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## The Triangular Contest for Florida

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## THE TRIANGULAR CONTEST FOR FLORIDA

Florida's colonial history is mainly that of an intermittent struggle for possession by the three great European nations-Spain, France, and Great Britain. Though efforts were made at colonization, none were really successful except the fair beginning of the English in East Florida; the beginning in the West was in those parts only nominally and temporarily Florida. The purpose of Spain's two hundred years of sovereignty was to keep the others out, and that was the reason for St. Augustine and Pensacola-two oases in a wilderness.

Three books tell of this early struggle for Pensacola and West Florida. First was William E. Dunn's *Spanish and French Rivalry in the Gulf Region of the United States, 1678-1702*, published as University of Texas Bulletin No. 1705 (Austin, 1917). This work is the source of a series of three articles in this *Quarterly* (IV. 3, 76, 140) which contain the Pensacola portion of Dr. Dunn's volume. The other two were published simultaneously : *Spanish Approach to Pensacola, 1689-1693*, by Irving A. Leonard (The Quivira Society, Albuquerque, 1939) and *The Triangular Struggle for Spanish Pensacola, 1689-1739*, by Lawrence C. Ford (The Catholic University of America Press. Washington, D. C., 1939). Dr. Leonard's work was reviewed in this *Quarterly*, in January 1940 (XVIII, 229).

The three are in large part built out of the same materials from *Archivo General de Indias* at Seville. Dunn, as Leonard says, blazed the trail. Leonard, working in the archives of Spain and Mexico City, brought to light and published pertinent documents which Dunn had not found, together with others of the transcripts of the Florida State Historical Society.

Ford used mainly the transcripts and photostats in the Library of Congress: those from Seville "the official transactions and reports of the viceroys of New Spain, of the governors of Havana and Florida, and of the commanders and other officers of the Florida presidios and sea-port towns, addressed to the King of Spain or his ministers" and from *Archivo . . . de la Nacion*, Mexico City, "principally the replies made by the Spanish court to the officials in New Spain, together with orders, instructions, and royal *cedulas*."

The Ford study, extending several decades beyond the others, emphasizes the later English threat, as his headings indicate: "French Intrusion and English Menace 1698-1702," "Spanish-French Alliance against England 1702-1713," "English Maneuvers and French Hostilities, 1713-1721," and "The New Threat: English Georgia, 1732-1739."

The volume is of especial interest because its treatment of Pensacola extends through the early decades of the eighteenth century—a period of which little is generally known, and one full of vicissitudes.

Though the author recounts most of the local history of the Pensacola region for this period which can be got from the Spanish archives, he also treats the long conflict as "a political and diplomatic contest with the Spanish documents as the chief source of information." He shows that "the diplomatic intrigues at the European courts affected [Florida] . . . considerably less than is generally believed. Thus while Spain and France were at war with each other in Europe, their colonials on the north coast of the Gulf of Mexico were fostering not only peaceful but actually friendly relations."

There was no food to be had in the Pensacola area, so when supplies failed to come from Mexico or Havana, as was continually happening, starvation

was in prospect. Time and again the French in Mobile came to the rescue generously, and when Pensacola with almost all of its supplies was virtually destroyed by a fire in 1705, French Mobile sent food, arms, ammunition, tools, and other necessities, together with a boat to send to Vera Cruz for further aid.

After the war of 1719-1721 in which Pensacola was shuttled between Spanish and French four times within a few months, it was finally given to Spain again by treaty, and thenceforth "France was no longer a serious threat. Thereafter it was England that Spain had to contend with for the retention of Pensacola, and this threat lasted until 1763 when the Gulf coast region of the Mississippi was ceded to England by the Treaty of Paris."

Of much value to any one wishing to go further into any phase of the long conflict is a list of one hundred eighty one documents in the bibliography, with their titles and descriptions, dates and locations -being those most useful to the author in his study.