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THE CONTENTION OVER THE
SUPERINTENDECIA OF THE FLORIDAS

By D. C. CORBITT

Louisiana was granted the privilege of trading with France for a period of ten years by a royal cedula of January 22, 1782. The importance of this cedula in the history of Louisiana and in the commercial history of the Spanish Empire can scarcely be overestimated. We are interested here, however, in a side issue which it provoked.

In communicating the cedula to Bernardo de Galvez, January 26, 1782, the Marques de la Sonora instructed him to give copies of it to the intendant of Louisiana together with the advice he thought, opportune as *Superintendente de Real Hacienda de la Luisiana y de la Florida Occidental*. After the death of Galvez in 1786, (He was at that time viceroy of New Spain and still captain-general of Louisiana and the Floridas) the government of Louisiana and of the Floridas returned to the jurisdiction of the captain-general of Cuba. Juan Ruiz de Apodaca who became captain-general in 1812, chose to interpret the language of the Marques de la Sonora, quoted above, to mean that he, Apodaca, was the *Superintendente* of the Floridas, to which the intendant of Cuba raised objections.¹

The root of the difficulty is to be found in the creation of the Cuban intendency in 1764 as an administrative institution with an intendant of equal rank with the captain-general. As might have been expected there was friction between the two officers and the; home government was called on several times to decide points of dispute. In 1802 it was thought, necessary to tell the intendants that their

1. Villanova, Manuel, "Alejandro Ramirez, XI", in the *Revista de administracion* (1887) I, pp. 144-145.

“absolute independence . . . in no way destroys that provided in the general ordinances of the army concerning the authority of the captains-general in things relating to the security and defense of their respective provinces”. This by no means settled all points of disagreement and the altercations between intendants and captains-general went on². Therefore when Apodaca arrived in 1812 and laid claim to the financial administration of the Floridas he added fuel to the flames.

Although the words of Sonora could have been interpreted to support Apodaca's claim, the logic of circumstances was on the side of the intendant. Florida was by no means self-supporting and for years her deficits had been met by *situados* from New Spain. Due to trouble there at this date the *situados* had not arrived for some time and the overtaxed treasury of Cuba was called upon to support the Florida government. As long as Apodaca was in power, however, not logic, but the letter was the basis of action and much paper and ink was used by both sides.

The settlement came about in 1816 when Apodaca was appointed viceroy of New Spain and on July 2 of that year General Jose Cienfuegos succeeded him as captain-general of Cuba. The next day Alejandro Ramirez became *Superintendetite de Real Hacienda* (The *intendencia* was raised to a *superintendencia* in 1812). Ramirez had already made a record for peaceful cooperation with captains-general in Guatemala and Puerto Rico and by August 9th these two

2. Pierson, W. W., “The Establishment and Early Functioning of the *Intendencia* of Cuba” in James Sprunt *Historical Studies*, XIX (Chapel Hill 1927), Corbitt, D. C., A *History of the Colonial Government of Cuba* (MS), chapters on the Captaincy-General and the *Intendencia*. Zamora y Coronado, Jose María. *Legislacion ultramarina* (6 vols. Madrid 1844-46). II, pp. 180-181. Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Reales Ordenes libro 16 (1803), p. 117.

officers had reached an agreement on the long debated Florida question. On the 14th Ramirez gave the following account of the conclusion of the matter in a letter to the *Secretario de Estado y de Despacho de Hacienda* :

All the business of the Royal Treasury of the Floridas was obstructed by a rivalry that was roused during the time of Captain-General Don Juan Ruiz de Apodaca.

He pretended to be the *Superintendente de Real Hacienda* of those provinces. What he wrote on this question caused the inconveniences that are usually the result of such things.

The Floridas always depended on the fat *situados* from Mexico. Now that they do not receive them they apply to the Royal Coffers here. From these they were eventually given part of what they asked, but without method or regularity: and it was never known if what was sent or credited was sufficient, or what was the degree of their necessity, because their receipts and expenditures were not recorded. Their employees, especially the military commandants, calling themselves Subdelegates of the Royal Treasury, did not send statements or information, nor did they properly acknowledge superior authority in economic matters.

This matter being treated in a verbal conference with the present Captain-general, Don Jose Cienfuegos, a joint agreement has been reached, the result of his moderation and real love of the Royal Service.

In an expediente of which I will give a separate account, I have decreed with the advice of the Junta Superior Directiva that, after the present month, the regiment of Louisiana, which garrisons Pensacola, will be paid from the Royal Funds here according to the effective force indicated in its reports; in this way the troops in service there can be guaranteed their pay, the same as those here.

The great obstacle of the contention being cleared up, I shall dedicate myself to the affairs of the Floridas; investigate their condition; take the steps that fall within my powers; and take counsel about what else I should do, keeping in mind the location and peculiar circumstances of that country and its surroundings.

In everything I shall work in unison with the Captain-General: and it seeming to me that the enclosed merits be-

ing brought to the attention of His Majesty, and that he deign to give it his Sovereign approval, I mention it to Your Excellency for what you see fit to do; without now sending with it the documents on which it is based, since they are bulky and I do not think them necessary in this case for His Majesty to decide what is his Royal Pleasure, although it be temporary while an arrangement is made for the Floridas, which was ordered in the order of the Regency of the Kingdom on November 27, 1812.

The important part of the agreement to which Ramirez referred in the above quoted letter is found in the following paragraphs:

1st. That the point of doubt or disagreement, promoted in the time of Don Juan Ruiz de Apodaca about the Superintendencia de Real Hacienda in the said provinces, be left for the determination of His Majesty.

2nd. That in the meantime the treasury officials of those provinces as well as the Governor and Military and Political Commandant of St. Augustine and Pensacola, correspond directly with the Intendencia de Ejercito of this Island (in view of the fact that they depend on it at present for all kinds of assistance) about matters arising relative to the *Real Hacienda* and other things incident thereto; without prejudice to the said commandants also communicating with this Captaincy-General in eases and about things pertaining to its attributes or require its knowledge.

3rd. That to the *Intendencia de Ejercito* of this Island belongs the decision and resolution of all Treasury or related business of the said provinces, in conformity to the *Ordenanza de Intendentes de Nueva Espana* and succeeding Royal Orders; and consequently the Governor and Commandant of St. Augustine and Pensacola must preserve the respective subordination provided in the same *Ordenanza*. All of these provisions are to be observed until the Sovereign will on the first point is known; those things requiring their concurrent action are to be treated in harmony and in conformity with the good of the service by the Captain-General and the Intendant, giving account of all to his Majesty with certified copies of the documents³.

3. *Revista de administracion* I, pp. 145-146.

The agreement reached by Ramirez and Cienfuegos was approved by the king in a royal order of September 3, 1817 which also declared the Superintendente of the Island of Cuba to be also of the Floridas⁴.

4. *Ibid.* p. 146.