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THE LAST SPANISH CENSUS OF
PENSACOLA, 1820

by DUVON C. CORBITT

Prior to 1812 the Spanish monarch did not see fit to grant Pensacola the right to organize as a municipality; consequently, the West Florida capital was governed up to that year by military commandants whose authority was untrammelled by elective officers. With the inauguration of the Constitution of 1812, however, it became necessary to allow the organization of municipal government there, since the charter in question provided such government for all towns and communities having one thousand or more free inhabitants, or whose special conditions necessitated local government. Therefore, Pensacola's municipal government, consisting of an *alcalde*, or mayor, and a city council was set up. It functioned until Ferdinand VII abrogated the constitution in 1814.¹

In 1820 a revolution in Spain forced the king to restore the constitutional system that he abhorred. When the news of this change in the mother country reached West Florida the governor thought he was obligated to institute another constitutional regime there. In the meantime, however, a number of circumstances had brought about the migration of many former residents of the province. Among the forces bringing about this migration there stands out the occupation of the province by Andrew Jackson. The governor, Jose Callava, however seems not to have questioned the right of his capital to organize again as a municipality, and so proceeded at once with the elections looking to that end. The governor did order a census to be made, probably

1. For a discussion of Spanish institutions in Florida at this time see D. C. Corbitt, "The Administrative System in the Floridas, 1781-1821," *Tequesta*, 1942 and 1943.

to justify himself should his acts be called in question. Before this census was completed one Jose Norriega had been elected *alcalde*, and after studying available documents concerned with his office reached the conclusion that practically all civil authority in West Florida pertained to him. When he laid claim to this authority the governor, reenforced by the counsel of his legal advisor (*auditor de guerra*),² refused to grant the demand and a heated dispute ensued during which both parties searched for records to support their respective claims.

While the dispute was in progress the census was completed.³ At first glance it seemed to prove that Pensacola was not entitled to municipal government because it fell far short of the required one thousand. The governor tried to use this as an excuse to abolish the office of *alcalde* but its holder promptly asserted that "special conditions" prevailed which warranted municipal government regardless of population. He further asserted that in the taking of the census several persons had been overlooked. He also produced documents that cast doubt on the right of the *auditor de guerra* to continue in office under the constitutional regime. This impasse led to an appeal from both parties to the provincial *diputacion* in Havana.⁴ That body, elected indirectly from the whole province, was charged with rather wide legislative and administrative du-

2. Nicholas Santos Suarez

3. A copy of the census is in Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Floridas, legajo 13, number 6.

4. The papers concerned with this dispute are in Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Floridas, legajo 2, number 35, legajo 13, numbers 6 and 14, and *ibid.* Gobierno Superior Civil, legajo 861, number 29160. pp. 6, 27-28. For an account of the *diputacion provincial de la Habana* see Corbitt, *op. cit.* and D. C. Corbitt, "Cuba y el sistema administrativa en las Floridas, 1779-1821." This last is a paper that was presented at the First Historical Congress of Cuba, October 8, 1942.

ties as well as some that partook of a judicial nature. Since East and West Florida were both included in the province of Havana under the constitutional regime, it was to the Havana body that the dispute had to be referred for settlement.⁵ This it did in due time, but not before orders had arrived from Spain to hand over the Floridas to the United States. Before news of the decision in Havana reached Pensacola, Andrew Jackson had arrived in the city to take control.

The American governor proposed to continue the Spanish system until a permanent organization could be provided ; consequently, he appointed a man to take over the duties of the retiring *alcalde*. This man, Henry M. Brackenridge, could not learn from Norriega the extent of his duties for the simple reason that the latter did not know what they were. Nor does it appear that Norriega ever explained to his successor that he and Governor Callava had been almost at daggers' points over the question for months. Thus it came about that the second attempt to establish municipal government in Pensacola served only to complicate the last months of Spanish rule and the first weeks of American rule. We are indebted, however, to this effort for a socio-economic picture of life in Pensacola on the eve of its transfer to the United States.

The census report consists of a list of residents with columns of data opposite the names. There is appended an official summary made, it would seem, for the use of the governor. There are listed 713 persons of all colors, soldiers and government officials being omitted. The persons named were

5. *Diario del Gobierno Constitucional de la Habana*, January 18 and 20, 1813 ; and *Archivo Nacional de Cuba*, Gobierno Superior Civil, legajo 861, number 20160.

6. For the appointment see *American State Papers, Miscellaneous*, II, pp. 904-905.

shown to have lived in one hundred and eighty-two houses. The official summary puts the total at 695 persons; but evidently the tabulation was carelessly made; in fact, it will be necessary later to call attention to other errors in the official summary.

At first glance it would appear that Governor Callava might have been responsible for making the total appear as small as possible in order to help in the battle with the *alcalde*, but the erratic variation of other figures in the summary disproves this view. Nevertheless, in spite of the careless manner in which this summary was made, it merits quotation because it indicates the type of information that the authorities, considered as important:

		1 to 14 years	78	
	Males		93	235
WHITES		over 45	64	
	Females	1 to 14	77	
		14 to 45	104	206
over 45		25		
FREE COLORED	Males	1 to 14	60	
		14 to 45	76	108
		over 45	12	
	Females	1 to 14	46	
		14 to 45	80	146
		over 45	20	
		total	695	

The age groups have no bearing whatever on the political situation that called forth the census. Rather the grouping would suggest a desire on the part of the officials to ascertain the persons capable of child-bearing or military service. The only part of the summary concerned with politics is a note at the bottom which said: "There are in this Plaza and district one hundred and twenty-six Citizens."

As for the mistakes in the compilation: the greatest variation appears in the total for whites. Instead of 235 white males and 206 white females, a glance at the census list shows the figures to be 252 and 199 respectively. The totals for colored

are more nearly correct. Whereas the summary shows 254 males and females, the list of names reveals 259. If, however, the three mestizas cited are included among the colored population, there is a difference of only one from the official summary.

Turning from the summary to the complete list; since the individuals are listed according to whether they were white, black; mulatto or mestizo, it is possible to subdivide the colored population. In this way we find 65 blacks and 194 mulattoes, besides the three persons of part Indian blood. It is known that there were many Negro slaves in Pensacola at the time, but their names do not appear.

By a check through the tabulation of birthplaces, it appears that only seven of Pensacola's residents who were native born were forty years old or over; that is, old enough to have been living there before the return of Spanish rule in 1781. Of these seven, four were colored. The other three were white women, two of whom seem to have belonged to the same family. It may be noted also that of the 713 persons in the census list, 370 were born in Pensacola. Of these 230 were white, 18 black, and 122 mulattoes. There were 17 persons from the neighboring town of Mobile (1 white, 3 blacks, and 4 mulattoes). Five came from Baton Rouge which, like Mobile, was then in American hands although still claimed by Spain as part of West Florida. From the part of Louisiana considered as such by Spain there were 155 persons (79 whites, 16 blacks, and 60 mulattoes). Spain and her dominions contributed as follows :

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Catalonia	22
Canaries	13
Cuba	10 (7 whites and 2 blacks)
Centa	3
Valencia	3
Vizcaya	2
Andalusia	4
Galicia	8
Castilla	7
Mayorca	3
New Spain	7
Santander	1
San Roque	1
Malaga	2
Alicante	1
Sevilla	2
Toledo	1
Xerez	1
Aragon	1
Asturias	1
Cartegena	2
Santo Domingo	1
Madrid	1
Ferol	1
From elsewhere they came as follows:	
France	5
Italy	3
Germany	3
Canada	1 (a white woman)
Scotland	
Georgia	1 (Negro woman)
Portugal	2
Carolina	3 (2 whites and 1 black)
Charleston	2 (1 white and 1 black)
Genoa	1
Philadelphia	1
Normandy	1
Africa	18 (5 males and 13 females)
Ocsin	1
Virginia	4 (3 whites and 1 black)
Indian Nation	5 (blacks)
Jamaica	1
Rome	1
Ireland	1
England	2 (both white, a man and a woman)
Baltimore	1 (black)

On the occupational side we find that two barbers, one white and one colored, were able to care for the male heads of Pensacola. There were an equal number of billiard parlor operators; but there was only one surgeon, one innkeeper, one gunsmith and one confectioner, all white men. Three white

cigarmakers supplied commercial smokes. Only three men, all colored, plied the trade of mason, but the carpenter's trade was bi-racial with seven whites and ten blacks and mulattoes. Both races also served as shoemakers (seven whites and fifteen blacks), as fishermen (10 whites and 3 blacks), as bakers (6 whites and 2 blacks), as tailors (3 whites and 2 blacks), and as blacksmiths (3 whites and 1 black). One Negro woman professed to be a pastry cook, while another was a seller of tripe. The port captain was of course white, as were all of the 14 sailors listed. Two other whites were wagoners, 8 were forest rangers, 3 were cattle men, and one a cowboy. The sacristan was also white, and so was the interpreter and the three silversmiths. The 18 grocers were all white, mostly from Spain (Galicia and Catalonia), but the shipkeepers were mixed, ten being white and two colored. Twenty-five white men and one white woman were farmers, but two Negro men were also in the same category. Fourteen white men were listed simply as employees, as was also one white woman. Only eleven white women professed to have any other occupation than that of housewife. The lady farmer has been mentioned. One white woman was a laundress, six were seamstresses, while one rated as a dressmaker.

Of the colored women, only four appear to have been housewives. Besides the pastry cook, the two peddlers and the tripe-seller, there were 23 who classified themselves as seamstresses, 27 as laundresses, and one as a servant. One Indian woman also professed to wash for a living.

The white seamstresses appear from the records, to have been, for the most part, respectable widows, but as much cannot be said for the women of color. The compilers of the census must have raised their

eyebrows knowingly as they wrote "seamstress" or "laundress" after the names of fifty Negro and mulatto women, for with very few exceptions they were unmarried mothers living openly with white men. Of the 379 persons whose parentage is given, 101 were illegitimate. The town could boast of 55 married women and 34 widows, but there were also 39 mothers of illegitimate children besides 8 women without children living openly with men who were not their husbands. In 23 cases colored women lived with white men, while only 6 lived with men of their own race. It should be said, however, that only one white woman is listed as the mother of an illegitimate child and her paramour is not given.

In a number of cases the children of the same Negro mother are separated into blacks and mulattoes. This is true in a few instances when the mother was living with a white man at the time of the census. Evidently a change of paramours was not infrequent. Several moral oddities, or what seemed to be such, are to be noted. There was, for instance, an unmarried mulatto woman of 28 years with three children of the same color (aged 7, 4, and 1) living in the same house with an unmarried grocer of 43 years and a retired sergeant of 61 also unmarried. Again there is the case of a mulatto laundress from Georgia, aged 19, who lived in the same house as three bakers of 41, 34, and 21 years respectively. Then, too, there was a mulatto seamstress from Louisiana who, although unmarried, lived with a shopkeeper who was listed as married, but whose wife does not appear in the census. It should be noted also that widows and widowers were carefully listed as such.

A grocer from Santander was married but he lived alone. A fellow grocer did not live alone but with an unmarried negro woman, the mother of two

mulatto children. Nor was this all ; there was also in his house an unmarried negro mother who had three mulatto children. An unmarried shoemaker lived with his son. A mulatto girl of 19 lived in the house with a white employer of 28, and a mulatto carpenter of 27. And there was a mulatto woman of 50 years, who made her home with a grocer of the same age, while in the same house lived a native Pensacola tailor of 30 years.

Pensacola was an interesting town in 1820 despite its small population.