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## PIONEER FLORIDA

by T. FREDERICK DAVIS

### THE PAD-GAUD AT PENSACOLA, 1830

Any well-rounded history of a country or of a section must include an account of the habits, customs and pastimes of its people in each generation. For Florida, not much has been told of these during our pioneer period from 1821, when it became a possession of the United States, to its admission to statehood in 1845. The human side of life in that period was recorded mostly in the minds of the old inhabitants, and when that generation passed the records were gone too. Every bit of authentic information relating to this period such as diaries and contemporaneous letters, should be deposited in a safe place, such as the Florida Historical Society's library, together they would make a collection from which the historian could construct at least a limited view of life in those days.

A certain festival of Pensacola's territorial days is a stone in that structure. This was the *pad-gaud*.

The name is said to have been derived from an obsolete French word, *gaud* signifying a male bird *gaud-ind*, a male turkey ; *pad* or *pap*, from *papier*--- a paper turkey. The custom of shooting the *pad-gaud*, in one form or another and with varying significance, is traced to Medieval times in Europe. Before the invention of gunpower, the cross-bow was used for the occasion.

A detailed description of the festival as held at Pensacola on May 15, 1830, was published in the next issue of the *Pensacola Gazette*, as follows:

#### *The Pad-Gaud*

The writer of this lately passed a very pleasant day near Pensacola at a *fete champetre*, given in

pursuance of an ancient usage. For more than a week he had heard much of the *Pad-gaud*, but not being able to obtain a distinct explanation of the custom, he resolved to satisfy his curiosity in person. He could only learn that it resembled the annual diversion of shooting the Jay, as described by Sir Walter Scott in "Old Mortality" . . . .

The day fixed upon was last Saturday, which fortunately turned out to be unusually fine, a circumstance which does not always favor such rural festivities—a general ducking sometimes terminating those delightful assemblages in the open air. Every sort of vehicle was put in requisition—stages, carriages, gigs, and horse-carts; *cavaliers* on horseback, and some on foot; crowds of children, and a *ducky posse* of Plebians [sic.], might be seen in motion at an early hour. By ten o'clock the streets of Pensacola were entirely deserted, there was scarcely a dog left to keep watch.

The place chosen for the amusements of the day, was at the distance of a mile and a half from town, on the high land to the north, where there is a beautiful grove of spreading live oaks. On reaching the spot, rendered more agreeable, by contrast with the loose sandy road, through which we had to wade, the writer found a numerous assemblage of people, dressed in their holiday apparel together with all the fashion of the town. A long table was spread under the deep shade of the trees, and near each end of it stood a wide side board fixed against their large trunks, and well supplied with refreshments. Beyond the grove, there was a "bosky dell," filled with the rich, various and fragrant shrubbery of this climate, and around, there was the close green sod of the open fields, which had formerly been cultivated. Not far off stood the untenanted dwelling, at this moment, however, filled to overflowing,

with the gayest of the gay. The dance had already commenced, several sets of cotillions were footing it at once to the sound of the violin, and attracted by this animated scene, he left those who were seated or moving about singly, or in groups, through the grove, to join the merry throng. The assemblage of beauty would have made a paradise of any place. Pleasure was painted on every countenance-the writer promised himself a delightful day, in which he assures the reader he was not disappointed.

At twelve o'clock the important business of the day was announced-the shooting the *Pad-guad*. Here it is proper to be a little more minute. The body of the bird was somewhat larger than that of a domestic fowl; it was made of the root of cypress or wild olive, or other spongy material, so that it might be struck by a hundred balls without being brought down. An iron rod was passed through it, which was driven into the end of a long pole. The distance from the place where the shooters took their stand, was about seventy yards. The head of the *gaudy* bird was crowned with a bunch of artificial flowers, while its spreading wings, and the sweeping curve of its tail, were adorned with one hundred ribbands of every colour, and fluttering in the breeze-gifts, which it had obtained from the ladies, during the week, while paraded through the town. Every eye was now fixed on this object-it was sufficiently near to enable each fair maiden to distinguish her gift from the rest-and many a generous *Caveliero* guided by instinct, perhaps by some secret intimation, panted to possess himself, if not the *whole bird*, at least of the favor of his damsel. Eighty tickets were drawn from a hat, and the lists forthwith were opened. Rifles, muskets, fowling pieces, double or single barrellled, with common or percussion locks, were brought forth. Of-

ficers of the army and navy, citizens, the young and the old, all engaged in the contest with equal earnestness, and with equal gaiety, and good humor. But the imagination must supply the rest. The shooting continued one hour and a half, until nothing remained of the poor bird, but a small piece not longer than one's hand. As it diminished in size, and the aspirants grew more eager, the distance was shortened, until at last each one was at liberty to take what station he pleased. By this time the ornaments of the *pad-gaud* were transferred to the hats and button holes of the more fortunate marksmen, who seldom obtained the ribband most valued by them. A lucky, or perhaps well directed shot, brought down the remaining fragment—a shout ensued, and Mr. V--- was proclaimed king. Then followed a procession—his majesty *elect* with the bouquet in his hand, supported by the *ex-kings*, and preceded by music, playing "hail to the chief." The procession passed twice in review before the ladies, who were seated, but on coming round the third time a fair lady was chosen queen of the next festival, the bouquet was presented to her, and the choice was ratified by general acclaim, and by the blushes of the maiden.

The company soon after sat down to an elegant dinner—after which the dancing was resumed, the *fandango* following close on the heels of the Scotch reel. About sundown the returning population once more filled the streets, like the coming in of the tide. Any where else, it might have been worth while to add, that in the whole of this numerous collection, there was not to be seen a single instance of excess, nor was there the slightest occurrence to disturb the harmony and good humor—but here, the circumstance produced no remark. This may be ascribed to the habitual temperance of the Spanish

population, and still more to the formidable influence produced by the presence of the fair. It was indeed a pleasant day-and if there should be another *pad-gaud*, while the writer remains here, he is determined to be one of the party, and perhaps an aspirant for the honours of the day.

(Signed) *Traveler*.

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The writer, a stranger, has missed some of the details of his *fete champetre*. The editor of the *Gazette*, who doubtless had attended many, describes another *patgeaud*, \* which is pronounced *patgo*, he says.

The preliminaries are much the same. Each lady attached to the *patgeaud* "a ribband with some peculiarity to enable her to identify it. Its ownership is chronicled also by the trusty servant who carries the *patgeaud*. In this way with its enormous tail, it soon becomes the most flaunting gaudy thing imaginable."

This one was held on the 4th of July, following the reading of the Declaration of Independence and an oration. "The young men have brought their rifles and the girls their guitars. The Oaks, as if jealous of the charms beneath their foliage, forbid the approach of a single ray from the impudent sun and the hours, winged with pleasure, speed on to the time for the shooting of the *patgeaud*. The king, who has despotic control over all the details of the festivity, gives the signal. Now comes the tug. Each fires in his turn. 'There goes a ribband.' It has scarcely touched the ground before the successful marksman has it in his hand. 'Whose is it' is the question, for there is some kissing in the ease. Alas! nobody's. The conscious proprietor denies the

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\* *Pensacola Gazette*, June 27, 1835

ownership, of course, and our hero kisses the girl he likes best - on suspicion. This is an episode in the general hurly burly now enacting. The patgeaud is now nearly all shot away; the ribbands are torn all to - ribbands, we were about to say, but that would not do-however, there is no time to stop for a choice of words; everybody is in momentary expectation that the next shot will bring down the last remaining fragment of the bird.-"There it comes." "No, lend me your ramrod." At length a loud and general huzzar announces its termination. The new king receives the congratulations of his rural subjects and chooses the partner of his regal honors and all betake themselves to their amusements. Some dance, some sing, some shoot at a target, and evening surprises them in the midst of their enjoyment. This is as it used to be. Alas! for the refinements of the new comers upon these simple pleasures, these temperate, rational and healthful pastimes."

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*[ibid.]*:

We are requested by the committee of arrangements for the celebration of the 4th of July to say that at eight o'clock in the morning the citizens will assemble at Collins Hotel, and march thence in procession, with a band of music, to the Episcopal Church, where the Declaration of Independence will be read and an oration delivered. The following will be the order of the procession.

Mayor and Board of Alderman  
 Judges of the United States  
 Clergymen  
 Officers of the United States  
 Officers of the Army and Navy

President and Directors of the Bank of Pensacola  
President and Directors of the Railroad Co.  
Strangers  
Citizens

We are requested also to say that the subscription  
paper for the celebration of the day is left at Collins  
Hotel.