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James Innerarity



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THE FORBES PURCHASE

A letter from James Innerarity to William Simpson, partners of John Forbes and Company

Pensacola 24th September 1804

My Dear Simpson,

In order to give you a perfect knowledge of my transactions with the Chiefs of the Lower Creeks & Semanolies at Appalachicola respecting the grant of land made by them to us in that district, I now sit down to give you a detail of the proceedings.

When I left this place it was impossible for me to imagine after the Solemn Confirmation of the Grant before the Governor, that any difficulty could have arisen in putting me in possession; much less could I expect that the whole business was to be done anew: -therefore on my arrival at Prospect Bluff (Achack-wheithlee) agreeable to the desire of the Chiefs, who had come to Pensacola, I sent off two of the Indians, who accompanied me round, to inform them of my being there and inviting them to come & see me. I waited in patient expectation of their arrival upwards of twenty days.

Tom Perryman who had been the steadiest promoter of the Grant, arrived first, & from him I learnt that great murmurs had taken place respecting it, arising principally as he said, from the opposition which Coll. Hawkins had shown it; he having en-

Note—This letter is in continuation of the series of documents, survivals of the records of Panton, Leslie & Co. and its successor John Forbes & Co., preserved by the family of John Innerarity, last surviving partner of the latter firm, the publication of which was begun in a late issue of the QUARTERLY. They are in the possession of Mrs. John W. Greenslade, of Washington, D. C., who has transcribed them. This series will be continued in the following issues.

deavored to possess the Indians with the belief, that our Sole intention was to settle the Country, with a set of vagabonds from Georgia & South Carolina who would make continual incroachments on the Indians, & would soon Complete their ruin. I saw that Perryman was himself staggered by these insinuations, & therefore repeated my assurances to him that our intentions were to settle the land principally with people from the Bahamas, & from the other English, Spanish & French Colonies, but of whatever nation they might be, none but good men should be admitted-with this he was satisfied.

A day or two after, Semothly, the Chief Speaker of the Semanolies, Kinhagee King of Mickasucky, & John Kennaird arrived. The first & last of these had opposed the business at a former meeting, & as neither of the three had attended at the meeting, where the Grant was made I was somewhat apprehensive that their intentions might not now be over friendly, but did not at first suspect that they would have endeavoured, as they did two days after, when the Talks were opened, to upset the whole affair.

I immediately however saw that the Consequence of Perryman & the other Chiefs, who had principally been instrumental in granting the land, was reduced to nearly nothing on the arrival of these men, who I soon found were determined to cut me off with a very small share of what the others had granted, & even that entirely worthless.

Jack Kennaird was my enemy, from the most powerful of motives, Self Interest, as he had enjoyed a very extensive & most profitable Trade, since the removal of our Stores at St. Marks, which their reestablishment must much diminish-and Semothly, altho' the Chief Man, being a poor one was dependent upon him [illegible] Perryman was the first who informed me of

their intentions at which I was much surprised as you may imagine. I told him that I would not even hear of the proposal they were going to make me, but would reimbarck the few things I had landed, & would again leave them to their misery, & desired him to think with what Silly faces he, & the other Chiefs must shew themselves, if they allowed themselves to be treated like children, & dictated to, by two or three other men. By such like Talks I succeeded in infusing some little Spirit into him & the heads of his party, & next day at the Talk, the Chiefs held among themselves, altho they were severely handled by Semothly's gang, they prevailed so far as to have the boundary they first intended to prescribe to me extended up the river to Estifanulga (since named by me Panton's Cliffs) from thence to run straight to Meally's crossing place on Occalagany & thence to Wakhulla (the river where the old Store stood)-When Perryman in the evening returned from this Talk, he told me in private their resolution & seemed to plume himself on what he had effected-but I told him that would not do for me, that the boundaries must run as Specified in the Grant; or all must be annulled at once,-and moreover that unless these boundaries were Confirmed, our *friendship* was at an end,-at this he appeared much disconcerted & downcast, told me that he had talked & used every endeavor to have them Confirmed, but in vain & he could do no more.

Next day-Altho' some of the distant Chiefs had not arrived, they determined on holding the Talks & after breakfast I was called on to deliver what I had to say-After recapitulating the different Talks that had been held on the Subject, & mentioning the grant that had been made in Consequence I was proceeding to mark out on the ground its boundaries.-When I was stopped authoritatively by Semothlee the Speaker, who

told me he would allow no marking, that he knew what I was going to say,-that the land that these other Chiefs had granted was too much, & they had exceeded their authority in giving it up, that himself who was the Speaker & a number of other principal men had not been at the Talks at which it was granted, & they were determined against it, that nevertheless as they were willing to make compensation to the House for their debts & robberies, they would now cede to them the land from Estifanulga, (Panton's Cliffs) to John Meally's Crossing place on the Occalagany & thence to the head of Wakhulla leaving out Jno. & Wm. Kennaird's plantations at the latter place, - I objected to this & insisted on the first described limits & after some more Talk they agreed to extend the boundary on the river (Appalachicola) to five miles above Estifanulga, but would not alter their former determination of making it cross Occulagany at Jno Meally's path.-And as I insisted on Burgess's Crossing place, being the boundary on the river Occalagany, & told them to Consult again respecting it, we separated for the moment & went to dinner.-Their determination not to alter the bounds they now laid down appeared so fixed, that I began to ruminate on the propriety of accepting them. Kinnaird's party had in the course of the debate given me plainly to understand that if I did not like their terms, I was at liberty to remove, & had even expressed a wish for my going, so that I saw there was no chance of ever succeeding, if I rejected their offer at present.

The probability there was of the Americans getting possession of the Country, an event which would put us entirely in their power & would most likely operate against our ever obtaining any Compensation, with other similar reflections, had nearly determined me.-

Fortunately while these ideas occupied me, the

Little Prince, an old friend of the house arrived, to whom having explained the manner in which I was treated by the Chiefs then assembled,-he called them together & harangued them for an hour or two. - I was not present, but the effects of his interference were soon apparent, for towards evening I was advised that they had receded from their former determination so far as to grant me a further extension of limits, to which proposal, when the Chiefs were assembled next morning, I thought it most prudent to accede, & the boundaries were accordingly now finally fixed as follows. Vizt - Beginning at the mouth of Appalachicola, running up the same to five miles above Estifanulgia (Panton's Cliffs) thence striking off, & running to where Thompson's path crosses Little River, thence along said path to where it crosses Occalagany (about six or eight miles below where Burgess's path crosses it) & thence in a straight line towards the head of Wakhulla, stopping at one mile from the river, thence round John & Wm Kennaird's plantations & then into the river at one mile distance below them ; & down the same to the Seat, with all the Islands on the coast.- This principal matter being settled, I proceeded to inform them of the rules which I intended to establish in trading with them. - I made the prices of our Goods as moderate as possible, but at same time informed them that I would give Credit to no one whatever.-with everything they were very well pleased and particularly with the last arrangement, which however some of them. wanted afterwards to break thro; but were refused-

Judging it proper to keep the original Grant of the land in my possession, I caused them next day to sign a paper confirming it, & putting me in possession of same, specifying & excepting only the difference that was now made in the northern boundary-And

this paper was signed by Hopoie Hache (Semothly) the Chief Speaker of the Seminoles, the Little Prince, Tom Perryman, the Fire Warrior Tuskiniah Chatoackchipale for the Tame King and twenty nine other chiefs and head Warriors-

The same evening after the Talks were over I was called out to the camp of the Little Prince where I found himself, Semothly, Kinhagee & Jno Kennaird assembled-The Little Prince began by telling me-That at a meeting called at the Tuckabatches by Cdl. Hawkins, where he was present & sitting alongside of the Coll. the latter had inveighed bitterly against the Semanoles telling them that they had completed the ruin of their nation by giving up this land, that Mr. Jno Forbes had gone to Charleston to Baltimore & Philadelphia, & had wrote to Georgia in order to engage all the vagabond Americans he could find to come & settle on it-that they would find it would soon be peopled by their enemies.-that the Americans would undoubtedly have possession of it shortly as they (the U. S.) who were a powerful nation intended to move off the Spaniards, who were but a handful of people, with many other things to the same purpose, & he required me to explain to him how these things were. I told him in answer that I did not think it likely that the Americans would go to war with the Spaniards, who far from being but a handful of people were more powerful than themselves, but that if they should by whatever means get possession of this Country, still the lands being given to us by the Indians would be our property, it could not be taken from us, & they might depend on Mr John Forbes' promise as well as my own, that none but good people should be permitted to come upon it.-that we intended to settle it with Englishmen from Providence (whom they were very desirous of seeing) with Frenchmen or Spaniards, & no people

who were their enemies should be allowed to stay on it.-That if Coll. Hawkins or any one else had asserted that Mr John Forbes had either gone or written to Charleston or Georgia for vagabond Americans to settle it, it was neither more nor less than a downright falsehood-

That Mr John Forbes had gone to the Northward (not to Charleston) with the Sole view of getting paid for our Chactaw debts, as that Nation had given up to the Americans a piece of land for the purpose of paying them, as they all knew, & that it was impossible that he should have engaged people of any description to come & settle on that land, since he did not as yet even know of its being given up-We had more talk to the same purpose, & then separated for the night, very well satisfied with each other.-

Two days afterwards the Chiefs separated, & I went with one headman & an Indian to examine & mark the principal Corners of the Northern boundary, as far as Occalagany, which business occupied me for ten days - I should have gone on to the Wakhulla, but as I had already spent much more time than I at first Calculated on, & knew the serious business in which you were engaged & that my presence might be needful here, I returned little imagining that my speed would be the occasion of a further loss which I hope however, will be trifling, by the Circumstance of the Schooner in which I was embarked, being Cast away on this Coast -

This is a succinct detail of what I have done. If I have not succeeded to the very utmost of my desires I flatter myself that Circumstanced as I was, with every one against me & no one to raise his voice in my favour, as much has been effected as was possible without putting the whole affair in imminent hazard of never being accomplished-

(retained copy, unsigned)