Florida Historical Quarterly

Volume 25
Number 3 *Florida Historical Quarterly, Vol 25, Issue 3*

Article 8

1946

Book Reviews

Florida Historical Society
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BOOK REVIEWS

A Prince in their Midst: The Adventurous Life of Achille Murat on the American Frontier. By A. J. Hanna (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1946. pp. xi, 275, illustrations, bibliography. $3.00)

It has long been known that Floridians once had a prince in their midst and that his name was Murat. So much, and little more, was knowledge ; beyond that was legend compounded of rumor, gossip, exaggeration, and outright invention. Out of this came our indistinct image of Murat as a man of mystery and glamour to be remembered, if remembered at all, only for his reputed eccentricities.

Such a legendary character is a direct challenge to the historian, and Professor Hanna undertook the task of piercing the encrusting legend to discover the Prince within. His investigation could draw little help from printed material; it was only by examination of manuscript sources, especially the letters of Murat himself, that even the ordinary facts of Murat's life could be gleaned. The author located these letters in Italy, France, Austria, and in various collections in the United States. They revealed the facts of Murat's career; Murat's more formal writings added their revelations of his ideas and principles. So extensive was the search for materials that the reviewer cannot believe that any vital source has been overlooked. Neither can he believe that from the sources now existing any more complete biography of Murat could be written.

The Prince Murat who emerges from this painstaking study is a Murat quite different from the Prince of popular fancy. The glamour has gone with the mystery. This impression of departed glamour is strengthened by the art of the author in telling his story: the style is restrained, matter-of-fact, sedate, studiously dispassionate. Only occasionally does a sly innuendo or a caustic epigram remind the reader that the author of *A Prince* is also co-author of *The St. Johns.* The style is fashioned, if not to the author, at least to the subject, of the biography.

Murat, aged 22, seeking relief from an irksome life of regimented exile in Austria came to the United States in 1823 and after a short visit with his Uncle Joseph in New Jersey went on to Florida, being influenced thereto by that original Florida booster, Richard K. Call whom he had met in Washington. He brought with him certain assets and liabilities. His assets were the glory of his name, and his consuming ambition to win fame and fortune for himself; his liabilities were an impetuous temperament and a pronounced incapacity for patient application. With scanty deliberation, or none, he bought a plantation near St. Augustine, but after a year of something less than success as a planter he followed the rainbow to the frontier of the present Jefferson county where, within some fifteen miles of the new capital Tallahassee, he acquired a plantation ("Lipona"), married the widow Catherine Gray, and set out again in pursuit of his double goal. Here, but for a two-year sojourn in New Orleans, he continued to make his home until his death in 1847.

His life in Florida divides itself into two periods of ten years each. The first period, 1825-1835 is a time of ambition, of striving and of constant hope; the second, 1837-1847 is a period of hopelessness, of resignation, and of abject submission to Giant Despair. It was in the first period that Murat made his failure, in the second period that he acknowledged it. He failed to gain wealth. As a planter his application was too inconstant for success; as a business man his judgment was too warped by his visions. As a prelude to a coveted public career he studied law, was admitted to practice and had law offices in Tallahassee and at his plantation home. The law brought him some remuneration and a modest recognition, but as a stepping-stone to political preferment it proved altogether vain, and Murat was beaten in the only race he ever ran, for a seat in the Legislative Council. The only political office he ever held was that of county judge of Jefferson county, and he held this by appointment. Other appointive offices were those of postmaster (at "Lipona") and of inspector of West Point; for neither of

these positions did he apparently have any qualification other than his name. His nearest approach to success was in his writing, much of which was done in England at a period of enforced idleness while waiting in vain an opportunity to re-enter Continental politics. His two books describing American life and explaining American government were designed for Europeans and were popular enough to receive translation into German, Dutch, Swedish, and English.

The second period of Murat's life finds him bankrupt as a result of extravagance and participation in wildcat business. The sordid tentacles of the Union bank dragged him under, the panic of 1837 drove the price of cotton to its nethermost depths, a rampant, if somewhat out-at-the-elbows democracy denied him political preferment. Murat had fought a good fight but he had finished his course. He gave himself up to intemperance and let himself sink into sloth. He was an old man at forty. He was growing bald and was becoming as fat as his Uncle Napoleon. Incapable of further effort to escape the slough of despond he died April 15, 1847.

As a factor in Florida history Murat was of negligible importance. It is impossible to believe that he was ever able to influence the course of events in the territory or, to any great extent, even in his own section. This judgment does not imply that the author's work has been wasted. There are times when the most valuable thing the historian can do is to establish a negative. The author thinks that Murat never became an American; that his heart, consciously or sub-consciously was always in Europe. That may be; but at least he became a Southerner, espousing and expounding the Southern view of slavery and tariff. The author thinks, also, that, for all his trying to become a democrat, he always remained an aristocrat. It would seem not impossible to be both.

The reviewer recognizes in this book but one misstatement of fact: Murat's plantation is said to have been fifteen miles west of Tallahassee whereas it was really east. This is evidently a slip of the pen. It can be presumed that "Wascissa" is a variant, not a misspelling,

of Wacissa, and that DuVal was the contemporary form of Duval. The strictures on Lafayette are harsh and the author's view of the settling and revolt of Texas seems inconsistent with the facts established by Professor Barker.

None of these things affects the value of the book, and that value is high. For Floridians its highest value is not that it extends the Bonaparte saga or reconstructs a picture of the Southern frontier but that with clarity and finality it ends the myths and legends surrounding Murat by the simple (and much neglected) device of establishing the facts. It may occur to the remembering reader that the same author once performed a similar task in identical fashion in a book called *Flight into Oblivion.*

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Jonathan Dickinson's Journal or God's Protecting Providence. Being the Narrative of a Journey from Port Royal in Jamaica to Philadelphia between August 23, 1696 and April 1, 1697. Edited by Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles McLean Andrews. (Yale Historical Publications, Manuscripts and Edited Texts, XIX.) New Haven, Yale University Press, 1945. pp. x, 252, illustrations and maps. $3.00

God's Protecting Providence, the journal in which Jonathan Dickinson recorded a "remarkable deliverance" from the savages of Florida, was originally published in Philadelphia by Reinier Jansen in 1699, the first of twenty issues and editions in which the work was brought out at various times and places within the ensuing two centuries. Among the earliest of the Indian Captivities, it remains for many of us second in interest to none of its successors.

Note - Dr. Lawrence C. Wroth, who has given us this review, is librarian of John Carter Brown Library, in which is a noteworthy collection of early editions of Dickinson's *Journal,* seven prior to and including that of 1774. For other of the earliest and rarest of Florida historical material see *Source Materials of Florida History in the John Carter Brown Library of Brown University* in this QUARTERLY, xx pp. 3-46 (July, 1941).

Dickinson's journal is a literate narrative written by a Quaker of good education and of good position among the planters and merchants in his native island of Jamaica. On September 23, 1696, the barkentine *Reformation* in which he was sailing upon a trading voyage from Jamaica to Philadelphia, was wrecked off Jupiter Island, Florida, near the mouth of Jupiter Inlet into which flows the Loxahatchee River. Taken into a rigorous custody by the Jobeses Indians of that area, the ship's company suffered in that captivity, and in their escape from it, hardships which in the reading seem almost unendurable. It was probably because of certain terms in the agreement between England and Spain, made effective by the Treaty of Madrid in 1670, that the Spanish officials in Florida proved themselves extremely helpful to the unfortunate Englishmen. It was the efforts of the Spanish governor, added to their own initiative, which brought Dickinson and most of his company, including his wife and infant son, safely to St. Augustine. Well received at that place by the authorities and generously aided in the matter of money, food, and clothing, they were soon afterwards guided thence to South Carolina. Arriving at Charleston late in December, 1696, Dickinson proceeded to Philadelphia, which he reached in April of the following year. His later life in that city forms no part of the narrative, but an appendix to the Andrews edition of the book before us carries on adequately with his biography as trader, citizen, and member of the local Society of Friends.

The narrative of Dickinson's experience, aside from its moving quality as a human document, has direct interest for the historian in the glimpses it offers of Spain in Florida in the period when, her power declining, she yet was holding tenaciously to what she had long ago established in that outpost of her American dominion. The documentation of that period is sparse, certainly so far as printed works are concerned, whether in English or Spanish. Dickinson's account of the nature and customs of the Indians by whom he was held or through

whose country he passed is another valuable feature of his journal, even though he tells as much by omission or by implication as by direct statement. His book stands, for example, with Father Pareja's *Catecismo* and *Confessionario,* with Le Moyne's and Hawkins's narratives, and with brief passages in one or two general works as basis for what is known today of the Timuquan Indians. Ten years after he saw those people in relative prosperity and contentment there began the complete annihilation which was their fate as adherents of the Spanish in the war with the English for dominion in Florida.

The book is generously planned by the editors, Evangeline Walker Andrews and the late Charles McLean Andrews. It begins with an introduction written by Mrs. Andrews, who concludes her comprehensive historical sketch of the background of the Dickinson voyage with the sentence, "It makes me proud and happy to have my name appear with his on the title-page of this reprint of Dickinson's *Journal,* which represents the last of our many voyagings together, as we explored, he as captain, I as mate, the enchanted realm of American Colonial History." Mrs. Andrews's introduction is followed by a reprint of the narrative from the text of the first edition. In a series of full and leisurely appendices, Dr. Andrews discusses the contemporary evidence which supports the truth of the narrative, and presents biographical sketches of Dickinson and the more important of the companions who shared with him the rigors and terrors of the adventure. The place of the Bahama Channel in Spain's American policy is clearly stated. An important section deals with the history of the Florida Indians and their state in the late seventeenth century. Mr. Samuel A. Galpin contributes a note on barkentines. A final section of the book is devoted to the bibliography of the narrative, with discussion of each edition and issue, locations of copies, and reproductions of title-pages. * Dr. Andrews's fresh account of Reinier Jansen, the Philadelphia printer, and of the Quaker printers in London is a contribution

Vide - **Florida Historical Quarterly* XXI. 107-126: Charles M. Andrews, "God's Protecting Providence, A Journal of Jonathan Dickinson."

of value to the history of the press in the United States. Four maps make a pertient addition to the clarification of the additional narrative.

The character of the Dickinson narrative and its historical implications would have been enough to engage the attention of Dr. and Mrs. Andrews even if their Florida home had not been upon the summit of the shell mound which rises beside Jupiter Inlet. Their love for that spot was additional incentive to the intensive study they made of the book. Dr. Andrews's great knowledge of American colonial origins and his experience in the ways and methods of research are here applied to what may seem to be a series of minor problems in connection with a source book of secondary importance. It is unnecessary to say that through his learned treatment of the book it is no longer a source of secondary importance. He has made of it, in the edition before us, one of the primary books for the study of the Southeast of the United States.

LAWRENCE C. WROTH.