

## Experience the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Florida Becoming US Territory

In 1820 – two hundred years ago this year – Spain ratified the Florida Treaty, selling Florida to the United States at the bargain-basement price of \$5 million. What was it like for Floridians to live through such a sea-change in the language they spoke, the government they pledged allegiance to, and the liberties they valued? How did families from Spanish, English, African, and Native American backgrounds protect the people they loved, the property they owned, and the opportunities they treasured during this seismic shift in power?

This spring, your family can step into 1820s Florida and explore answers to these questions firsthand. Theater with a Mission (TWAM) is presenting *Florida for Sale*, a new living-history encounter that lets you meet characters from Florida's past face to face, hear them tell you in their own words how they worked to make the Florida Treaty a world-class step forward for their fellow-citizens, and even taste the foods, dance the steps, and sing along with the songs they loved.

One character you'll find unforgettable is Luis de Onís, the ambassador from Spain. Played by Samuel Castellanos, Onís invites you into his living room – where he senses the presence of his dearly departed wife Cristina, who died of a New-World fever while Luis was negotiating the Florida Treaty. You'll hear Ambassador Onís quote extracts from his *memorias* in Spanish and in English, to show the spirit of his wife (played by Carolina Merida) that her death was not in vain.

Here's what Samuel Castellanos has to say about inhabiting this historic character. "For me, being bilingual helped me embody the character because Luis is bilingual himself. Coincidentally, at the time the play is taking place, Luis has been in the US for about ten years and I've been in the States for about nine. So that's another very close thing we have in common. The knowledge he has of English is about the same as me, since we've been exposed to it for the same amount of time. Being Latinx helps me with switching back and forth between languages, because I learned English second. Latinx culture is very much about speaking Spanish when you can and seeing what words can be kept in Spanish and not have to translate over to English, and Luis does that. A lot of times he'll start saying things in Spanish because that's just how he thinks and that's how I think too."

To enrich your thinking about this milestone in Hispanic history, *Florida for Sale* will be presented in a mansion that dates back to the 1800s – the main house at Goodwood Museum & Gardens in Tallahassee. Tour guides will escort you through the house to encounter a series of historic characters (including Ambassador Onís and his wife), introduce you to 1820s cookery on the lawn, and invite you to join in dancing at a Florida Birthday Ball. It's time travel into an immersion experience, where for two hours you get to step back 200 years to see, hear, taste, and feel Florida in 1820.

This year, get up close and personal with Florida's Spanish past! As Samuel Castellanos (a/k/a Ambassador Onís) reminds you, "It's important for people to see what our ancestors went through to get to what we have now, so that we can appreciate it more." For more information about this new development for the new year, visit TWAM's website ([www.theaterwithamission.com](http://www.theaterwithamission.com)) and follow TWAM on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

by Jacob Evanshine and Ben Gunter

photos: black and white: Luis de Onís (1800s portrait)

color: Samuel Castellanos and Carolina Merida portraying Luis and Cristina de Onís  
in Theater with a Mission's *Florida for Sale*