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George I. F. Clarke

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A LETTER OF G. I. F. CLARKE'S RELATING TO
PORT ST. JOSEPH, EAST FLORIDA

¹ Charleston, S. C., May 1st, 1823.

Sir, I have been informed by the Delegate of Florida, who I accidentally met here a few days since, on his return from Washington, that an unfavorable impression of my character, or views in Florida, is felt by the Executive of the United States or by some of the officers of that very respectable department, in consequence of two of my letters having been laid before them by Col. James G. Forbes of New York, which letters relate to the creation of Port St. Joseph in, East Florida, under the Spanish government; they were produced by the United States attorney on the trial of the french ship Apollon, in the circuit court at Savannah, and have lately been noticed by the Hon. Judge Johnston in his decree on the appeal in behalf of that ship.

As I cannot, for a moment, suppose the Executive of the United States is acquainted with all the facts connected with those letters ; nor that, under such circumstances, I ought to be silent on their explanations, I beg, Sir, your attention to the following statement:

I had the honor of commanding under the Spanish government those ports of East Florida laying west and north of St. Johns River, excepting only Amelia Island, that of Surveyor General, and one of my places of residence was the town of Fernandina when the place fell into the hands of General McGregor. I was

²From the original in Bureau of Index and Archives, Department of State, Washington, D. C. Other letters of Clarke's, also relating to the disturbances in East Florida, 1811-1818, were published in the QUARTERLY in July and in October, 1925; and still others, of which the originals are in the collection of the Society, will appear in future issues.

absent at the time, and did not return-it had become necessary for me to keep between him and his successors in their farther progression into the province, and to endeavor by every means, to check to and from that place, the passage of negro and other cargo piratically acquired and that of dissolute characters thrown together in such scenes of iniquity. And the better to effect those and other objects beneficial to both governments, I took a house of occasional residence in the town of St. Marys, Ga., obtained a power as consular agent there from H. C. Majesty's consulate for the Carolinas and Georgia and established a regular mail from thence through East Florida.

Fernandina having been taken possession of by your troops, the passage of all the waters of Florida, discharging by St. Marys Bar, became shut against foreign vessels by instructions to the collector of St. Marys from his government founded on the absence of a Spanish port of entry in their neighborhood. The French ship "Apollon" from Havre de Grace, came into those waters in quest of a port. Her captain proceeded to St. Augustine and the deputy collector of that city brought me orders from my then government to select and lay out (as engineer pro tempore) a proper place for a port of entry, etc., and orders to govern it. I placed it about seven miles from Georgia, and called it Port St. Joseph.

The Apollon was taken to it, entered, and moored, and immediately after I officially communicated to the collector of St. Marys the presence of that port of entry.

Some time previous to this Col. Forbes had been with me, on a visit to St. Augustine - the place of our nativity ; we had been schoolmates there. Our parents had been friends and we had perpetuated that friendship; we corresponded by letters on many subjects. I gave him several intimates of our contem-

plated port of entry, selected him alone from among all my friends and acquaintances and invited him there as one to serve. Much commercial business would lay at my commendation and I would disinterestedly put all into his hands. I knew his pecuniary circumstances were limited, his age advanced, his family large and young.

The collector of St. Marys having had the Apollon carried by an armed force from her moorings at Port St. Joseph to the town of St. Marys, Col. J. Forbes selected those two letters and layed them before the Executive of the United States.

I acted, Sir, as an officer of Florida; my object was my country's good. The political principle of benefitting by the misfortunes of others has ever been universal. The same gave birth and being to Fernandina and wealth to Florida during the embargo of the United States, their non-intercourse and the war with Great Britain-from 1807 to 1815 -wherein one sweep of the eye from that port could gather in one hundred and fifty square rigged vessels and a multitude of smaller.

East Florida is the land of, my nativity, it has been the theatre of my life, and I expect it to be the depository of my bones. I promise myself, then, a shady tree in the rear ground of the stage and I hope to enjoy it free from censure or suspicion. His Excellency, Don Luis D'Onis while forming the treaty of its cession, spontaneously tendered me any vacancy of the Spanish consulates in the United States should I choose. I answered him, there could be none that would draw me from my contemplated retirement in Florida. I since called to Don Mateo de la Serna at Washington for the vice-consulate of East Florida without pay, the better to secure my retirement there, but heard nothing from him. My prospects in Cuba are good, but my feelings are wedded to Florida;

moreover, I have long thought I saw a mill stone hanging over that Island.

I presume, Sir, it would not be too much to suppose, that he who without stipend faithfully served his country for 20 odd years, thrice bore a part in saving it from the evils of revolution, and twice sustained a ruinous sack of his property in its service under one government, would not feel less its friend when fairly transferred, to another, and himself and his all within it.

I have the honor to subscribe myself, with great respect

Your obt. servt.,

GEO. I. F. CLARKE.

The Hon. John Q. Adams
Department of State
Washington.

Sir, Should you honor me by letter (for I cheerfully as an individual attend to anything that concerns Florida) please to direct for St. Marys, Georgia, and they will readily come to hand.

Written from Charleston, S. C.

1 May 1823.

Received on 14th of May.