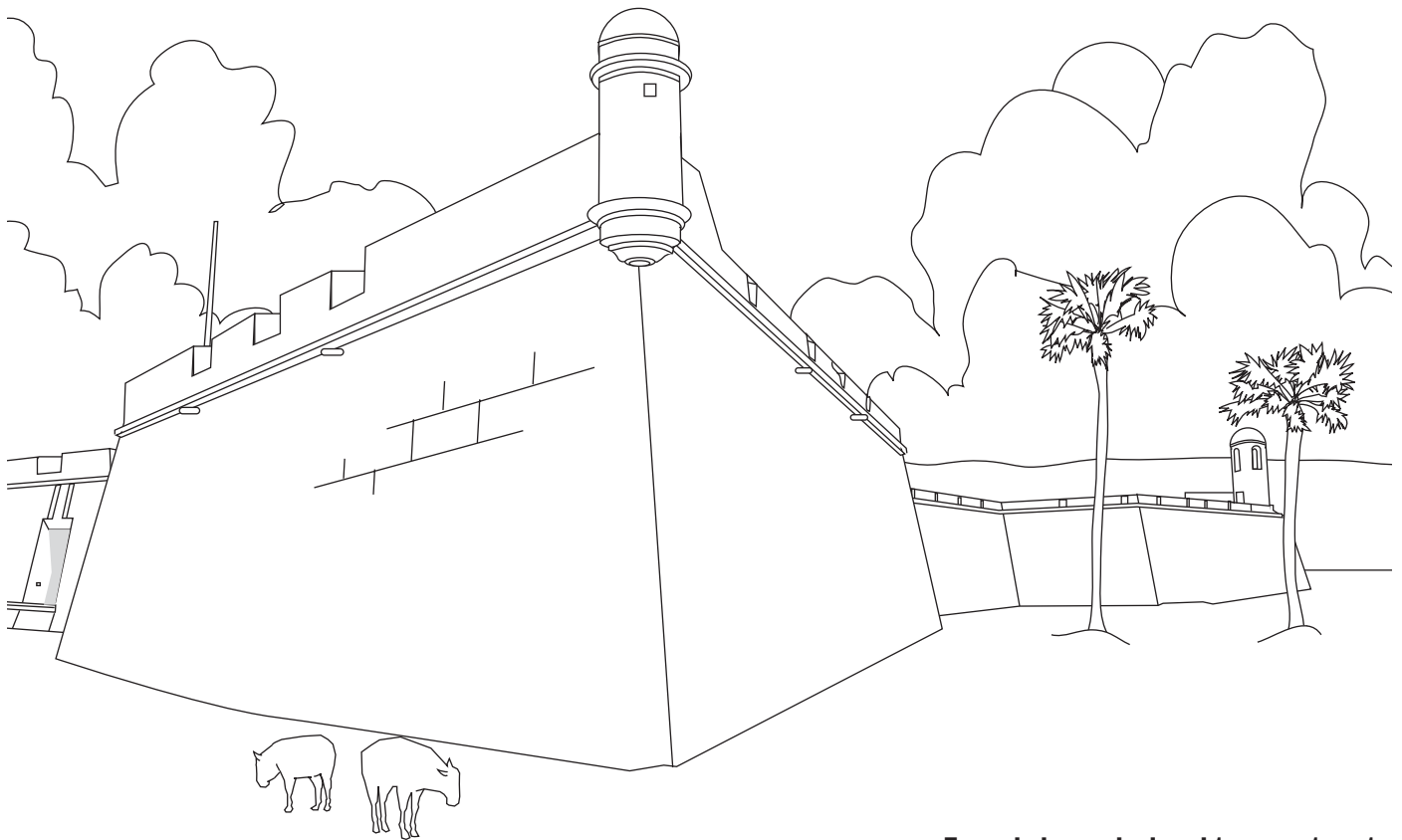**Fort Mose was located about two miles north of St. Augustine.**

In 1693, the King of Spain wanted to weaken England's rule in the New World. He decreed that slaves who ran away from the British colonies would be free if they converted to Catholicism and declared loyalty to Spain. As this information spread throughout the colonies, many slaves escaped to freedom. Large numbers of these freed slaves helped the Spanish settlers build the Castillo de San Marcos, St. Augustine's great stone fortress.

In 1738, the governor of Florida, Manuel Montiano, decided to set up a separate town for the free Africans. The location for this settlement was carefully considered. The decision was made to build it 2 miles north of St. Augustine in a salty marsh, so that it could act as a military outpost for the town. It was named Fort Mose after the Indian name for that area.

The one hundred African Americans who settled in Fort Mose raised food for themselves and other settlements in St. Augustine. They built churches and shops. The men formed their own militia, or military unit. The captain of this militia, Francisco Menendez, was recognized as chief of Fort Mose.

In 1740, the Fort Mose militia and Spanish soldiers defended St. Augustine and the surrounding area when James Olgethorpe attacked them. Most of Fort Mose was destroyed during the attack. A second Fort Mose was built, but it never really thrived. After the British gained control of Florida in 1763, the inhabitants of Fort Mose, along with most of the Spanish settlers, fled to Cuba.

Fort Mose was the first free African American settlement in America. Today, it is a National Historical landmark on the Florida Black Heritage Trail. Artifacts found on the site reveal the rich culture and traditions of this historical settlement.

Freed slaves helped to construct the Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine.