

1931

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Lawrence Kinnaird



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### Recommended Citation

Kinnaird, Lawrence (1931) "International Rivalry in the Creek Country Part I, The Ascendency of Alexander McGillivray 1783-1789," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 10: No. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol10/iss2/4>

## INTERNATIONAL RIVALRY IN THE CREEK COUNTRY

### PART I. THE ASCENDENCY OF ALEXANDER MCGILLIVRAY, 1783-1789

The Creek nation with its lands situated in regions claimed both by Spain and the United States occupied a strategic position at the close of the War of the American Revolution. Since no treaty existed between the two countries the question of boundaries was left entirely for future determination. The Spaniards desired to extend the limits of the Floridas as far northward as possible ; while the Americans wished to establish the boundary near the Gulf as specified in the treaty with Great Britain.<sup>1</sup>

The rivalry between Spain and the United States was further complicated by the fact that the British had not lost interest in Florida with its cession to Spain in 1783. Many loyalist refugees continued to live among the Florida Indians. Since the country of the Creeks and related groups extended to the sea it was easily accessible to the British traders from the West Indies. The Creek nation constituted the most important factor in the three-sided rivalry between Spain, the United States and British interests in the region north-east of the Gulf, not only on account of its geographi-

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed studies of the dispute between the United States and Spain over the boundary question may be found in the following works: Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty* (Baltimore, 1926) ; Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Spanish-American Frontier, 1783-1795* (Boston and New York, 1927). According to one contemporary American opinion the Spaniards claimed to the northward "as far as the tennessee, if not further." Another American asserted that the Spaniards regarded all the region from "the sea to the head waters of the Alabama" as within their jurisdiction. Green to Bledso, September 10, 1785, MS. Bancroft Library; *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 307-308.

eal situation but because it probably could put into the field more warriors than any other of the southern tribes.<sup>2</sup> The success or failure of each of the three rivals depended to a large degree upon the friendship or hostility of the Creeks. The country that could successfully dominate the Creek confederacy would in all probability become firmly established in Florida. The question of leadership among the Creeks became, therefore, one of great importance to Spaniards, 'Americans, and British, in the decade following the Revolution.

The first phase of the contest for control of the Creek nation came as the result of the compulsory evacuation of Florida by English settlers when Spain occupied it. Some sought refuge among the Indians, but a larger number migrated to the neighboring Bahamas. Merchants who had formerly traded with the southern Indians wanted to continue this commerce, while many of the exiles doubtless hoped that Florida might some day be recovered, and thus they would be enabled to return to their former homes. East Florida had been one of the chief refuges for colonial loyalists during the Revolution. As the American forces gradually gained possession of the south, ers states thousands of British adherents fled to Florida.<sup>3</sup> Loyalist soldiers were paid for their services to the king in liberal grants of land. St. Augustine and vicinity grew rapidly. New towns sprang up on the

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<sup>2</sup>Alexander McGillivray estimated that the total number of Creek gun-men was between five and six thousand, "exclusive of marauders, independent of the general interest of the others". Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Archives of Aboriginal Knowledge* (6 vols., Philadelphia, 1860), V, 263. Swanton states that "these figures are perhaps a little high". John R. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians and Their Neighbors* (Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin No. 73; Washington, 1922), 438. Estimates of six thousand gun-men are given in the *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 15, 21.

<sup>3</sup>Herbert Bruce Fuller, *The Purchase Florida* (Cleveland, 1906), 18.

St. Johns River and settlements were made all the way from the St. Marys to the Matanzas.<sup>4</sup>

Then came the news that Great Britain was ceding Florida to Spain. Many refused to believe it. Continued grants of land kept up their hopes. In April, 1783, a party of Loyalists took the Bahamas from Spain.<sup>5</sup> All hopes of retaining Florida, however, were soon dispelled by the official notification of Governor Tonyn that the province had been ceded to Spain. The plight of the refugee Loyalists was pitiable. For a second time they were driven from their homes. The country was thrown into a state of confusion. Many lawless characters trained in the school of border warfare against the Americans now began to plunder friend and foe alike. Among the "Banditti" were Colonel Daniel McGirth and Major William Cunningham, formerly of the Florida rangers. Governor Tonyn organized a troop of horse to protect the people in combating the activities of the bandits, but he failed to get rid of them.<sup>6</sup>

The Spanish governor, Zespedes, arrived at St. Augustine in June 1784, with a corps of officials and a small body of troops.<sup>7</sup> The English began to leave

<sup>4</sup>Carita Carita Doggett Corse, "Florida History—a Field of Colorful Original Sources", in the *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, VI, 35; Wilbur Henry Siebert, "East Florida as a Refuge of Southern Loyalists, 1774-1785", in the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* XXXVII (1927), 237-238.

<sup>5</sup>Siebert, Siebert, *op. cit.*, 239-240; Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Great Britain*, IV (London, 1909), 38, 93, 128, 169, 247, 293, 351; Fuller, *The Purchase of Florida*, 18-19; George R. Fairbanks, *History* (Philadelphia, 1871), 237-239.

<sup>6</sup>Siebert, Siebert, "East Florida as a Refuge of Southern Loyalists, 1774-1785", in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, XXXVII (1927), 237-238; also Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774-1785* (No. 9, Publications of the Florida State Historical Society; Deland, 1929), I, 164, 165.

<sup>7</sup>Siebert, Siebert, *Loyalists East Florida, 1774-1785*, 161; Fairbanks, *History Florida*, 238.

the country in large numbers for the British West Indies, Nova Scotia, and even England.<sup>8</sup> Many of the British, however, clung tenaciously to their homes, while others refused to leave Florida and sought refuge in the Indian country.<sup>9</sup> Many of those who resisted the expulsion assumed the role of outlaws and committed numerous depredations.<sup>10</sup> In July and August Governor Zespedes issued proclamations warning the malcontents against committing any acts of violence and assuring all English inhabitants that they would be protected and permitted to withdraw with their effects in case they did not wish to take the oath of allegiance to his Catholic Majesty.<sup>11</sup>

Disorder continued, for there were many "disturbers of the peace who, not knowing where to go and wishing to remain in the province, refused to be subjected to Government, or laws of any kind."<sup>12</sup> Zespedes, although urged by Tonym, the British governor, hesitated to act in the situation because he had only twenty-five dragoons available. Lieutenant Grenier of the Hibernians reported as follows: "The number of outlaws between the towns of St. John's and St. Mary's is about sixty families. Among them some might be useful to our nation, but the others the sooner we drive them out of the Province the better, as they are men who have neither God nor law."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Siebert, Siebert, *op. cit.*, 207; Corse, "Florida History", in the *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, VI, 36-38.

<sup>9</sup>Zespedes Zespedes to Galvez, January 12, 1786, Archivo General de Indias, Audiencia de Santo Domingo, 86-2-22 (Bancroft Library transcript).

<sup>10</sup>Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784* (Tr. and ed. by Alfred J. Morrison; Philadelphia, 1911),

<sup>11</sup>Siebert, Siebert, *Loyalists Florida*, 161-163.

<sup>12</sup>A. M. Brooks and Annie Averette, *The Unwritten History of St. Augustine* (St. Augustine, 1909?), 229.

<sup>13</sup>Garnier Garnier to the Governor of Florida, November 10, 1784, *ibid.*, 231.

The time for the final British evacuation of Florida was drawing near. March 19, 1785 had been set as the day upon which all inhabitants who had not taken the oath of allegiance to Spain must leave, but many still were not prone to do so. The governor of East Florida reported to the home government early in the year that "the inhabitants have openly declared against us by concealing themselves in the wilderness on the banks of the St. Johns as far as St. Marys, controlling that province."<sup>14</sup> Some of the confusion in the country was eliminated by the arrest of Daniel McGirth, William Cunningham, Stephen Mayfield and other disturbers of the peace through the cooperation of the British and Spanish governors.<sup>15</sup> When it was found that not all British subjects could, or would, leave Florida by the appointed time, Zespedes postponed the date of final departure until the 19th of July.<sup>16</sup> Even this extension of time was not entirely successful in handling the situation, for many of the English preferred to live among the Indians rather than to abandon the Floridas entirely.<sup>17</sup>

The management of the southern Indians offered a serious problem both to the Spanish and British authorities during the period in which the transfer of the Floridas was made. During the Revolution these Indians had become so dependent upon the English, both

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<sup>14</sup>Zespedes Zespedes to Galvez, April 28, 1785, with documents pertaining to the trial of Daniel McGirth, William Cunningham, Stephen Mayfield, and others, A. G. I., Audiencia de Santo Domingo, 86-5-21 (Bancroft Library transcripts). The final disposition of the prisoners is related in the following documents: Galvez to Zespedes, July 16, 1785, *ibid.*; Galvez to Ezpeleta, April 25, 1787, *ibid.*; Zespedes to Galvez, January 12, 1786, *ibid.*; Troncoso to Zespedes, November 7, 1785, *ibid.*; Zespedes to Troncoso, January 7, 1786, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup>The royal order authorizing the extension of the period of evacuation did not arrive at St. Augustine until July 13, 1785. Siebert, *Loyalists 1774-1785, I*, 175.

for articles of trade and for gifts, that British evacuation meant real disaster to them. Many Creeks and Cherokees asked to be taken with the English when they departed. Some even went so far as to request that they be supplied with ships.<sup>18</sup> British officials sought to discourage such an unwise procedure but at the same time they wished to retain the good-will of the Indians.<sup>19</sup> The presence of a Creek village near Nassau indicated that some Indians actually followed their English friends to New Providence.<sup>20</sup>

Commercial relations between the Florida Indians and the British never entirely ceased ; but the arrival of Lord Dunmore in the latter part of 1786 as governor of the Bahamas gave an added impetus to this contraband trade, because he was interested in the southern Indians both from a commercial and political standpoint. He looked upon the Floridas much in the same way that Dorchester and Simcoe regarded the territory between the Great Lakes and the Ohio. The Providence Island merchants, however, found that the chief obstacles to their participation in the Florida trade were not offered by the Spaniards and their commercial regulations, but by the opposition of the firm of Panton, Leslie and Company. Panton was on friendly terms with Alexander McGillivray, the famous chief of the Creeks, and by his support the company gained great prestige and profit throughout the Creek country. Through his mother, McGillivray had inherited the position of chief among the Tallapoosa Creeks and by

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<sup>18</sup>Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Britain*, IV, 119, 351; Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation, 1783-1784*, 240.

<sup>19</sup>Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report*, IV, 89.

<sup>20</sup>Mary Wilkinson Mount, "The Harbor of Romance", in *Tropic Magazine*, XI, 331. For location of Creek Village see George Burbank Shattuck (ed.), *The Bahama Islands* (New York, 1905), Plate XXVII.

his ability had succeeded in making himself the leader and spokesman for the nation.<sup>21</sup>

Although Alexander McGillivray held a commission as colonel in the British service during the Revolution and took an active part against the Americans, he did not hesitate to open correspondence with the Spanish authorities before peace had been signed by Spain and Great Britain. When he learned that the greater part of the Creek country had been ceded by England to the United States in the Treaty of Paris he began immediately to negotiate with the Spaniards.<sup>22</sup> Already the Americans were encroaching upon Creek hunting grounds and attempting to force the nation to cede to them large tracts of land. McGillivray realized that his people would need the protection and support of Spain in resisting the pressure on the Georgia frontier.

McGillivray's diplomacy was so successful that an Indian congress held at Pensacola from May 30 to June 1, 1784, was attended by Arturo O'Neil, the commandant of Pensacola, Intendant Navarro, and Miro, governor of Louisiana and West Florida. A treaty was signed in which the Creeks placed themselves under the protection of Spain in return for certain guarantees of aid and assistance in their troubles with any hostile nation. Miro appointed McGillivray commissary for the King of Spain in the Creek nation at a salary of fifty pesos per month. The Creek chief at this time at-

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<sup>21</sup>The best study of the life and career of McGillivray has been made by Arthur Preston Whitaker and published in the following articles: "Alexander McGillivray, 1783-1789", in the *North Historical Review*, V, 181-203; and "Alexander McGillivray, 1789-1793", *ibid.*, 289-309. Earlier sketches of McGillivray's life may be found in *American Museum*, VIII, 171-172; Schoolcraft, *Archives of Aboriginal Knowledge*, V, 281; Samuel G. Drake, *Aboriginal Races of North America* (Philadelphia, 1860), 385-387; Albert James Pickett, *History of Alabama* (Sheffield, 1896), 54, 75, 132, 230, 325, 344, 367, 369, 373, 382, 385-407, 411-414, 418, 429-432.

<sup>22</sup>Whitaker, "Alexander McGillivray, 1783-1789", in the *North Carolina Historical Review*, V, 185-186.



tempted to persuade the Spaniards to permit his friend Panton to establish a trading house at Pensacola. Although the request was not acceded to at once, permission was granted for the continuance of the trading post on the Apalachee. McGillivray clearly demonstrated that he wished not only to secure Spanish assistance for his nation but also planned to arrange that the Indian trade should be in the hands of men he could trust.<sup>23</sup>

Panton had better success with Governor Zespedes of East Florida than with Miro. He was able to assist the governor in the matter of goods for presents to the Indians, and, as a result of this favor, his firm was permitted to remain in East Florida after the English evacuation. The firm of Panton, Leslie and Company, aided in no small degree by the influence of McGillivray, was eventually granted a monopoly of the southern Indian trade by the Spanish government, and extended its operations to West Florida.<sup>24</sup>

Alexander McGillivray was the key to the whole southern Indian trade situation in the decade following the Revolution. The house of Panton owed its existence in West Florida to the prestige and influence of the Creek chief with the Spanish government. Writers dealing with the history of this period have frequently made the mistake of emphasizing McGil-

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 189-190; Jane M. Berry, "The Indian Policy of Spain in the Southwest, 1783-1795", in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, III, 463-464; Pickett, *History of Alabama*, 367-368; Caroline Mays Brevard, *A History of Florida* (No. 4, Publications of the Florida State Historical Society; Deland, 1924) I, 6-7; Charles Gayarre, *History of Louisiana*, (4 vols., New Orleans, 1903), III, 157-162; *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 16.

<sup>24</sup>Frederick J. Turner (ed.), "English Policy Toward America in 1790-1791", in the *American Historical Review*, VII, 707; *Report on Canadian* 1890, 153; Manuel Serrano y Sanz, *Espana y los Indios Cheroquis y Chactas en la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XVIII* (Sevilla, 1916), 24-25; Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty*, 66-68; J. F. H. Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province Territory and State* (Jackson, 1880), I, 132.

livray's dependence upon Panton. At times he borrowed small sums of money from the trader, at others he listened to his advice, but it should be remembered that Panton, Leslie and Company owed their fortune to McGillivray's patronage and assistance and that the latter acted with entire independence whenever it was to the interest of himself or his nation.<sup>25</sup>

As long as McGillivray remained satisfied in his connection with the Spanish government and with the service rendered by Panton, Leslie and Company, the Providence Island merchants would have difficulty in establishing themselves permanently in the Creek country. Nevertheless, Miller, Bonnamy and Company, with the approval of Governor Dunmore, made active preparations to compete with the house of Panton in the Florida Indian trade.<sup>26</sup> William A. Bowles, former officer of the Maryland Loyalists, was selected to establish a post among the Lower Creeks. Although he was only twenty-three years of age at this time, he had lived for many years among the Indians and was himself a Creek by adoption.<sup>27</sup>

Bowles set to work quietly to collect a sufficient quantity of stores and ammunition both to be used for trade and as gifts to the Indians. Rumors of what was going on eventually came to the ears of Panton, Leslie and their associates. Since Panton also traded with New Providence it was natural that his friends and business associates there should oppose the plans of his competitors and inform him what was taking place.

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<sup>25</sup>Pickett, Pickett, *History Alabama*, 387-388, 395-396; *American State Affairs*, I, 18.

<sup>26</sup>Voluntary declaration made by sundry of Bowles' banditti at St. Augustine, November 21, 1788, Florida and Louisiana Papers, Archivo Nacional, Havana, Cuba.

<sup>27</sup>Turner (ed.), "English Policy Toward America in 1790-1791", in the *American Historical Review*, VII, 727; [Benjamin Baynton], *Authentic Memoirs of William Bowles on 1791* 10-11, 21-22; Fairbanks, *History of Florida*,

When Bowles had collected enough supplies he made no attempt to ship them at once to the Florida coast. Instead he "most unexpectedly stepped on board a vessel and sailed for the continent. This mysterious conduct baffled all the schemes of his enemies in the Spanish interests and left them with vague and wild conjectures."<sup>28</sup> Upon his arrival in Florida Bowles made the necessary arrangements with the Lower Creek Indians for the establishment of a trading post among them. He learned that in his absence the Indians had made a treaty with the Spaniards permitting them to re-establish their old fort at St. Marks.<sup>29</sup> Bowles determined to undo the work of the Spaniards in this region and was successful in inducing a number of chiefs to return the silver medals they had received from his Catholic Majesty's officers.<sup>30</sup>

The Spanish occupation of St. Marks on the Apalachee threatened to interfere seriously with Bowles' plans since he had arranged with his associates before he left Nassau that the ship bearing his supplies should put in at the Bay of Apalachee. When the appointed day for the vessel's arrival approached, Bowles came down to St. Marks with a large force of Creeks. The expected boat from New Providence appeared in the offing true to schedule. Bowles then sent a message to the Spanish commandant of St. Marks with assurance of peaceful intentions, but warning him that the Indians would attack the fort if he made any attempt to interfere with the landing of the cargo. The pre-arranged signal was then given and an answer was made from the vessel. The ship immediately put into the bay, and discharged its cargo, which was loaded on pack horses brought for the purpose, and conveyed into

<sup>28</sup> *Authentic Memoirs of William Augustus Bowles*, 18-19.

<sup>29</sup> Perrin Perrin du Lac, *Voyage dans les deux Louisianes* (Paris, 1805), 462.

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the interior. The Spaniards prudently remained within the fort.<sup>31</sup>

Bowles had no difficulty in establishing his post among the Lower Creeks, but if the enterprise was to gain any great proportions it was necessary next to win the approval of Alexander McGillivray. Lord Dunmore with this purpose in view had given to Bowles a letter for the great Creek chief designed to win him back to British interests. The letter was accompanied by a beautiful silver mounted sword, a gift from the governor. From the town of Cusita, Bowles sent the letter and the sword to McGillivray by the hand of a Creek chief.<sup>32</sup>

Governor Dunmore's overtures came, by chance, at a very opportune time. During the year 1786 and the early part of 1787 McGillivray had received large subsidies in munitions from the Spaniards to aid his nation in carrying on a border warfare against the American frontiersmen.<sup>33</sup> Governor Miro, however, suggested to McGillivray in May, 1787, that he should make peace with the Americans, for he feared that an open war might break out between the United States and the Creeks which would involve his own government.<sup>34</sup> As the year wore on, Miro became so insistent upon the point that the chief feared he was about to lose all Spanish support in his attempts to check American encroachments upon Creek lands. A letter written by Miro in December seemed to confirm McGillivray's suspicions, for the governor again urged

<sup>31</sup> *Memoirs of William Augustus Bowles*, 19.

<sup>32</sup> Leclerc Leclerc Milfort, *Memoire ou coup d'oeil rapide sur mes differens voyages et mon sejour dans la Creek* (Paris, 1802), 118.

<sup>33</sup> Whitaker, "Alexander McGillivray, 1783-1789", in the *North Carolina Historical Review*, V, 196-198.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 198-199; Pickett, *History of Alabama*, 391. For information concerning the relations between the United States and the Creek nation consult *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 15-24.

him to come to some peaceful settlement with the Americans. This advice was not agreeable to the Talapoosa chief, who well knew the course he wished to follow. The northern Indians had already sent delegates to him.<sup>35</sup> A confederation composed of both northern and southern Indians under McGillivray's leadership seemed quite within the range of possibility<sup>36</sup>, but unfavorable peace with the Americans, and that seemed the only possible kind, would ruin his plans.

McGillivray had signed a treaty with Spain because he needed the guns and the ammunition she could give him. If the Spaniards cut off the Creek subsidy and, at the same time, attempted to dictate the policies he should follow, they were worse than useless to him. So far as the Creeks were concerned, "these people who are saddling us," as McGillivray designated the Spaniards, might better be out of Florida than in it.<sup>37</sup> The leader of the Creek nation, then at the height of his power, had no intention of taking orders from a handful of Spaniards when he could not profit by so doing. If worst came to worst, it was not impossible to rid Florida entirely of Spanish domination. At any rate, His Catholic Majesty's officers could be shown the advisability of an unquestioning support of McGillivray's nation.

The Creek chief was a master of intrigue. The jealousies and hostilities that existed between his neighbors were utilized by him for the benefit of his nation. Americans, Spaniards, British, and Indians were played one against the other when occasion re-

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<sup>35</sup>Whitaker, Whitaker, "Alexander McGillivray, 1783-1789", in the *North Historical Review*, V, 198-199.

<sup>36</sup>*State Papers, Indian Affairs*, I, 16; *American Museum*, III, 592.

<sup>37</sup>Whitaker, *Whitaker* 198.

quired.<sup>38</sup> Circumstances in 1788 favored McGillivray. In addition to the overtures from Lord Dunmore through Bowles, others were sent to him by western Americans.<sup>39</sup> The Spaniards soon began to hear alarming rumors. A letter fell into their hands in February which added to their uneasiness. In it one American officer wrote to another that a project was "under way on the Tenesi River to form an expedition to go down the Ohio and attack" the province of Louisiana.<sup>40</sup>

Governor Zéspedes, on March 24, informed Valdez that he feared McGillivray might join with British adventurers and perhaps with American frontiersmen to attack the Spaniards in Florida and Louisiana.<sup>41</sup> Trouble was certainly brewing on the Florida frontier for the Spaniards. Two, Americans from Cumberland arrived about this time at the plantation of McGillivray. They had been sent in an attempt to bring about a cessation of hostilities on the Tennessee frontier.<sup>42</sup> McGillivray wrote to the Spanish commandant at Pensacola that the Cumberland settlers were willing to place themselves under the protection of Spain in order to secure immunity from Creek attacks.

Details of the conference between McGillivray and the American delegates may never be known, but subsequent events indicated that the Creek chief did not impress them as being a strong Spanish partisan. The Cumberland people within a few weeks after the return of their emissaries completely changed their method of approach to McGillivray. A letter by James

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<sup>38</sup>Pickett, *Pickett's History of Alabama*, 396.

<sup>39</sup> <sup>39</sup>*American State Indian* I, 26, 29.

<sup>40</sup>Miró Miro to Perez, February 15, 1788, MS. Bancroft Library.

<sup>41</sup>Whitaker, "Alexander McGillivray, 1783-1789", in *North Carolina Historical Review*, V, 201.

<sup>42</sup>John Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1891), 245; Bemis, *Pinckney's Treaty*, 161; James Phelan, *History of Tennessee* (Boston and New York, 1889), 167.

Robertson written on October 3, indicated in a manner not too carefully veiled that the Americans were willing to "open their eyes to their real interests", even if that interest resulted from a British occupation of Louisiana.<sup>43</sup> In the meantime, McGillivray's fears concerning the loss of the Spanish subsidies were confirmed. He went down to Pensacola in May at Lieutenant-governor O'Neil's invitation and there he learned that the Spanish government would furnish the Creeks with no more arms or ammunition until he had made a real effort to negotiate peace with the Americans.

McGillivray left Pensacola apparently very displeased with the Spaniards. O'Neil, like Zespedes, was now suspicious of him. He warned Governor Miro by a letter dated June 4, that the Talapoosa chief might join with the British and Americans in an attack upon the Spaniards of Florida and Louisiana. In the latter part of June, McGillivray decided to visit Bowles at the Lower Creek towns. The Creek chief and the young adventurer soon came to a friendly understanding. Bowles proposed to secure from New Providence supplies and ammunition for the Creek nation and McGillivray accepted the offer.<sup>44</sup> Of this the latter made no secret; on the contrary he informed Governor Miro by letter almost as soon as he returned to his home on the Coosa. The other matters discussed at the conference are more difficult to determine, but subsequent events indicate that Bowles and McGillivray planned to cooperate in enterprises that threatened Spanish safety in Florida. The wily Creek chief apparently persuaded Bowles to participate in his plans. At that time he evidently considered the young Maryland

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<sup>43</sup>"The Correspondence of General James Robertson", in the *American History Magazine*, I, 81-86; Haywood, *Civil and Political History of Tennessee*, 248.

<sup>44</sup>Pickett, Pickett, *History of* 386.

Loyalist an able military leader who might be of service to him.<sup>45</sup>

There can be little doubt that the meeting with McGillivray was an important event in Bowles's life. The basis of the great Tallapoosa chief's diplomacy was the belief that his nation was free and independent and should be so treated both by Spain and the United States. At the time of his meeting with Bowles he was planning to form between the United States and the Spanish possessions an Indian confederation, powerful enough to hold its own against its white neighbors.<sup>46</sup> It is significant that Bowles from the time of this meeting until the end of his life devoted himself to the project of creating an autonomous Indian state in Florida and the "old southwest".

Bowles promptly returned to Nassau and reported on the plans discussed in his conference with McGillivray. With the assurance of the Creek chief's favor, the firm of Miller, Bonnamy and Company with the aid of Governor Dunmore, enlisted and outfitted men for a filibustering expedition into Florida. The first object of this invasion was to capture and destroy the trading posts of Panton, Leslie and Company, thereby ruining them financially and breaking their monopoly of the southern Indian trade.<sup>47</sup> If successful in this, the Florida Indians were to be aroused against the Spaniards and attacks were to be made upon the Spanish posts. In August when the expedition was being outfitted in New Providence, McGillivray wrote to Miro

<sup>45</sup> on *Canadian Archives*, 1890, 154-155.

<sup>46</sup> *Papers, Affairs*, I, 16. Richard Winn wrote to the Secretary of War on December 8, 1788: "I have every reason to believe that McGillivray is trying to unite the two nations, the Creeks and Cherokees." *Ibid*, 30. Also see *State Records of North Carolina*, XXI, 509, 569-570.

<sup>47</sup>Voluntary declaration made by sundry of Bowles' banditti at St. Augustine, November 21, 1788, Florida and Louisiana Papers, Archivo Nacional, Havana.



a letter in which he stated his grievances against Spain and resigned his commission as Spanish agent for the Creek nation.<sup>48</sup>

The Spaniards were genuinely alarmed. A rumor was spread that McGillivray's agents were enlisting men for military purposes. The officials of West Florida began to arrest all English traders who aroused the slightest suspicion. Some of McGillivray's men escaped by flight. The chief himself gave an account to Panton of the occurrence: "I had written you, during the great hubbub in Pensacola . . . I gave, then, a sketch of my idea of the times. The sudden flight of Curnells and Walker ought not to surprise you. The cowardice of the former is proverbial and Walker fled, being my servant. When Linder and the others were taken up, a little Irishman, living at Tensaw, was in Pensacola. He became frightened, ran out to Walker and informed him that the governor, in very severe terms, threatened to seize him, understanding that he was recruiting men for my service."<sup>49</sup> McGillivray also made quite clear at this time that the interests of the Creek nation were of more importance to him than the welfare of Panton, Leslie and Company. "I now repeat to you," he wrote to Panton, "what I told you more than twelve months ago, when we were talking upon the subject of the trade . . . As my attention was wholly occupied about my people, it could not be in my power to be of any essential service to your business."<sup>50</sup>

In the meantime, preparations at Nassau for the Florida expedition had been completed and Bowles chosen as its commander. On the 20th of September, the very day that the first shipload of Bowles's men

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<sup>48</sup>Whitaker, "Alexander McGillivray, 1783-1789", in the *North Carolina Historical Review*, V, 200.

<sup>49</sup>Pickett, Pickett, *History of Alabama*, 384.

<sup>50</sup> 387-388.

sailed from New Providence, McGillivray wrote to Miro a letter threatening in tone and openly defiant; but without knowing it, he had accomplished his purpose before the letter was written. Miro had already written on September 16th to the captain-general of Cuba recommending a renewal to the Creek nation of the Spanish subsidy in arms and munitions. Upon receipt of Miro's letter, Ezpeleta, the captain-general, hastened to give the proposed authorization, for already alarming reports were coming from Florida, Louisiana and the American West. Bowles in the meantime landed with two shiploads of men, arms, and munitions at Indian River on the east coast of Florida and began a very daring march across the peninsula.<sup>51</sup>

He was unsuccessful in attaining his objectives because the Spaniards and Pantón's men were forewarned and the peninsula Indians refused to give him the expected assistance. His own force was too small to attack any strongly fortified place and he was further handicapped by shortage of food and desertions among his own men. When Bowles failed to capture Pantón's Indian store on the St. Johns River he marched entirely across the peninsula of Florida to the Bay of Apalachee where Bonnamy planned to meet him with ships

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<sup>51</sup>The best account of Bowles' filibustering expedition into Florida is to be found in the "Voluntary declaration made by sundry of Bowles' banditti at St. Augustine, November 21, 1788", Florida and Louisiana Papers, Archivo Nacional, Havana. The manuscript is published in full at the end of this article. Fuller stated that Bowles "in 1789, made an abortive attempt to capture Florida from the Spaniards." See *Purchase of Florida*, 51. The men who served as captains under Bowles apparently were Robins, Wellbanks, and Dalton. Schoolcraft, *Archives of Aboriginal Knowledge*, V, 275-276. Other information concerning Bowles's expedition may be found in the following: Valdez to the Captain-General of Florida, April 21, 1789, A. G. I., Papeles de Cuba, legajo 1431 (Bancroft Library transcript); Las Casas to Floridablanca, April 21, 1792, No. 18, legajo 9, A. G. I., Estado de Santo Domingo (Bancroft Library transcript); Fairbanks, *History of Florida*, 246-247.

and reinforcements. Here Fort St. Marks was found to be too well prepared for defense to attack. Even Pantón's Apalachee post had been fortified.<sup>52</sup> Although the expedition was unsuccessful thus far, the danger for the Spaniards had by no means passed. Within the Indian country there were many Englishmen and British mix-bloods who could be counted upon to support the Providence Islanders, while large numbers of the Indians themselves preferred their old British friends to the new Spanish occupants of Florida.<sup>53</sup> If in addition to the factors mentioned, McGillivray should put his warriors into the field against the Spaniards, the British faction would be again in possession of Florida.

Lord Dorchester, governor of Canada, reported to his government in October, 1788, that the Kentuckians were planning to attack Louisiana and open the Mississippi to western commerce.<sup>54</sup> Colonel James Connolly, a British agent who had formerly served under Lord Dunmore, at this time left Detroit for Kentucky. There he attempted to interest the western Americans in a plan to drive the Spaniards from the Mississippi valley. Wilkinson reported that Connolly informed him that a British fleet would come up to New Orleans from the Gulf while a force of ten thousand men would invade Louisiana from the American west. Connolly was unsuccessful in Kentucky and his reports may have been exaggerated by Wilkinson, but the evidence seems to indicate that a conspiracy was in progress of forma-

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<sup>52</sup>Voluntary declaration made by sundry of Bowles' banditti at St. Augustine, November 21, 1788, Florida and Louisiana Papers, Archivo Nacional, Havana; "Statement of William Cunningham, April 2, 1792", in the *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, IX, 183.

<sup>53</sup>*Papers, Public Lands*, I, 315.

<sup>54</sup>Justin Winsor, *Westward Movement* (Boston and New York, 1897), 367, 368; *Report on Canadian Archives*, 1890, 99.

tion similar to and much more dangerous for Spain than the Blount conspiracy eight years later.<sup>55</sup>

The crafty McGillivray now followed a policy of delay. He may have directly or indirectly been the cause of Bowles' expedition but the Spaniards could not prove it. The nature of his relations with Bowles was well concealed. He committed no open act of hostility against the Spaniards but there can be no doubt that he caused them much anxiety. Before he found it necessary to take any open measures against Spain, Governor Miro was able to send him official notice in December that the subsidy to the Creek nation would again be granted. The crisis had passed, and the shrewd chief of the Creeks had won. The Spaniards had been quietly but effectively coerced into compliance with his wishes. The Creek diplomat replied to Governor Miro's letter that he found the captain general's orders in regard to the renewal of the subsidy to be entirely satisfactory, and suavely assured him that he would exert himself to re-establish harmonious relations between his nation and Spain. He then informed the governor that he would expect the Spanish government to furnish him with 1200 guns, 6000 pounds of powder, and other munitions and goods not later than the 20th of the following April.<sup>56</sup>

McGillivray's power was now at its highest peak, and he was treated with the greatest respect by the Spaniards. When he came to St. Augustine he was received as a highly honored guest. An American who chanced to be in that town described the occasion as follows: "I have had the satisfaction of conversing with the famous Alexander McGillivray, whose name

<sup>55</sup> Winsor, Winsor, *op.cit.*, 368; J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee* (Charleston, 1853), 534; James H. Perkins, *Annals of the West* (Published by James R. Albach; Pittsburgh, 1858), 492-493.

<sup>56</sup> Whitaker, "Alexander McGillivray, 1783-1789", in the *North Carolina Review*, V, 200-201.

you have so often seen in our public prints-this interview has fully convinced me, that he really is the man, our papers sometimes represent him to be, and his neighbors the Georgians, have much to fear from his penetrating genius and great address. The attention paid him by the Spaniards, seems to have something more than politeness in view-they tell me he holds a general's commission under the crown of Spain ; this I have reason to believe, as I have seen him in the Spanish uniform at the governor's table, and receive the military honors of the garrison. This is a policy for which they are not to blame, as M'Gillivray's connections, from his infancy up to this day, with the different Indian nations in the southern part of America, have established him the supreme legislator over their countries. The Spaniards but indifferently established in this quarter and sensible to his power, dread his consequence."<sup>57</sup>

McGillivray's policy of making the Spaniards useful to him was clearly revealed in 1789 when he was preparing to negotiate with the Americans at Rock Landing. He wrote to Panton on August 10th assuring him that he would conclude no agreement detrimental to the interests of Spain. "But at the same time," he warned, "I must insist upon an equal resolution in our friends, the Spaniards, to afford us their decided support by every means in their power, and not under any pretences to repeat their conduct of last summer, in the very moment of vigorous exertion to refuse a further aid, and incense and menace us to make peace, right or wrong with the Americans, which, if we had done at the time, we should have been driven into hostility with Spain before this day."<sup>58</sup> In reference to the subsidy he had extorted from the Spaniards

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*American Museum*, V, 312.

<sup>58</sup>Pickett, *Pickett's History of Alabama* 391.

he wrote : "The ammunition and arms given us by the King, we have not yet been able to fetch away. It is a good store in hand, to make ourselves firm in treating with the Americans." <sup>59</sup>

McGillivray, in addition to his successful Spanish diplomacy, had refused to yield to the demands of the Americans for a settlement of the border troubles. By permitting his warriors to make intermittent raids along the frontier, and by aiding the Cherokees, he had discouraged any rapid encroachment upon Creek lands. <sup>60</sup> At the same time he did not allow the fighting to develop into a general war with the United States which only could have brought disaster upon his people. The Creek nation under McGillivray's skillful guidance continued, in 1789, to hold the balance of power in the southeast.

LAWRENCE KINNAIRD

#### A BRITISH INVASION OF FLORIDA IN 1788

Substance of a voluntary declaration made by sundry of Bowles' Banditti at St. Augustine 21 Novr. 1788 and which has since been confirmed by them and the others now prisoners upon oath-viz.- <sup>61</sup>

That in Septr. last in New Providence, they were enlisted for an Expedition then fitting out in two vessels from New Providence for the coast of East Florida by and at the Expense of the Honorable John Miller Esqr. a member of the Council and of His Copartner Mr. Proomfield Bonnamy ; ! which Expedition they were

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<sup>60</sup> 388; John Clement Fitzpatrick (e d .), *Diaries of George Washington*, (4 v o l s ., New York, 1 9 2 5), IV, 81.

<sup>61</sup>Florida and Louisiana Papers, Archivo Nacional, Havana, Cuba. A transcript of this document was secured through the courtesy of Sr. Carlos M. Trelles who generously procured for me from the archives of Cuba copies of certain important manuscripts pertaining to the history of Florida. L. K.

given to understand, and then had and since have strong reasons to believe, and they do believe, was promoted, abetted, assisted, & Countenanced, tho not publickly, by His Excellency the Rt. Hnble. John Earl of Dunmore Governor of the Bahamas ; and was to be conducted under the Command of a Mr. W. A. Bowles, a Half pay officer in the British service and formerly of the Corps of the Maryland Loyalists.-

That- the said declarants were not made fully acquainted with the object and intent of the said Expedition, but in General understood that they were to be Landed on the Coast of East Florida where they would be joined by Indians and provided with Horses ; and that great gain and Emolument might be expected from the Enterprize, in negroes, Goods, Horses and other moveables-which it was proposed to Capture & make seizure of in Georgia and Florida-and that in the meantime they might rest easy and satisfied in mind that the Expedition would be conducted by officers duely and regularly coimmissioned by Governmt. and in the service thereof. That they should receive paid at the rate of 8 Drs. pr month p man.-except such as preferred taking a chance of the success of the expedition, who in lieu of pay should be entitled to a share of prize money, from the proceeds of the captured property-and that for the transportation thereof to the Bahamas vessels would be furnished by the said messrs. Millar Bonnamy & Co. to cruise off the coast of Florida or that in the Harbour of Indian River or some other of the Southern inlets.-

That a Rendezvous house was opened publicly at Nassau for entering men & the expense of which was payed by the said Millar Bonnamy & Co.

That some sailors deserted from the ship Sherborn Castle of Liverpool and were enlisted by Bowles ; but were reclaimed and demanded by Capt. Preston commander of the Ship who could not obtain them, who

was assured that Lord Dunmore would order a Guard of Soldiers to notify the House of rendezvous and the enlisted men if any attempt should be made to recover the said sailors by force.-

That two criminals, Jno. Dallon & Jno. Keaton were taken out of Jail by order of Lord Dunmore and given as recruits to Bowles and one Hamilton a Banished Convict from England was by Lord Dunmore's authority obliged also to enlist with Bowles who received provision for the said men out of the Kings Stores at Nassau by order of Lord Dunmore.

That frequent representations were made to Lord Dunmore by Henry G. Anton Esqr. of Nassau, setting forth that Divers persons considerably indebted to him had enlisted with Bowles and praying his Lordship that said Debtors might not be permitted to leave the Island or to be carried off without payment of their Debts but all without effect.-

That, during the enlistment and other preparations Millar, Bowles and others of the principal associates and partizans of the Enterprize were apparently very intimate and friendly with Lord Dunmore and were frequently entertained at his Lordship's Table from which circumstances and from said intimacy and friendships between the said L. Dunmore and the promoters, commanders, assistants, and partizans of the Sd. expedition, the greatest encouragement and countenance was given to it-The men being generally persuaded and believing that it was undertaken under the authority and protection of Government.-The Governor giving every private Support and countenance to it and a member of the King's Council being the Person ostensibly most interested in and defraying the expence of the outfit.

That the Schr. with the first division of about 25 men, armed and furnished with a quantity of Blunderbusses, Wallpieces, musquets, Pistols ; Highland Broad



Swords, Horsemens Swords, Cutlass, Ammunition & Sailed about 20th. Septr. and waited 12 days at the Berry Islands, then Sailed for Indian River & E. Florida where they arrived after three days passage, and was next day there joined by the other vessels Carrying two Brass Cannons Swivells & small arms in which came Bowls, Bonnamy and a Mr. Richmond, Millar's Clerk-with the 2d. division of about 23 men-38 quarter Barrils Gunpowder a Large proportion of Ball a Drum on which the King's arms was painted and a Silken Standard or Ensign belonging to the British army and marked as for the fourth Regiment.-That on Landing and examining the arms and . . . with which the men were furnished, they regularly mounted guard and Discipline, as in the military, was established ; Bowls taking the title of Col. Commander.-

That one of the Schooners returned to Nassau in which went Bonnamy by whom Bowles wrote a Letter to L. Dunmore, advising Him of their Last arrival and among other things informing his L. Ship that He (Bowles) had received information that a Detachmt. from the Garrison at St. Augustine was Stationed at Panton Leslie & Cos Store on St. Johns, which it would be necessary to attack and reduce before he could execute their design on P. L. & Cos Store that Capt. Louis of the Schooner had an opportunity of seeing the Copy of Said Letter and Communicated the contents to John Lovern one of the Declarants to whom Louis expressed himself to be very well pleased therewith as he now certainly perceived the Expedition was an affair of Government.-

That L. Dunmore the Governor was warmly interested in the success of it and that it would be well and properly protected and supported.-

That from conversations that passed in the Evenings over the pipes between Bowles and Bonnamy at Indian River and as on other occasions at which divers

of these Declarers were present, it plainly now appeared that the first and primary object of the Expedition was to plunder burn and destroy the said Indian Store of Panton Leslie & Co. on the River St. Johns ; Bowles declaring publicly that he was also determined to put to Death Mr. Hambly the Store Keeper against whom he professed Great Enmity-and the General Tenor of the conversation at the officers mess, between Bowles, Bonnamy and the rest, usually run upon the situation and affairs of the said Panton Leslie & Co. being full of invective, against that House, which they accused of pride and arrogance &c but pleased themselves now in the Hopes that-He (Bowles) would very shortly be able to crush them and humble them perfectly; establishing Millar and Bonnamy in the Indian trade ; which was very easy for him to do as Alech M'Gillivray, he frequently declared, had ceded to him (Bowles), all the authority and influence he possessed among the creek Indians. -

It now also appeared and was declared, that Mr. Bonnamy return to Nassau was with an intention, of putting himself on board of a Schooner fitting out there, with 14 or 16 pieces of cannon, men &c in proportion which the said Millar Bonnamy & Co. had hired from George Johnston of Nassau for the purpose of Going down to St. Marks appalachy, and there after reducing the detachment of Spanish soldiers from the Garrison of Pensacola, to plunder, burn and destroy the Indian Stores of the Said Panton Leslie & Co. at that place-where it was farther intended and expected, Bowles would arrive in time to join & support Bonnamy by marching across the country from St. John's River after having effected the destruction of the Indian Store and detach. posted there as aforesaid.-

That Bowles in his march would collect and Emboldy about 1000 or 1500 Indian warriors for their

better support being now, as he persuaded his followers, effectually King & Commander in Chief of the Creek Nation by virtue of Mr. M'Gillivrays Cession to him of that power and dignity-and that accordingly he would reward His followers with grants of Land in the Creek Nation where they could procure negroes easily out of Georgia by plunder and soon be comfortably and Happily Settled and established.-

That from the inlett of Indian River the party proceeded in one of the Schooners along the Beach up to the Rivers to an old Sugar Work, where they found waiting their arrival a party of 15 or 16 Indians, 3 White men 2 negroes and upward of 50 horses-on 28th Octr. decamped from the Sugar Work and began their march for the St. Johns Indian Store carrying 4 swivel guns, ammuniton &c on pack horses and every man furnished with 12 Rounds of Musquet cartridges.

That they were very Short of provisions but flattered by Bowles that they would be very shortly amply supply'd with provisions, Blankets and all other Necessarys from the plunder of the said Indian Store-On the 1st of novr. reached an Indian village where they obtained a little corn and some pompkins-on the 5th came to another little village on the eastern Bank of the river where they again obtained by purchase another very scanty supply of Corn which Mr. Richmond (Millar's Clerk) paid the Indians for-and begun without delay to [ferry] over the swivell guns, arms, ammuniton & Baggage in Cow Hides and one Small canoe - and swam the Horses, which being accomplished they encamped on the West Bank of the River -There they were visited by some Indians, who informed Mr. Bowles, that, if he persisted in his march to, and design upon the Indians Stores he would certainly fall in with a party of american woodmen supported by a Troop of Spanish Light Horse who were to waylay and intercept him, having got intelligence

of his design upon the said Store-At this news Bowles was greatly disconcerted and appeared in manifest consternation.-

That the Indians refusing to supply more provisions they eat up two horses that were drowned in the River. Bowles in consequence of the above intelligence and advice of the Indians now Changed his Rout and marched towards Latchua<sup>62</sup> where they arrived on the 12th. instd. subsisting during the march on palmetto Berrys acorns and other wild fruits. That they were contrary to expectations very coldly received by the Latchua Indians and with difficulty obtained a small quantity of pease.--That here Bowles learned his intelligence of being waylaid &c was a fiction and contrivance of the Indians to divert him from his design on the Indian Store & now proposed resuming his first plan & march back to plunder & destroy it and burn the Houses, telling his men that the distance was only forty miles and that the march would be easy.-

But how the declarants (for various reasons, such as an abhorrence of such wicked actions, which they were not till lately acquainted were to make a part of the object of this expedition, and finding them selves also deceived in Bowles promises of support protection and assistance from the Indians) determined to desert him and having got a negroe to put them on the path they came away in the night an on their arrival at said Indian Store,-there surrendered themselves to the Spanish Soldiers Stationed at that place. dated St. Augn. 21 Novr. 1788.

**HUGH McDONALD,**                      **JOHN LOVERN,**  
**MOSES DUIR,**                      **WM. MAIBEN,**                      **WM. LYMMERY.**

<sup>62</sup>Alachua Alachua or Cuscowilla was the chief village of the Alachua group of Seminoles. Swanton, *Early History of the Creek Indians*, 399-400. For a description of the village and its location consult William Bartram, *Travels* (London, 1792), 190-191.

(The next paper in this series, *Bowles versus McGillivray, 1789-1791*, will appear in an early issue of the QUARTERLY)