

Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 9
Number 4 *Florida Historical Quarterly, Vol 4,*
Issue 4

Article 8

1930

A Journal of John Forbes, May, 1803, The Seizure of William Augustus Bowles

John Forbes



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.

Recommended Citation

Forbes, John (1930) "A Journal of John Forbes, May, 1803, The Seizure of William Augustus Bowles," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 9: No. 4, Article 8.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol9/iss4/8>

A JOURNAL OF JOHN FORBES, MAY, 1803

The Seizure of William Augustus Bowles

[May 11, 1803 (?)] The Coll. [Co]. Benjamin Hawkins, Indian Agent] assures that the number of Guns men included within the Creek agency does not exceed 3500 in addition to which if we put down 1000 for the able men of the Semanories & Creeks included within the Spanish Limits, makes the effective force of the Creek Confederacy 4500. McGillivray at one time made them out 15 m but never less than 10 m. Olivier took considerable pains to investigate their numbers but at last made them 9700-how this difference - can it be the wish of the agent to hold out the Idea of there being so few in number, in order to depress the spirit of the Indians or make them an object of less consequence in the eyes of Spain? This I cannot solve but I really believe their numbers are more considerable than here represented.

The Traders from whom Olivier took his information, might in some cases have been deceived, but that men who had resided so long in their Towns should have been so Egregiously mistaken is incomprehensible to me & I do not believe it.

Calculation of the Capital adequate to the purchase money of the Creek Lands to the Okmulgy as proposed by the Commissioners-

A perpetual annuity of ten thousand Drs.

would require a Capital at 8 P cent of..... 125 000

Note - This journal is a part of the series of documents, survivals of the records of Panton, Leslie and Company and its successor, John Forbes and Company, the publication of which was begun in a late issue of the *QUARTERLY*. The originals are in the possession of Mrs. John W. Greenslade, who has transcribed them. Apparently a portion of this journal is missing. The series will be continued in the following issues.

Payment of our claims	100 000
to be paid them in hand.....	25 000
2 Blacksmiths Equal to an annuity of 720	
Drs. @ 8 p ct	9 000
Supposed to cover Traders Claims	9 000
	<hr/>
	268 000

1st The Col. was no doubt influenced by prudential motives from laying hold on Bowles when at the Talassies, has read me his instructions to the Singer when he orders him to take him if he thought it a fit oppy. Besides Mr. Hill [?] subsequently told me that there was a doubt on his mind whether he could be delivered up to Spain if taken by the Agents orders and in that I coincide so far, and think it would be much preferable if he could be laid hold of by the voluntary exertions of the Chiefs who it seems are inclined to do so if he comes to the ensuing meeting.

They would certainly fulfill their engagements to Spain and deliver him up. The Coll. is of opinion that he will come to the meeting, he is the only one I have spoke to that thinks so, he promises to give Stephen F. [son of Gov. Folch] every facility in his power. On the subject of my views he appears to be sanguine, indeed more so than myself had the Indians accepted the proposal of making the okmulga the Boundary.

Thursday 12 - they were to have all claims against them including ours paid an annuity in perpetuo of 20,000 Dollars 25000 Drs. in hand and on annuity of 2 Blksmiths the Grant might have included about 5,000,000 - acres they accepted the minor proposal (which H acknowledges to be disadvantageous to them) on the terms known to the publick

He complains of want of energy in the Government; he has only received one energetic order since Jefferson's administration Viz to take the troops at

Fort Wilkinson under his command and proceed to St Marks & retake it from Bowles-he was arranging the Expedition when he received accounts of Govr. F's success

His views of civilisation go on with rapidity altho' silently-he has had four hundred farms now fenced [?] he has ploughs agoing 200 spinning wheels & I saw a list of two more bespoke-we have had ocular demonstration of Indians ploughing in their fields-the little Prince & Talassie King are opposed to these measures & he told me in confidence that he has been urged by many of the Chiefs to have them put to Death he even mentioned that he believed he would do it in the course of the summer he found their conduct & Talks so subversive of the laws he had in contemplation He complains of the Spanish Interpreters at Pensacola & St Marks whose talk is sometimes indecent & ill timed but he never once hinted that the Commanders were to blame attributing it rather to the ignorance of the interpreters-he assured me that previous to Bowles' first attack on Appalachy he sent down to Fort St Marks 14 warriors of approved Confidence & valour with a letter to Partell, informing him of the intentions of the Semanories and that he might put implicit faith in the men sent him, who had orders to remain with & assist the Spaniards- They were not says he even invited to eat a morsell, and were remanded without a single line of acknowledgment- He commented with Some Severity on the Peace concluded at Appalachy with the Semanories and is of opinion that the terms of it preclude the Spaniards from any expectation of indemnification for the expences they have been at in consequence of the aggression of the Indians- Had it not been for this circumstance there is no doubt but Spain might have obtained all the lands below the Line from Scambia westward untill it meets the old english line which

runs in a S.E. direction from the mouth of Hollow Creek on Tinsa to the head of the Bay of Pensacola

N.B. There is still an old Indian alive who remembers that it excluded the Governor's saw mill but a small deviation was permitted by the Indians in order to accommodate the English. but to return-were the lands obtained up to the american line there is no doubt but that thirty good Plantations might be established which would be fully sufficient to the supply of a Town ten times the size of Pensacola for besides several Spots of good upland, the swamp in general might be brought under cultivation with very little trouble 'Mem' to get copy of Purcell's note of the Line for Govr. Folch. [Probably a part of the journal is missing here.]

Saturday 21

An Indian came over the River & informed us that Hawkins and Duroseaux were arrived, took horse in the afternoon & rode up the River untill we were opposite to the town when we crossed over. it seems the Rascally same king has sent to the lower Towns to inform the Indians that the meeting is put off, that he is to be the head of the assembly. that he will send forth the broken days and that the english are arrived in Augustine and Tampa and that the Indians would see the Red Coates in a very short time.

Sunday 22

Perryman again brought forward the Okalagany grant I told him that the sum asked for the land was too much that the land would be of no use to me & might become of value to the Nation at some future day, and therefore I would advise as a friend to the Nation that they adopt the measure of selling the Lands to the Okmulgie, & keep the Okalagany for some future necessity, when it becomes.

valuable: but that they might see I did not under value their land, I would allow them 30m Dollars for the grant, provided they would extend the line from Okalagany to the Big pond on the East Branch of Appalachy, which would include all the Yaunaica old fields and upon the other proviso that Bowles should be made away-with and the consent of the Mickasuky indians obtained-

Monday 23

Towards evening Aleck Cornel arrived & brought news of the lower towns chiefs being upon the path and with them Bowles: that they would certainly arrive next day Kenages it seems & Mithlogie and all the Mickasooky gang now for
bella horrida bella !

Tuesday 24

The Plot Thickens: Bowles & his party are within a few miles of us, two runners came in and required that a residence should be pointed for the Semanories & Bowles. The Singer despatched them for answer, an order to come in a body and their residence should be given them. 2-o'clock P.M. Col Hawkins called me in and put the following papers into my hand which he permitted me to copy-

Col Hawkins to Hopoie Mico

"It being now reported & believed that the "Semanolie chiefs, those in opposition in this Agency, and Bowles will arrive in the course of the day "I must know from you as you have conferred with "the Chiefs of the other Nations & your own, the "course you mean to take to put an end to the disturbance in this land and particularly whether "you can or will as you have assured me, apprehend Bowles, or is it to depend on me. If you find "you cannot I know I can-but as the Semanolie

"Chiefs are here and the effect on them will be important in its consequences to the subjects of Spain, as well as a law to evil doers on our parts I am of opinion it should proceed from the chiefs themselves, and from you as their head.

Answer by Mr. Cornells the Interpreter. "I have taken my measures, I am surrounded by my three Brothers Cherokees, Chickasaws & Choctaws ; I have for some time doubted, as I have not had my Chiefs hearty in aid of me, but now I feel strong; the four Nations are together, and we are nearly of one mind. The Chiefs of the lower Towns of Tuckabatchee & the Semanolies are near us just over the hill--Bowles is with them - I shall send a deputation to them to assign them their quarters ; I shall place Bowles and the Semanolies at my own house in the quarters prepared for the Cherokees. I shall invite him & them to sit down there & eat. I shall then take the Semanolie Chiefs to a Council of the four Nations, give them our determination, apprehend & confine the mischief maker and do with him as I have assured you I will do: you & your White people will remain about your House, and you will attend the Square as usual & is agreeable to you. I feel for your Situation, as you have Mr Forbes with you & the Son of the Governor of Pensacola. I know that you are the only authority here from the United States, and who has a right to do business with us, and that you are our friend, anxious for our welldoing, and that of the four Nations-as soon as he is Secured we shall assemble in the Square and proceed on public business.

N.B. Coll. Hawkins observes that after Mr Cornells had delivered him the above from the Speaker, he added from himself that the Cherokee Chiefs would come in person and give him their hand in token

of having understood & taken the talks which was accordingly done & after very affectionately taking him by the hand the Cherokee interpreter went off to conduct the Semanories to their destined Quarters. 3 o'clock P.M. The Mad Dog and the lower town Chiefs arrived. the latter were conducted to the Quarters assigned them & Bowles and his Semanories were lodged with the Cherokees. The Semanories & other Chiefs went almost immediately to the Square, where they sat in council all the afternoon : about five Coll. H. received a message from the Singer that he found much obstinacy in the Semanorie Chiefs, but that his determination was taken : that he had resolved to root up the evil and to do it in presence of him (the Colonel) of a Spaniard (Stephen) & of an Englishman (me) Several Indians arrived in the course of the afternoon from the lower part of the Nation, but I observe that none of them are armed. this being a White or Peace town perhaps they may have left their Guns in the Woods or some where in the Indian Huts, it is certain that none approached the Square with arms in their Hand. Nine o'clock nothing yet done some messages seem to have passed from the Square to the Col but he has not communicated any of them to me-at half past seven the little Frenchman named Croisierd who came with us from Millers, called Stephen & me, and informed us, that the Cherokees had been speaking with Bowles - that B told them he expected all talks would be made straight now & that he expected he would be made **King of the four Nations** - the Cherokees promised to see & speak with him again, and as the Frenchman serves as Interpreter he has promised to tell us what passes. this information I conveyed to Col. Hawkins, who said Double Head meant to sound Bowles at Eight o'clock. We under-

stood Bowles had gone to the Square and I suppose we must wait the result of their decision which I presume will be declared in the course of this night or Never

Wednesday 25th

Last night Croisiere who had gone to see Bowles about Eight at his quarters returned & waked me at Midnight he told me that he appeared to carry himself with much haughtiness, said that all the Chiefs were gained over to his party excepting four, that those who had thoughts of apprehending him would perhaps be much surprised to find themselves Caught in their own Trap and that Stephen & I had done very ill to come here and expose ourselves knowing that the Indians were at War with the Spaniards- This morning by my desire he called upon him again ; it seems he had heard the Singer say something in Creek to the Cherokee interpreter which alarmed him for Croisiere says his Countenance betrayed great marks of Dejection -there was nothing passed worth relating-all this forenoon the Council was employed in hearing the Cherokee, Chickesaw & Choctaw addresses the former of which according to Cornels report to the agent was singularly dignified & impressive ; it clearly pointed out that their voice was for the Singer & his party & that the Semanolies had by their Conduct merited the curses of the Nation, and was already become detestable to the Cherokees-with astonishing Caution they Avoided the name of Bowles, but said that there was a black Speck in the Sky at one point of the Horizen and their Nation had ordered them to enquire about it -All the afternoon the Singer & Mad Dog have held a Secret Council at a private House which I

believe is not yet broke up (8 o'clock) the Cherokee Chiefs also attended.

In the evening the Cherokee Tasggitigi ordered Croisier to attend him and questioned Bowles about whence he came, what was his employment and whether he had any papers or Commission-His answers were that he came from a Great Prince, King George, to preserve all the red people from having their lands taken from them as the Americans & Spaniards intended to do ; that he had papers & instructions which he never shewed to any white person, but that he would show them to the Cherokees-the Chief told them that it would be doing nothing to show them to ignorant people like them, as he might deceive them, that a man in employment ought not only to have commissions sealed with a Big Seal, but instructions, and if he was a great man the Nation he came from had ordered him to see & have these papers read to them -Double Head who came in in the meantime intimated that if he had papers they *must* be shown -So they left him to his reflections which I suppose are not very pleasant.

Thursday 26-

All this forenoon the Council has sat hearing a recapitulation of the Talks received from other Indian Nations-The Mad Dog who keeps the different belts of Wampum and preserves the memory of the several embassies that brought them, gave their History before the young Warriors, that they might preserve the records after his Death-Upon the conclusion of this Ceremony Double Head made a long harangue in favor of unanimity, and with many pointed allusions to Bowles-the Singer sent the Agent a Message that tomorrow, he believed, things would be brought to a Crisis-I have

been always of opinion that Spain requires an agent of talents to reside with the Semanories & Cooperate in some measure with Col. Hawkins in his Patristic [?] Views towards this Nation, and a Conversation I have had with that Gentleman to day of which I have taken notes, too long to be inserted here, fully confirms it-

Thursday 26

Half past seven o'clock P.M. Dourousseaux brot a message from the Big Warrior of Tuckabatchies to Col Hawkins & Stephen, "That he would call upon them in the evening to know how they wished him to dispose of Bowles Col H answered that he had made up his mind, & would give his answer so soon as the Application was made - I cannot enough admire the secrecy with which this affair has been carried through and at length brought to a conclusion ; although certainly upwards of two hundred Indians have been privy to the discussions that were going on not a gesture or word escaped any of them that could give an Idea of the result untill the moment they communicated it. even Bowles friends who have been admitted to the discussions have not given the least hint of the dangers that surrounded him. The prudence of the red men in this instance is highly conspicuous, and I must bear. Equal testimony to the manly & liberal conduct of Col Hawkins thro the whole of the Business the gradual improvement he is introducing & the method he pursues to make the red people Govern and Chastise themselves is truly admirable : in this place where I suppose there are upwards of four hundred Strangers, there is not the smallest disorder, noise nor disturbance not a Belt Stole nor a horse missing-the square is always attended & business of a Publick or private nature seems al-

ways to be going on-To day he appointed a Commission of five Persons to decide upon small suits with an appeal to him. two only were brought forward which were heard & sentenced in a short time- the Mad Dog tells me he intends going to Pensacola when the Treaty is over-

Half past 10 the message came - Col H. answered "my wish is that he be put under Confinement immediately and properly secured untill irons are made when he must be conducted to Pensacola under a secure guard of Indians and delivered up to Govr. Folch to satisfy the Spaniards for the "seventeen deaths owing to them by the Nation" he added the "Governor will pay the Nation the sum of four thousand five hundred Dollars as he "promised

the 27

To day the Big Warrior returned & informed that everything would be executed this night; that they were going to elect a king, and after the ceremony they would tie & secure B. that he had seen him this morning, and that he was perfectly easy in appearance but that he was well watched although he did not know it, orders was sent immediately to the Blacksmith to make the Hand cuffs, and they will be here this night.

Received at Pensacola the 31st May & arrived at Mobile the 1st of June 1803.