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Letters from the Public Record Office, London

James Grant



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take the unhappy settlers to other shores. He chartered a vessel for five hundred guineas to make as many trips as necessary to move all things movable at Rollestown. He had petitioned the Lords of Plantations for Mogane, an island north of Turks Island in the Bahamas, but in 1785 we find the remnants of Rollestown upon Exuma, another island. In two trips negroes, farm implements, and stock were moved, and even the buildings taken down and shipped. Forty-five of his negroes died on the journey, and only twenty-eight of the remainder were "taskable". Twenty three thousand pounds had been spent in all on the Florida venture, and though Rolle fared much better than most of the refugees since he returned to England to press for his indemnity, he was thenceforth content to live at Stevenstone, his country home in Devonshire, a chastened pioneer.

CARITA DOGGETT CORSE

LETTERS FROM THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE, LONDON

(Copy-Governor Grant's Letter to Lachlan MacLeane Esqr. in answer to an Official Letter wrote by order of the Earl of Shelburne, concerning Denys Rolle Esqr.)

St. Augustine, February 13th, 1767

Sir

I have had the honor to receive your Letter of the 20th November, informing me that you are Commanded by the Earl of Shelburne, to acquaint me that it is His Majesty's Pleasure that all suitable Encouragement be given to Denys Rolle Esquire in his useful undertakings in the Province of East Florida.

It is my Duty and Inclination to encourage every Settler-if that was not my constant study, I should not deserve the honor which His Majesty has conferred upon me., by putting an Infant Colony under my care; but I have the satisfaction to believe that

my Endeavors to serve and oblige every Gentleman who has come to settle, or even to look at the Country have succeeded except in the ease of Mr. Rolle, tho' I have been at more pains to please and accommodate him than all the rest.

Mr. Rolle came to this place in September 1764 determined as he told me to proceed directly to St. Marks by Land, but after Guides and Hunters were provided to attend him, he altered his Opinion without assigning a Reason, and said he would go to St. John's the Province was open to his Choice, a single Acre had not been granted away, and he had near Five Months to consider of a proper situation for Locating his Estate, before the appointment of the Land Surveyor took place; upon Mr. De Brahm's Arrival from Georgia in the end of January 1765, a Warrant of Survey was issued to measure out twenty thousand Acres of Land for Mr. Rolle in one Contiguous tract in any part of the Province without Restriction where he chose to, fix-by this means I flattered myself that his Business must soon be settled to his Satisfaction-but Difficulties soon occurred, the Deputy Surveyors obliged by their Instructions and Oath of Office, to measure out Lands according to the Terms of His Majesty's Order in Council, and His Majesty's general Instructions to me, could not comply with Mr. Rolle's directions in Locating his Estate and on the other hand the Terms contained in the King's Order did not appear to Mr. Rolle to be sufficiently advantageous to him therefore the Survey was postponed-and in place of doing business a thousand Doubts, Suspicions and Grievances were started. I received many Letters from him upon those disagreeable Subjects-my Answers were as Civil; and as much to the purpose as I could contrive to make them to a man, who for the most part I did not understand, but nothing was satisfactory to him,

he remained complaining and wandering upon the River St. John's during the Winter 1765 - wherever a place pleased his Eye he built a Log House by way of taking possession, upon Islands as well as on each side of the River indifferently, without asking my consent or even taking the trouble to inform me of it - this extraordinary measure was prior to the Indian Congress, and was not pleasing to me-for tho' I never intended to ask the Country to the Eastward of St. John's as a favor from the Indians I wished to bring them in good Humor to the meeting, and for that reason I was determined to Grant no Land above the Fort of Picolata except to Mr. Rolle, who I wished to get off my hands, upon any Terms that could be complied with. The Indians who are tenacious of their property took exceptions as I expected at the little Log houses - One Indian Family humorously enough fixed in one of them-their Complaints and Suspicions were put a stop to with good talks and the expectation of presents at the Congress and therefore tho' Mr. Rolle's Conduct was unprecedented in an established Government, as it was not attended with serious bad consequences to the Publick, I thought the best way. was to overlook his Behavior to me - But I could not comply with Mr. Rolle's request, when he applied to me for Grants of those Log house spots, to wandering woodsmen who never Resided a Year at a time in the same place - to whom I would not have given an Acre in any part of the Province, and who I knew were by Agreement to transfer their Rights for those Lands to him, for Lots to be assigned to them in his Ideal Town-where there is nothing to show for the Money he has trifled away, even the house intended for himself and raised at some Expense has remained so long uncovered that the Timbers are Rotten.

This Log House Plan one of the Objects of what he called his extra Settlement was extensive and not ill laid. Planters of Note intending to settle upon St. John's River, must have purchased proper spots for their houses from him, and of course would have been at his mercy.

In the course of our Correspondence I often pressed Mr. Rolle to Locate some where but to no purpose-at last in May 1765 I wrote to him that tho' the King's Order gave him a preference to other Settlers, I could not keep the Province open upon his Account-that Messrs. Kinloch and Moultree two considerable Carolina Planters were arrived with an Intention to look at the Country, and to form Settlements in it - I observed to him that if their Petitions for particular tracts were Prior to his, they in that case must be preferred to him, and that I therefore thought it right to put him upon his Guard against an inconvenience which was likely to happen - this seemed to alarm him, he applied for a Deputy Surveyor, who was immediately sent to him, and wandered for near two months with Mr. Rolle over all the Swamps and-Creeks round his Bluff, but as the Deputy got no Money he tired at last and left Mr. Rolle, upon finding that no Business could be carried on, he could not deviate from his Instructions, and it was impossible to prevail upon Mr. Rolle to agree to Terms which he thought so contrary to his interest-upon the return of the Deputy I sent for the Surveyor General and desired him to make out Plans of all the different ways in which it was possible to survey out Mr. Rolle's Tract (without transgressing the Kings Instructions) in that part of the Country which he seemed attached to, and of which the Deputy had made a Sketch. Mr. De Brahm proposed three different methods of running out the Tract. Funk the Deputy was directed to transmit the Plans to Mr.

Rolle, which was done, he rejected all the three, and was determined to go to England to get some alterations made in His Majesty's Order in Council dated in May 1764 -he left the Province dissatisfied because I would not act contrary to my Instructions, and refused to reserve two or three tracts 'till his Return- indeed Mr. Rolle thought every man in the Country was hostile to him, tho' in fact he had no Enemy but himself. I believe people did not shew him so much respect as he expected-his method of coming from England as a Steerage Passenger, and an affectation perhaps of saving the Expense of a Cabin passage by lying under a Cart upon the Deck of a small Schooner, which brought him from Charles Town, drew upon him a sort of Contempt, which was increased by the Clamours and repeated Complaints of the few White people brought out with him that they were Naked and starved. I could not command respect from other People to Mr. Rolle, but I treated him with great attention myself, had him every day at my Table, and asked the favor of a Gentleman to invite him upon his arrival to lodge at his house which was done, but he disliked his Guest so much, that he would not give Mr. Rolle a bed when he returned to Town a second time.

Mr. Rolle arrived at his intended Settlement on St. John's River the 26 ultimo with about forty white people, some of them indented, others not-they eat at his Expence - left England because they were idle and starving, and will not easily be prevailed upon to work in America-while they remain with him they will be a Load upon him, and will never be of any use to him or the Publick. I am very sorry to see his plans so wild and inconsistent, but 'tis impossible to direct him or put him right, he hates, indeed never forgives a man

who differs in opinion with him, of which I have seen too many instances.

In place of preparing Ground to raise Provisions his whole attention is taken up in clearing a spot for a Church and Church Yard in his Town where there is not a House or one permanent Inhabitant - he might have formed two valuable Plantations upon his Estate, for the Money which his two Trips from England will cost him, but by his management he will have nothing to show for so large an Expence - and I am much convinced he will never raise a hundred pounds worth of Produce in the Country.

When Mr. Rolle was last in this Province I did not think it necessary to trouble His Majesty's Ministers with his Transactions - but I am obliged to enter more particularly into his Conduct, as he informs me in a long letter that he has published our Correspondence and presented it with a Memorial to His Majesty-My Letters to him were private not intended for the press, tho' there is nothing in them that I wished to keep a Secret from His Majesty. I have kept Mr. Rolles Original Letters except one which I took the Liberty to transmit to the Lords of Trade if he has published exact Copys of them I am much mistaken if any Man in England can Decypher them.

I have the honor & c.

JAMES GRANT.

Lachlan MacLeane Esquire

* * *

St. Augustine

13th August, 1768.

My Lord

In obedience to Your Lordship's Commands relating to Mr. Rolle in your Letter No. 6 I take the liberty to send a Copy of my Letter of the 13th February 1767

to Mr. MacLeane, which was wrote in consequence of Mr. Rolle's first Memorial to His Majesty.

Facts speak for themselves My Lord, and I flatter myself that those contained in my Letter will convince Your Lordship that Mr. Rolle has met with no unnecessary Difficulties or improper Obstructions in locating his Land, but on the contrary every Facility which was in my power to give him, for I had heard and seen enough of Mr. Rolle at London, to wish most anxiously to get him off my hands as soon as possible after his arrival here. I therefore pressed him to take his Land, even before the Indian Congress took place, and I gave him a Special Warrant of Survey, to locate wherever he pleased without Restriction, which Warrant he had for Six Months in his Pocket, before an Acre of Land was given away in the Province.

The delay of Location therefore My Lord can only be imputed to Mr. Rolle's suspicious and Litigious disposition, for an unhappy Jealousy in his Temper, is the source of all his Grievances, which exist nowhere but in his Imagination.

Mr. Rolle thinks me his Enemy, and says so publicly, I never did him an Injury, I have often endeavoured to serve him, and tho' his behavior to me has been irregular as Governor of the Province, I should at this hour assist him in the same manner as I would any other Adventurer. I have ever acted upon that principle with him without showing the least Resentment for his Conduct-every man in the Country will do me the Justice to say so, tho' he no doubt endeavors to represent things in a very different Light.

Your Lordship seems to think that Difficulties may have arisen from a Delicacy with regard to my Instructions, and you say that if I will state my Doubts, possibly upon Consideration they may be removed-that might be done My Lord if Mr. Rolle could be prevailed

upon to come to the point, but it has ever been impossible for me to fix him to any thing - if he would have made a Demand in consequence of the King's Order, the Business might have been brought to a Conclusion long ago, for I should readily have given him small Grants in addition to the large one to accommodate him to his Satisfaction, tho' I have absolutely refused to do so, 'till the twenty thousand Acres are once Located.

Mr. Rolle if I understand him wishes to have about sixty thousand Acres of Land upon the East Side of St. John's River, to consider the Water of that River as Land, he being willing to pay Quit Rent for it as such and having removed the difficulty of the River by this Conversion of Water into Land, he is desirous to join a Body of 3, 4 or 5 thousand Acres of Swamp Land (already Granted to Colonel Middleton in 1763 by the Governors of Carolina) upon the West side of the River to the Sixty Thousand Acres upon the East side-the whole from this mode of Surveying the Waters to be considered as one Contiguous Tract, and not exceeding the King's Order, as he is of Opinion that he will not have a greater proportion of good Land, than a Gentleman who has a well chose Tract of 20,000 [acres] should have-Your Lordship will think this plan wild enough, but it is as far as I can judge Mr. Rolle's Idea of Location, and all the Gentlemen who have talked with him upon the Subject are convinced that it is his Plan-in looking over a Sketch of the Country he may possibly mention it to Your Lordship, but My Lord if he apprehends that Your Lordship disapproves of the System, or if he suspects that I have given the information he will fly off directly and deny every word of it-tho' before he went to England having made a Road through a part of the Swamp I believe with his own hands, he would hear of no other

Objection to his Plan, but the Governor's ill will to him.

For he is convinced of my Hostility, tho' I have kept a large Tract of Country open for him for four Years and have refused repeated Petitions for Land where he probably must locate in the end-but so far am I My Lord from having a desire to distress him, that I have really done an Irregular thing to serve him, and save his Land, since he returned to England last.

In a New World the same Tract of Country may be described different ways, and often is so by people who have an Intention to deceive or mislead-An Order was presented to me from His Majesty, for twenty thousand Acres of Land for Lord Adam Gordon, a Grantee from the Crown has a Right to chuse, wherever the Land has not been Surveyed or Granted, a Warrant was immediately issued, the Surveyors had traversed the Tract, and a Sketch of it was actually sent to England before I discovered that this Survey took in a great part of Mr. Rolle's intended Estate, I immediately put a stop to any further Survey *there*, and have Located Lord Adam's Grant in another place -As Lord Adam is My Friend and Acquaintance I ventured to take this Liberty with him, another. Grantee probably would not have allowed it, for 'tis an Act of power for which I have no Authority, but Lord Adam wont trouble Your Lordship upon the Subject, he might no doubt complain of my Partiality to Mr. Rolle, but I am pretty safe for neither His Lordship nor Mr. Rolle, will I believe impute my Conduct to any such Motive.

Mr. Rolle thinks it is in my power to make his servants work and to settle every little Dispute he has with the other Inhabitants, 'tis to no purpose to point out a Chief Justice, Assistant Judges, Justices of the Peace, King's Attorney & ca. all that costs Money and

he will have recourse to me only-he insisted upon my taking in Charge as Chancellor a Young Girl of Sixteen or Eighteen, who he had brought out from England for the second time, because they quarreled and she was going to leave him, I begged to be excused as Chancellor, but I took care to prevent any of the Young Gentlemen in Town, from giving her Encouragement, and employed people to persuade her to go back and things were seemingly made up when they differed about a few Guineas for a Gown-in one of his Letters to me he calls the Girl one of his nearest Relations, and after she left him, he actually applied for a Warrant to Commit her Brother for Felony to be tried for his Life upon the Suspicion of Stealing or Carrying away a Blanket from the Village of Rolle-he gives Protection as a Member of Parliament to all the Vagabonds who come about him, and has a thousand mean, low, trifling Litigious Disputes with all his Neighbours, and in short with every Body he deals with-he keeps an Indian Store without Leave or Licence, and indeed sells Goods in Retail to any Body who calls for them, at the same time he throws away his Money, and has not sunk less than five thousand pounds for which has has nothing to shew-a Planter with a Dozen of Negroes would do more in Six Months.

Mr. Rolle's great and constant Complaint is the loss he sustains by his Indented Servants, who he says are seduced away by other people, 'tis impossible to convince him that everybody who attempts a settlement in the same way will meet with Disappointments of the like Nature, and Mr. Rolle do's not consider that his own Conduct with regard to those Servants induces them to leave him sooner than perhaps they would do if they were treated in another manner.

Mr. Rolle made alterations and additions to many of the Indentures upon his passage from England. Peo-

pie were prevailed upon to agree to Changes visibly made to their disadvantage-upon Mr. Rolle's giving Tea and Sugar to their Wives and Daughters and probably a little Liquor to themselves, they considered the immediate convenience and signed to what Mr. Rolle pleased to dictate tho' they at the same time look't upon it as an imposition on his part.

Those people of course landed disssatisfied, and their Discontent was soon increased by bad living, and I am sorry to add by Acts of Injustice and oppression-for example, My Lord, some of the Servants by agreement were to have half the produce raised by their Labor, those people were set to work in a Pine Barren to Grub up Palmetto Roots, when they enquired of Mr. Rolle what advantage they could reap from such Labor, the answer was, that they might sell half the Palmetto Roots-they saw that they never would be able to buy a pound of Bread at that rate, and they declared that they would raise Provisions, but that they would not continue at the Palmetto Work, upon which a quarrel ensued, and several of them came to Town-I was not informed of the Circumstances, I refused to see any of the Servants, and in order to Support Mr. Rolle in the Command of them, I sent round to the Inhabitants to beg that none of Mr. Rolle's Servants might be received or harbored by them-if I detected any of them in a Publick house I threaten'd to take away the License from the Publican and in short I obliged numbers of them at different times to return to his Plantation.

One of Mr. Rolle's managers called upon me and said overly [i. e. superficially] in Conversation, that his Master at times stopt People's Provisions. who did not finish their Task-I told him that I thought Mr. Rolle did very right, for I believed they were a parcel of troublesome lazy people, I thought the man meant

a Dinner or a Supper, but the Fact was stopping Provisions from whole Familys for ten days or a fortnight at a time, and that in a Wilderness where it was impossible for them to get any thing to eat, unless it was in Charity from the other Servants out of their allowance.

Disputes and Dissatisfaction at last run so high that they came off in a body and abandoned Mr. Rolle and the settlement-upon their arrivel in Town they insisted upon being heard. I could no longer act in the way I had done, and the Affair was referred to three Gentlemen, who are Justices of the Peace. Mr. Rolle came to Town to answer the Complaints which were. made against him,-but at a Publick hearing so many things appeared against him and in favor of the servants-that if I had not underhand interposed the greatest part if not the whole of them I believe would have been discharged from their indentures, but I represented that it was a New Country, that adventurers laboured under many inconveniences, that servants getting the better of their Master would be a bad precedent, and might be hurtful to the future Settlement of the Province in short I prevailed upon them not to proceed to sentence, but to advise Mr. Rolle, and to recommend Obedience to the servants-in any other County in America every man of them would have been set at Liberty-yet Mr. Rolle thinks he met with injustice he exclaims against the Justices, & very probably I do not escape Censure, tho' officially I could have nothing to do in the business, he can know nothing of this last step which I took in his favor, - indeed it was rather done to serve the Colonist than the Man-I shall now leave that Gentleman, having 'tis to be hoped sufficiently explained to Your Lordship the Nature of the difficulties Grievances and

Obstructions, which he says he met with in this Province. I have &c.

JAMES GRANT

[To Lord Hillsborough]

(From MMS. of the Marquess of Lansdowne, vol. 66, pp. 687-688.)

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE PLANTATIONS IN 1782

The Village of Rolle of 15,000 acres & an Island of 85.

A Good House of two Fronts to the River and Inland-of 5 sashed Windows and two Stories.

Offices in different Ranges on each side a Large square of 10 acres with the Negroes Houses rang'd regularly on each side with Garden Lotts behind each -a Church & Clergymans house intended in Front with an Avenue 'between exactly fronting the Principal mansion cut straight for 8 miles through the woods towards Augustine to the end of my land-24 Feet wide road with 7 Feet Drains on each side in the middle of the avenue.

320 Acres on the banks of the River above the House enclosed for Tillage of which 200 acres are Imbank'd for Rice.

22 Acres below the House enclosed for a garden for Tropical Fruits and Vine yard.

79 Working Negroes, 27 Children, 106 in all. Between 2 & 300 Cattle, 100 Hoggs - many oxen trained to the Plough harnessed as Horses.

15000 Trees tapped for Turpentine. Vast Plenty of Provisions for sale. Negroes well clothed and great quantity of Turpentine ready for export.



1928



SAMUEL PASCO (1834-1917)