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LETTERS RELATING TO MACGREGOR'S
ATTEMPTED CONQUEST OF
EAST FLORIDA, 1817

¹ Headquarters, Fernandina
17 July, 1817

My dear Sir,

Long before you receive this, you will have learnt of the capture of this place. I have therefore now to request that you will do me the favor you promised me at Baltimore, that is to communicate to your government my views in taking possession of this place. I shall look with impatience for your answer and I trust you will not attribute my silence to any other motives than the true one, a want of time and a multiplicity of business.

Any news or information that you have relative to our affairs, I trust you will do me the favor of sending me, and that I shall at least have two of your letters to my one. I trust everything will go on well here, although some of my materials are not of the best discription, but this I must expect when I consider that they are taken at random from a populous sea port Town. They appear to be much fonder of money than military fame and glory, but probably after a victory or two they will feel themselves inspired with more martial sentiment.

I beg the favor of your presenting my best regards to Judge Bland, as also to my friend, the Major. I also beg my respectful compliments to Mrs. Skinner and Mrs. Bland and requesting you to accept the as-

²The originals of this and the following letter are to be found in Bureau of Index and Archives, Department of State, Washington, D. C.

surances of the most perfect regards, I remain, my dear Sir, most sincerely yours,

Gregor MacGREGOR.

To John Skinner, Postmaster
Baltimore, Maryland.

PRIVATE

Baltimore, 30th July 1817.

Dear Sir-The inclosed reached me this evening. Allow me now to relate in detail the particulars of my intercourse with General MacGregor while in this city, in regard to his objects.

The day after his arrival here he sought an interview with me through Mr. Cy Hughes at my house where he continued to visit me almost daily during a residence of about two months. At first he was impenetrably reserved and circumspect-vainly endeavoring to collect funds without venturing to communicate to those from whom he desired to command them the specific point on which his proposed expedition was to operate. After some days he told me apparently with much candor and solicitude that as he believed, I possessed the confidence of the Government he would confide to me his plans and intentions-at several *times* he desired me to bear in mind our conversations, and requested should events make it necessary, that I would communicate them substantially to the Government.

He declared his object to be in the first, place to take possession of Amelia-thence to wrest the Floridas from Spain, when he should immediately call on the inhabitants by proclamation to designate (that is, should he succeed in getting a foothold) some of their most respectable fellow citizens to form a constitution on the model of some of the adjoining States. That so far as it might depend on him, he would en-

courage the existing disposition of the People in that Section to confederate with the United States-leaving it to the will and policy of this Government and to political circumstances as they might arise, to indicate the most favorable time for their admission into the Union. That in the meantime he would endeavor to hold them as the most eligible depot to collect and organize the supplies necessary to the establishment of South American independence. In connection with that great object he was inclined to view the temporary possession of the Floridas as under a provisional government as of the highest importance and utility.

He was moreover of the opinion that it would be compatible with the best policy of the United States, under the explanations here given, to connive at the occupation of them (Floridas) by a Patriot force--because, in that way, the Patriots might have access to the resources, and profit of the enterprising spirit of this Country, without necessarily involving a positive violation of any of our strictly neutral or pacific obligations -- To any complaint from Spain he thought we might sufficiently answer, that we were not responsible for any operations conducted beyond our jurisdiction in a territory claimed by her. Thus he was of opinion that our government might be relieved from the embarrassment resulting from the uncontrollable propensity of our citizens, acting under motives of cupidity (or others more honorable) to embark in the contest between Spain and her colonies in favor of the latter without paying in all cases a decent regard to the requirements of existing laws--that in this way we might enjoy the satisfaction of seeing that assistance rendered to the Patriots indirectly, which are forbidden to be directly offered by our actual relations with Spain. I warned him that he would have to encounter the suspicion of subserviency to the views of Great Britain, which, if entertained by our Govern-

ment on the ground of strongly indicative circumstances, ought and would prove fatal to his enterprise - against which he urged that Nature has so obviously decreed the Floridas to the United States on their passage from the hands of Spain, that all apprehension of an attempt to hold them, by any other power must be rebutted by the gross and manifest folly of such an undertaking-unless as a pretext for gratifying a previous disposition to engage in a war with the United States for some other object, the holding of the Floridas not being an attainable one. In these views and opinions he hoped the Government of the United States would coincide with him, at least so far as not to interpose any obstacles, a measure to which he conceived them not invited by any sound view of the interest of the country, much less by any sense of obligation to Spain, to aid in preserving the integrity of her possessions.

Such is the exposition of his views as developed to me in the course of numerous conversations. I know the Government has been warned from Philadelphia that there is reason to believe he may be in the reins of England, that accursed nightmare whose business it is to watch for and to extinguish the first sparks of liberty as they arise in all parts of the world. I will only say here that my private opinion is from much and minute observation that this conjecture as to MacGregor is not well founded. If it were necessary I would here more minutely describe *his character* but I have already said much-in doing which I have only fulfilled a promise repeatedly given.

Please, Sir, believe me to be truly yours,

J. SKINNER.

To John Quincy Adams
Secretary of State