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## CARPETBAG IMPERIALISM IN FLORIDA 1862-1868

by **GEORGE WINSTON SMITH**

The great Civil War battlefields were far from Florida. Compared with the Wilderness campaign, the bloody slaughter of Pittsburg Landing or other major conflicts, even Olustee was a minor battle on the margin of the war. Yet in addition to keeping Florida in the Confederacy, it and other lesser encounters revealed social forces which were destined to alter the fabric of Florida's society, and radically influence the future, of all the South. For with the occupying forces of the Union army came political and economic adventurers, the successors of a few earlier Yankee pioneers in Florida, and the predecessors of a wave of Northern enterprisers eagerly seeking their fortunes in the peninsula during the generation after the close of the war. Usually unsuccessful, and often ridiculous in their dishonesty, these carpetbaggers were encouraged to entertain visions of quick fortunes by a belief that they could arouse strong and widespread Northern interest in the economic development of the South. In that lay their significance: they were only a frothy crest, but they were none the less a part of a gradually swelling tide of Northern influence.

### **(I) NORTHERN ECONOMIC INTEREST IN ANTE-BELLUM**

#### FLORIDA

The origins of Northern interest in Florida go back at least as far as the early nineteenth century, when there were scattered instances of Northern migration to the Spanish territory. Upon visiting St. Augustine in 1827, Ralph Waldo Emerson commented upon the peculiarities of certain dwellers who had come there from the North.<sup>1</sup> Already that city was attracting transient Northerners who were seeking to escape from harsh weather, and, in phrases which would have been most

1. Mrs. Henry L. Richmond, "Ralph Waldo Emerson in Florida," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (1939), p.84; Webster Merritt, "Physicians and Medicine in Early Jacksonville," *ibid.*, XXIV (1946), pp.266-269.

familiar to readers of travel literature in later days, the *Southern Review* promoted this attention. "Augustine," enthused one of the *Review's* writers, "attracts by its native aspect, its historical recollections, its luscious orangeries, and the hospitality and gaiety of its inhabitants. Those who visit it for health, return to visit it for pleasure."<sup>2</sup>

Although a hard freeze in 1835 killed St. Augustine's orange trees and cut off its thriving sea-borne trade in fruit, the Yankees continued to enjoy the cool ocean breeze as they strolled about its square each morning. At the Florida House, then the fashionable hotel, they lounged on the piazza, or played backgammon. More active visitors made up bathing or riding parties, and whiled away the hours at the nine-pin alley. After enjoying its recreations in the spring of 1843, William Cullen Bryant concluded that St. Augustine's facilities were improving each year; better advertising would make it still more popular. Northern investors were buying even then some property in the Florida east coast towns. On the same boat with Bryant were two or three persons who had come to make purchases; and, as Bryant further noted, emigrants from the North were living on a number of plantations along the St. Johns river. Confusion over land titles extending back to the Spanish grants, and the ill fortune of citrus growers who saw their new trees destroyed by coccus insects tended to discourage immigration; but the Indian wars were practically at an end and some newcomers expected to take advantage of a federal statute, the Armed Occupation Act, assigning 160 acres of land to settlers on the public domain in Florida.<sup>3</sup>

2. "Florida," *The Southern Review*, VI (1830), p.416.

3. William Cullen Bryant, *Letters of a Traveller* . . . (New York, 1869), pp.107-109. For settlers on the public domain, see Thomas H. Benton, *Thirty Years' View* (2 vols., New York, 1854-1856), II, pp.167-171; Sidney W. Martin, "The Public Domain in Territorial Florida," *The Journal of Southern History*, X (1944), pp.185-187.

In the early 1850's a few settlers from Northern states who were beginning to clear land for orange groves about forty miles below Cape Canaveral, provided the inspiration for a periodical notice which exhorted: "How many poor working men of the North, whose labor is the support of helpless families, and who are destined to die by inches of that dreadful disease, consumption, by remaining in their present situation, might have their lives prolonged to a green and happy old age by changing their occupation, and engaging in the rural employments of this genial region! . . . The attractions of the Indian River for those who wish to make their own labor their capital . . . are great . . . it is one of the best 'poor man's countries' that we know of. . . ." <sup>4</sup>

Population, however, increased slowly in Florida. To be sure, soon after 1850, a number of new orange groves came into bearing in both the Tampa and St. Augustine areas, <sup>5</sup> but as Frederika Bremer noted while on her travels through the St. Johns valley, even then some plantations stood abandoned. <sup>6</sup> No doubt the narrow limits of Northern interest were fixed in part by the circulation of unfavorable reports on Florida by visitors who wrote descriptions of "stagnant wastes and ponds", noxious reptiles and insect pests. <sup>7</sup> In attempting to refute such disparagement *De Bow's Review*, in 1853, secured a letter from Joseph C. G. Kennedy, Superintendent of the Census, who took issue with those who "slandered [Florida] as being insalubrious," and berated "some transient visitors" [who] . . . ignorant of the ordinances of Providence for the health in tropical regions, and ignorant of the genial

4. "East Florida: Her Lands and Agricultural Productions," *The Southern Quarterly Review*, XXVI (1854), pp.304-329-332.

5. Robert Gamble Jr. to Thomas Ewbank, December 18, 1851, in *Report of the Commissioner of Patents For the Year 1851, Senate Executive Document*, No. 18, 32nd Congress, 1st Session, p.328.

6. Frederika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World* (2 vols. New York, 1853), II, p.471.

7. James M. Phillippo, *The United States and Cuba* (New York, 1857), pp.298-300; "East Florida-Alligators-The Seminoles, etc.," *The Knickerbocker*, VIII (1836), pp.150-155.

effect of the climate upon the soil . . . [denounced] the lands of Florida as "barren sands." <sup>8</sup>

By the census of 1860 there were in Florida 1,807 persons of Northern nativity. Of these northern-born residents, 688 were from New York, 295 from Massachusetts, 222 from Maine, 210 from Connecticut, 201 from Pennsylvania, with lower numbers from the rest, ranging down to eight from Illinois, six from Wisconsin, three from Iowa, and none from Minnesota. These numbers, in 1860, were in a total free population of 140,424. <sup>9</sup> New Englanders who had come to Florida reported themselves in the 1850 compilation as planters, lumber merchants, brick masons, millers, cabinet makers, attorneys, physicians, ship carpenters, watchmakers, engineers, lighthouse keepers, mill-wrights, booksellers, ministers of the gospel, school teachers, machinists, laborers, soldiers, sailors, army sutlers, and in still other professions or trades. <sup>10</sup>

### Commercial Contacts

The ante-bellum commercial contacts of Florida with the North, if not particularly extensive, were at least varied. Yankees came in their craft to fish off the coast, and did a profitable business by carrying their catch to Cuba during the Lenten season. <sup>11</sup> For many years nearly all the sponges collected on the Florida reef and dried at Key West went to a New York merchant who

8. "Florida-Its Position, Resources, and Destiny," *De Bow's Review*, XIV (1853), p.327.
9. "Nativities of the Free Population," in Joseph C. G. Kennedy, comp., *Population of the United States in 1860, Compiled From the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1864), p.56.
10. Frank M. Hawes, "New Englanders in the Florida Census of 1850," *The New England Historical and Geneological Register*, LXXVI (1922), pp.44-54.
11. "Florida. . .," *De Bow's Review*, XXX (1861), pp.639-648 ; For twenty years, 1840-1860, a group of New England fishermen spent each winter on the coast near Pensacola; they packed their fish in salt and traded with planters in Alabama and Georgia. See, George B. Goode, *The Fisheries and Fishery Industry of the United States* (5 vols., Washington, Government printing office, 1887), II, p.567.

exercised something of a monopoly.<sup>12</sup> By 1845 the scattered settlers on the lower east coast were annually manufacturing for Northern markets twenty thousand pounds of arrowroot. Northern crews came to cut lumber in Nassau and Duval counties; coasting vessels took northward much of this live oak, cedar, and pine, until 50,000,000 board feet were each year going out of the St. Johns river region. Other Florida exports useful to the North were staves, bricks, hides, horn, tallow, beeswax, peltries, sugar and fruit. New York buyers also offered the highest prices for baled indigo leaves. In the ten years which preceded the War for Southern Independence, an association of capitalists, chiefly of Boston, backed David L. Yulee in undertaking surveys for a trans-peninsular railroad; and, when the government provided a land grant, Northern investors bought some of the bonds of the Fernandina and Cedar Keys line which finally reached its western terminus on the Gulf in 1861.<sup>13</sup> These were the rather tenuous links of trade and capital which already on the eve of the great civil conflict had begun to join the wealth of Florida to Northern influence in a chain of economic development destined eventually to transform the peninsula. On the other hand, as the great political crisis of 1861 gathered and broke upon a bewildered people, the monetary stake of a few business men was insufficient cause for general concern in the North as Florida followed the example of South Carolina, and became the second State to secede from the Union.

#### *Sea-borne Commerce*

Florida, however, was deeply involved in another economic issue which contributed to the determination of many a substantial Northern citizen to support the

12. "Along the Florida Reef," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, XLII (1871), p.359.
13. Dorothy Dodd, "Florida in 1845," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. XXIV (1945), p.15; John L. Williams, *The Territory of Florida* (New York, 1837), p.109; "Florida-Its Position, Resources, and Destiny," *De Bow's Review*, XIV (1853), p.322.

Federal government's final policy of military coercion against the South. The problem grew out of the fact that the trade of the North with Gulf ports, Central America, and the Pacific coast passed through the Straits of Florida. For 1856 alone, the value of property (*i.e.* merchandise, specie and tonnage) negotiating the narrow channel through the reefs was \$450,000,000.<sup>14</sup> With secession came the dread fear that should the forts at Key West and Tortugas fall away from the control of Federal garrisons into the hands of State authorities or the Southern confederacy, so too would pass over control of commerce in the Gulf. Henry J. Raymond, publisher of the *New York Times*, warned the Alabama "fire-eater" William L. Yancey that if the Southern States successfully carried out their project the North would be "surrendering to a foreign and hostile power . . . the whole Gulf. . . ." <sup>15</sup> Key West was an essential coaling and supply station for the United States navy's Gulf squadron. Moreover, the Florida wreck and salvage cases, with the lapse of Federal control, might go under the jurisdiction of a "secession judge" antagonistic to Northern commercial interests ; deference to the "wrecker influence" would degenerate into "freebooting and piracy." <sup>16</sup>

Concern for the strategic Florida coast heightened in the North when newspapers reprinted the Charleston Mercury's taunts that Northern war vessels would be forced to operate at such distances from their bases of supply that they would be ineffective in Southern waters, with the result that Yankee commerce, especially the vessels bearing gold from California, would "fall an easy prey to our bold [Confederate] privateers." <sup>17</sup>

14. "Florida-The Key of the Gulf," *De Bow's Review*, XXI (1856), pp.283-286.

15. Henry J. Raymond, *Disunion and Slavery. A Series of Letters To Hon. W. L. Yancey of Alabama* (New York, 1861?), p.19.

16. *New York Times*, January 9, 1861.

17. Philadelphia Press, January 10, 1861; John S. C. Abbott, "Heroic Deeds of Heroic Men . . . Florida. Her Crime and Punishment," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, XXXIII (1866), p.705.

With this prospect came the revival of an anti-slavery bogey, namely the charge that the Southern "slave drivers" would create a great Southern slave empire around the curving shores of the Mexican gulf. From thence forward the North might expect to witness Confederate filibustering expeditions against Mexico, Central America, and Cuba.<sup>18</sup> Writing for the columns of a conservative New York commercial paper, one frightened observer predicted that with the possible exception of "old Algiers on the Mediterranean", the projected Southern Confederacy would soon become "the greatest buccaneering community" in the world's history,<sup>19</sup> and even should that fail to materialize, others were ready to testify that by taking advantage of American weakness arising from division, Spanish adventurers might try to regain Florida, or British seekers after political dominion might attempt to put their "future supply of cotton beyond a doubt."<sup>20</sup> James S. Pike, at the time Washington correspondent of the New York *Tribune* but soon to become United States minister to the Netherlands, demonstrated that both Spain and France had military bases in the West Indies, while England held Jamaica. The commerce of the free states pouring through the Gulf of Mexico, and the possession of the Florida forts necessary for its protection were, in his opinion, "in themselves of sufficient importance to create and justify a war" by the United States upon the Southern Confederacy.<sup>21</sup> Horace Greeley, the *Tribune's* mercurial publisher, went even further. A month earlier he had wavered toward a policy of peaceable disunion, but as Buchanan and his hastily reorganized cabinet grappled with problems of administrative authority in January, Greeley wrathfully admonished them that if the Key West fortifications, recently completed at the cost of a million dollars and constructed for the protec-

18. New York *Times*, January 1, 1861.

19. New York *Courier and Enquirer*, December 13, 1860.

20. Philadelphia *Press*, April 14, 1861.

21. New York *Tribune*, January 11, 1861.



tion of American commerce passing through the Gulf, were to be deemed the rightful property of Florida, then there was no Federal government, nor would the North be a People—"only a mob, such as any fishhorn may collect, and any stream of water from a fire-engine disperse."<sup>22</sup>

The Secretary of the Treasury, John A. Dix, soon let it be known that he agreed with those who saw disaster to the North in Florida's secession. To the Florida reef he sent a special agent with arms for the lighthouse keepers.<sup>23</sup> Before the end of January, the veteran commander-in-chief of the Federal army, Winfield Scott, strengthened the garrison at Fort Taylor (Key West), and, on April 13, Montgomery Meigs arrived there bringing commissions for new judicial officers replacing those who had followed the sentiments of most Key West inhabitants and had resigned their Federal offices. More important than that, Meigs conveyed to the commandant an authority to invoke martial law.<sup>24</sup> The Northern government intended to retain its grip upon Florida.

#### (II) MILITARY OCCUPATION : FIRST PHASE

At the beginning of the war, Key West, Tortugas and Fort Pickens (guarding the entrance of Pensacola bay) were the only Florida bases remaining under Federal authority, and none were on the mainland. Confederate counter-measures which dispatched stores and troops to Pensacola, Apalachicola, St. Johns Bluff (below Jacksonville near the mouth of the St. Johns river), and Fernandina, were too little if not too late, for, by the spring of 1862 Federal forces held all these.<sup>25</sup> Flag Officer Samuel F. DuPont, commanding the Federal South Atlantic Blockading Squadron, particularly

22. *Ibid.*, January 14, 1861.

23. *House Executive Document*, No. 72, 36th Congress, 2nd Session, p.13.

24. John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History* (10 Vols., New York, 1890), IV, p.14.

25. Kathryn Trimmer Abbey, *Florida, Land of Change* (Chapel Hill, 1941), pp.282-284.

wanted Fernandina, on strategic Amelia Island, as a coaling station.<sup>26</sup> More broadly, the Florida operations were a part of the Northern war strategy which required the capture of Confederate port cities, and the control of the seacoast with an effective blockade to "crush the rebellion in its very heart."<sup>27</sup> Fernandina fell after slight resistance, and at St. Augustine there was even the pretence of welcoming for Federal occupation. Yankee owners of Jacksonville real estate were waiting on the docks with tales of the destruction which the torches of retreating Confederates had wrought upon their saw mills and lumber.<sup>28</sup>

The discovery of valuable timber and the promise of other secreted resources began to interject another and more tangible motive for the Northern wartime control of Florida. Sanguine observers in the North began to see a monetary advantage in developing the "loyalty" of the Florida population; with no knowledge of quantity they guessed that perhaps 150,000 bales of cotton, together with correspondingly large quantities of rice, sugar, and tobacco might come forward to market.<sup>29</sup> As Dupont's vessels began to scurry up the coastal rivers searching for stores of the country's products, Harrison O. Briggs, a Boston shipbuilder, informed his senator, Charles Sumner, he had just learned from an east Florida gentleman that there were large amounts of lumber there "in the hands of *professedly* Union men. . . ." Could but Sumner make the proper arrangements with the Secretary of the Treasury, Briggs was ready to

26. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (30 vols., Washington, Government Printing Office, 1894-1922), Series I, XII, pp.195-198 (hereafter cited as O.R.N.); *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (129 vols., Washington, Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, VI, esp. pp.237-264 (hereafter cited as O.R.)

27. John C. Ropes, *The Story of the Civil War* (3 vols., New York, 1894-1913), I, pp.175-185; Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History*, V, pp.250-251.

28. O.R.N., Series I, XII, pp.477, 571-578, 586-587, 588-592, 595-617, 622-623; *New York Times*, March 20, 21, 1862.

29. *Ibid.*, November 6, 1861, March 11, 1862.

start for Florida within a week. A "unionist" who had been a Florida business man volunteered his services directly to Salmon P. Chase, head of the Treasury Department, to hurry along shipments of cotton from the peninsula.<sup>30</sup> With great forethought, however, Chase's Treasury Department officials already had anticipated these details by accompanying the expedition. Once in Florida, William H. Reynolds, the treasury agent for abandoned property, was able to seize within a few days 26 bales of ginned upland cotton, 35 barrels of turpentine and 250 barrels of resin, all of which he arranged to send to New York.<sup>31</sup>

#### *The First Retreat*

Just as further prospects of lucrative adventure were beginning to arise, the DuPont-Wright forces received an order recalling them from Jacksonville, and along with them went most of the aspiration for an early exploitation of East Florida.<sup>32</sup> Especially hard hit by the withdrawal were a small coterie of Jacksonville unionists who had already held one meeting and called a convention for April 10 to establish a government for the State. Since they feared reprisals if they remained behind after the Federal troops had gone, a number of these disappointed union sympathizers boarded the Union transports with their families and as much of their property as they could take with them. Perhaps the most important of these refugees was John S. Sammis who was later to return to Jacksonville in the unsavory role of Tax Commissioner. Even as he temporari-

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30. O.R.N., Series I, XII, pp.584-585, 638-639, 655, 768, 793 ; Briggs to Sumner, March 20, 1862, Miscellaneous Letters Received, Secretary's Files, General Records of the Treasury Department, Record Group 56, National Archives; *id.* to Salmon P. Chase, March 30, 1862, *ibid.*; Alfred W. Ladd to *id.*, March 11, 1862, Chase MSS., Vol. 57, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.
31. William H. Reynolds to *id.*, March 10, 1862, Port Royal Correspondence, General Records of the Treasury Department, Record Group 56, National Archives.
32. O.R., Series I, VI, pp.251-252, 263; *House Executive Document*, No. 106, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, 1 p.

ly left Florida, Sammis had the foresight to send fifty-eight bags of his cotton to a Northern market.<sup>33</sup>

In their own State, the Florida unionists were neither prominent nor numerous. With few exceptions they were either poor-white farmers or Northern emigrants who had settled in the east coast towns. It was the latter type which left with the Federal troops and journeyed northward to New York and Washington. Once there, they began to exploit their peculiar status as "Southern loyalists" to garner in political influence or private gain. President Lincoln and others with patronage favors to dispense began to receive urgent petitions beseeching the Federal government to find places for the patriotic exiles on its pay rolls.

At the same time they were instigating these pressures, the Florida unionists turned their attention to winning the support of influential New York business men for a renewed military campaign to recover all of Florida. When Jacksonville was abandoned by DuPont and Wright, Federal troops had remained in St. Augustine and Fernandina, so the unionists had but to urge that a limited movement from those points to the Jacksonville area would be sufficient to arouse a strong feeling of latent unionism with consequent reorganization of the State under "loyal" auspices. By taking advantage of the fall election campaign of 1862, the "loyalists" were able to make their pleas a part of radical anti-slavery Republican campaign propaganda. Especially on October 24, 1862, at a large meeting in the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Philip Fraser of Florida (formerly of New Jersey), joined with other "voices of the South" to describe the plight of supposed millions of Southern patriots who were allegedly being ground to the earth by the "rebels'" vicious atrocities.

33. O.R.N., Series I, XII, pp.642-643, 709-710, 712, 716, 717, 728-729, 739-740; Horatio G. Wright to Hiram Barney, April 7, 1862, Port Royal Correspondence; Barney to Salmon P. Chase, April 25, 1862, *ibid.*

*Lyman D. Stickney*

At the Brooklyn meeting was perhaps the most opportunistic of all the Florida unionists, Lyman D. Stickney ; who declared that he attended at the request of "prominent persons," and brought with him a set of resolutions which were adopted with noisy unanimity. The first of these asserted: ". . . in the slave system of the South, and the free institutions of the North, we recognize an antagonism which is useless to disguise and impossible to repress."<sup>34</sup> Behind this apparently clear-cut statement of William H. Seward's "irrepressible conflict" doctrine was a shifty manipulator who as late as January 1861, had received a concession from the secession legislature of Florida ; because he was skillful enough similarly to win the favor of Salmon P. Chase and a number of New York business men he was to become the most unscrupulous of all the Northern wartime carpetbaggers in Florida - indeed one of the most prominent figures in the Federal military occupation of that state.

Stickney's checkered antebellum career, identified him generally with regions other than Florida. A native of Vermont, he appeared in the 1840's at Robert Owen's New Harmony community in Indiana. After that, with George D. Prentice of Louisville, he became involved in a speculative railroad promotion, and lived in Memphis, where he was also associated with a slate company venture. With a flair for turgid journalism, he served for a number of years as one of the editors of the Memphis *Enquirer*, until finally, in 1859, a quarrel with the publishers induced him to leave both the paper and Memphis. He travelled next to New Orleans, but only to turn

34. J. W. Bryant to John J. Crittenden, May 3, 1862, Crittenden MSS., Vol. 27, MS. Div., Lib. Con. ; Lyman D. Stickney to O. H. Browning, June 11, 1862, Lincoln MSS., Vol. 78, MS. Div. L. C. ; Petition, dated New York, June 16, 1862, signed by William Alsop, Benjamin F. Manierre, L. S. Lathrop, N. L. McCready, *et als.*, *ibid.*; Stickney to Salmon P. Chase, October 26, 1862, Chase MSS., Vol. 66, MS. Div. L. C. ; *New York Times*, October 25, 1862; Abbey, Florida, pp.289-290.

up some months later at Tallahassee professing to be the agent and partner of an apparently fictitious group of New Orleans capitalists who he represented as eager to develop tropical agriculture in southern Florida. It was then the secession winter; and even in that hectic session of the State legislature he succeeded in obtaining a legislative grant of two townships on the condition that he would establish a colony within two years. The large amounts of capital which he had pledged to such an enterprise were not forthcoming, but within a short time he induced about a dozen settlers with small means (gardeners, nurserymen, and laborers) to accompany him to the Fort Myers region with a promise that each immigrant would receive a forty acre homestead. The balance of the grant he planned to sell later at speculative prices. By April 1861, Stickney's colonists had left him in disgust, and finding nothing more for himself at Fort Myers, he began to operate an old sloop between Key West and the mainland, where he procured pilings for government construction by dealing with known Confederate sympathizers. But at Key West he posed as an ardent unionist, agitated political questions, and until the commanding officer forbade his activities, attempted to secure an election of delegates to the Federal Congress from that military outpost.

Not later than June of the first war year, Stickney appeared in Washington, and began to cultivate the friendship of other Florida "refugees". He was also successful in ingratiating himself with the government departments, as was evident when the 1861 report of the Commissioner of Agriculture contained his article on "Tropical Florida" in which he described plants of the Fort Myers region, and prophesied that with a little cultivation Florida's crops might be made to rival those of the "celebrated island" of Cuba. In one passage, Stickney disclosed his motive for writing the article as follows: "Such being the natural advantages which invite enterprise to this quarter, there can be no doubt

that when its agricultural resources are more generally understood, southern Florida will be covered with a dense population of thrifty farmers." Here was the real estate speculator still at work; instead of New Orleans the Northern states might now provide him with immigrants.

*Direct Tax Commission of 1862*

Like the other "loyalists" from the South, Stickney was eager to find a place for himself on the government pay roll, and his opportunity finally came in September 1862, when with the Jacksonville refugee, John S. Sammis, and Harrison Reed (a Wisconsin editor), he became a member of a newly created Direct Tax Commission to execute in Florida the punitive Direct Tax Law of June 7, 1862. In effect, this act confiscated the real property of Southern landholders; it provided that the commissioners appointed under it should assess Southern lands, and through advertisement notify the absentee owners of the taxes due; should such payments not be forthcoming, the Commission might sell at auction to highest bidders the plots or tracts. Since court action was not essential to condemnation, the Commissioners might follow hard upon the occupying armies, and, when the areas were pacified sufficiently for their operations, proceed under the shield of military protection with their work.<sup>35</sup>

Stickney (who became chairman of the Florida Commission) saw first of all a lucrative salary, but beyond that there would be other possibilities arising from confiscation and redistribution of the land among new owners. There might be political power for himself in rapid political reconstruction of the State by a rump government of Florida unionists. Pecuniary advantages might

35. Theodore Bissell to Harrison Reed, April 2, 1864 (copy), Lincoln MSS., Vol. 150, MS. Div. L. C.; Stickney to O. H. Browning, June 11, 1862, *ibid.*, Vol. 78; H. of Rep., Ex. Doc. No. 18, 38 Cong., 2nd Sess., pp.64-65, 71-72, 84, 96, 98; "Agriculture Report," *Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1861*. Washington, Govt. Ptg. Of., 1862, pp.402-404.

result from his dealings with the armed forces in an area from which commercial representatives of civilian enterprises would be barred for at least a time. Finally, on a more fantastic scale, there was a possibility that through the medium of his tax sales Northern migration to Florida might begin to "regenerate" the State along the lines of Northern "free labor" economy. The attractions of this last vision brought Stickney into relations with one of the most influential promoters of that era, Eli Thayer.

### (III) ELI THAYER'S PLAN

It is quite understandable that Stickney and the other Florida unionists should attempt to gain the cooperation of Eli Thayer ; for Thayer, with his humorless mien and black frock coat, had long been known the country over as a single-minded devotee of a concept that enjoyed considerable popularity in the North. He was infatuated with nothing less than a universal solution of sectional conflict through mass immigration of "free labor" population from the North to other areas which had not yet responded to the influence of Yankee civilization. In the pre-war struggle to win Kansas territory from slavery, Thayer had induced New England capitalists to organize the New England Emigrant Aid Company which planted a small colony of free-soilers in Kansas ; but in reality the numbers it sponsored were small, and Kansas's decision to become a free state was due to other factors. Nevertheless, Thayer claimed a victory for his system. Later he promoted another emigration scheme to "regenerate" the upper South, with the result that a small community was founded in western Virginia. A group of New York business men and politicians supported him in this enterprise, but alarmed outcrys in Virginia climaxed by the discovery that his corporate promotional group was none



too stable, combined with the panic of 1857 to deny him real success.<sup>36</sup>

Thayer had the persistency of a zealot, and by the autumn of 1861 he was in Washington to urge upon President Lincoln and his cabinet new schemes of mass migration. Thayer was no pacifist, but he argued with a Yankee's pride in practicality that military campaigns were wasteful whereas peaceful emigration to change the social nature of large sections of the country might be both constructive and profitable. He promised "a hundred thousand emigrants for the border states & Texas" if the government would allow them to be "mustered [in] as volunteers & to serve for a few months & then be disbanded to settle in the South." In that manner only, Thayer urged, might the "rebellious" states "be made and kept loyal with limited expense to the government." The only alternative was to maintain a standing army in the South for years, and such an occupying force "would consist of *consumers* & be a very heavy burden upon the country," while his immigrant host in contrast would consist of "*producers* & would soon make the southern states worth much more to the nation than they ever have been."<sup>37</sup>

Responding to a request from Lincoln that he put his plan into written form, Thayer submitted to the President a memorandum on a proposed "Homestead & Emigration Department" of the government. This proposed department of government, according to Thayer's plan, would take charge of "the confiscated property of

36. Samuel A. Johnson, "The New England Emigrant Aid Company," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1935) ; Ralph V. Harlow, "The Rise and Fall of the Kansas Aid Movement," *The American Historical Review*, XLI (1935), pp.1-25; Russell K. Hickman, "Speculative Activities of the Emigrant Aid Company," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, IV (1935), pp.235-267 ; Eli Thayer, *A History of the Kansas Crusade: Its Friends and Its Foes* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1889), esp. 202-207, 209, 281-282; George W. Smith, "Ante-Bellum Attempts of Northern Business Interests to 'Redeem' the Upper South," *The Journal of Southern History*, XI (1945), pp.190-213.

37. Thayer to Chase, October 16, 27, 1861, Chase MSS., Vols. 51, 52, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

rebels," divide "the confiscated land into homesteads for loyal men," and place the "confiscated negroes not able to take care of themselves under the apprenticeship of loyal citizens" ; should the time ever come when it might be found "necessary or expedient to remove the negro population from the country," the department would "execute a suitable plan for the purpose."<sup>38</sup> Probably because of the large amount of public land in Florida and the prevailing notion that Florida had been largely depopulated by the withdrawal of thousands of men to fight in the Confederate army, Thayer by the end of 1861, was shifting his primary interest from Texas to Florida. He then set his goal at from twenty to fifty thousand volunteers to be raised in the North and sent to Florida where, after clearing the peninsula of any opposing forces, they would remain as permanent settlers. Under their protection and domination a legislature might then assemble to complete political reconstruction.<sup>39</sup>

Thayer later reminisced that, about February 1, 1862, he interviewed Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and President Lincoln, and that after a two-hour conversation the President declared that it was a practicable plan which could be put into operation speedily, with Thayer commissioned a brigadier general in charge of the military-colonizing expedition. Soon after that, Thayer began to search for recruits and engaged in an extensive promotional correspondence. Significant of a kindred interest in Florida was a sermon preached by the Reverend Edward Everett Hale, himself a veteran of the Kansas struggle and a member of the New England Emigrant Aid Company, at the South Congregational Church in Boston. On April 13, 1862 he told his flock

38. *Id.* to Lincoln, November 28, 1861, Lincoln MSS., Vol. 61, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

39. Franklin P. Rice, "The Life of Eli Thayer," (transcript copy), chapter 35, p.8, MS. Div. L. C.; Thayer to C. Edwards Lester, February (n. d.), 1863, Thayer MSS., Brown University Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

with great fervor that discharged soldiers from Northern regiments would most certainly be sent to establish forges, factories, schoolhouses and churches in Florida which then would become "our own Italy." Even though fifteen thousand Floridians until then had chosen "to hold back that paradise in the condition of the islands of the South Sea," from thence forward "if we need a summer in January, we will take it as God has been pleased to give it to us, here at home."<sup>40</sup>

The Federal withdrawal from Jacksonville during the spring of 1862, sorely disappointed Thayer's hopes for immediate action in that quarter, but he nevertheless continued to press his case in Washington. In June, Lincoln received from thirty-two congressmen a petition recommending Thayer's appointment as Commissioner of Agriculture. One newspaper story hinted that he would become the head of a new emigration bureau, while it pointed to the twenty-million acres of land held by the United States in Florida alone.<sup>41</sup> The figure was exaggerated, but the availability of public lands for his immigrants was an important consideration in Thayer's plan.<sup>42</sup> The enactment of the Direct Tax Law of June 7, 1862 gave him another excellent opportunity to link the immigration movement to Federal military occupation of the South, for lands seized under the new law for non-payment of the direct tax would give to his soldier-immigrants their homesteads without further cost to the government. When Secretary Chase appointed

40. Edward Everett Hale, *The Future Civilization of the South: A Sermon Preached on the 13th of April, 1862 at the South Congregational Church, Boston*. (Boston, 1862), p.13.

41. Petition, in Lincoln MSS., Vol. 78, MS. Div. L. C.; *Alexandria (Virginia) Gazette*, June 13, 1862.

42. A committee reported to the Florida State Convention, April 26, 1861, that the area of public lands in the State was then 8,500,000 acres. See, W. McDowell Rogers, "The Seizure of United States' Lands by Seceding States." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (1934), p.266. In 1866, the Commissioner of Public Lands stated that from the beginning to June 30, 1866 a total of 26,631,520 acres of public land had been surveyed in Florida. "Report of the Secretary of the Interior," *Ex. Doc.*, no. 1, 39th Cong., 2nd, p.413.

the Direct Tax Commissioners for Florida (these were among the earliest appointments of the kind that he made), Thayer was promising to return Florida to the Union by the next February. At least, Thayer and Stickney of the Florida Commission were soon working together in a propaganda to regenerate Florida through the immigration scheme.<sup>43</sup>

Thayer believed that success was near; he redoubled his efforts with Lincoln, and a Washington correspondent of the New York *Tribune* announced that the project was meeting with presidential favor together with assent from the Secretary of War and other cabinet officers. By then (September, 1862), the specific proposals had been modified slightly to call for a new military department, the Department of Florida, with Thayer as military governor and Brigadier General James A. Garfield to command the Federal army there; between thirty and fifty thousand volunteers would be accepted for the mission with the proviso that they might resign to become permanent residents of Florida after the authority of the Federal government had been restored in the region of their operations.<sup>44</sup> But August and September, 1862, were for all save single-minded fanatics such as Thayer a period of Northern disaster in the war. The Second Battle of Manassas followed by Lee's invasion of Maryland denied support for anything but the emergency close to the Federal capital. No sooner, however, had the pressure relaxed (still in late September) than Stanton asked for and received from Chase a recommendation of the Secretary of the Treasury's protege, Garfield, for the command of the Florida expedition. Thayer later became convinced that Garfield secretly opposed such an appointment, and was largely responsible for defeating it. Certain it is that Garfield was thinking more favorably of service in South Carolina

43. Worcester (Mass.) *Spy* cited in (New York) *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, September 13, 1862.

44. New York *Tribune*, September 26, 1862; New York *Times*; September 28, 1862.

with an attack upon Charleston as its objective, but on September 25 he wrote that he would know within a few days whether or not he would go to Florida to "open the way" for Thayer's immigrants. Even in mid-October, Thayer with Garfield in tow visited New York "to see some of the leading men of the city" about the plan. Garfield then declared: "We have lain still so long with our great armies that we have almost lost the great opportunities which the good weather and the good roads have afforded us. On the whole, therefore, I don't know but I am better pleased to go to Florida, or some point far to the South where something can be done even in the winter season. . . . If I go to Florida I shall have command of that Department and be responsible to no other commander and make my reports and receive my instructions from the Secretary of War. . . . I shall be pleased to help in the experiment in Florida. . . ." <sup>45</sup>

#### *Lincoln Opposes a Radical Rape of Florida*

While Thayer was pumping enthusiasm into Garfield, and expounding Florida's prospects to New York business men, he was beginning to realize that both Lincoln and Stanton were turning against him; on several occasions he failed to secure appointments to see the President, and Stanton's attitude quickly changed from unctious cooperativeness to curt asperity. Quite to the contrary, Garfield's mentor in Washington, Salmon P. Chase, continued to assure Thayer of sympathetic helpfulness, and outside of a petty desire to cultivate those whom Lincoln estranged, Chase probably had sincere grounds for desiring to encourage Thayer. Since early in the war, the Treasury head had eagerly championed peripheral military expeditions such as the one which occupied the Sea Islands, or the one which was

45. Rice, *Life of Thayer*, Chapter 35, pp.18-19; *Diary and Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase*, American Historical Association, *Annual Report*, 1902 (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1903), II, p.92; Theodore C. Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Abram Garfield* (2 vols., New Haven, Yale University Press, 1925), I, pp.239-240, 244, 248-249.

even then maturing (the Banks expedition) against Texas. As the most prominent anti-slavery figure in the cabinet, Chase could see in these plans to occupy the South a direct attack upon the slave system, and a demonstration of the capabilities of "free-labor" civilization. Seemingly, he was honest in his belief that the negro would be aided in the transition from slavery to freedom by these practical manifestations of abolitionism. Though he had at the time but a "slight personal acquaintance" with Thayer, he had written in 1860 that he believed him to be "sincere, earnest, and able"; in his opinion Thayer had "contributed a great deal to saving Kansas from Slavery."<sup>46</sup>

After Lincoln rebuffed him, Thayer redoubled his efforts to influence public opinion. To reporters he released portions of a work then in progress entitled: "Florida : Its Climate, Soil, Productions, Resources, and Capabilities; Also a Plan For Colonizing the State and Information to Emigrants." With lush praise, newspaper commentaries claimed that this brochure contained a "vast amount of what every person seeking that latitude for a home should know." In close paraphrase and direct quotation the journalistic notices lavishly described "the productions of the northern and southern latitudes" which grew and blossomed by the side of one another in Florida. "Oranges," one story read, "are larger, more aromatic and succulent than in Portugal. Plums naturally grow fine, and are of a superior quality to those gathered in the orchards of Spain. The fig and olive attain perfection. Indigo and cochineal have been advantageously cultivated. . . . under the control of an industrious and enterprising people, Florida's resources would make it one of the first states of the Union."<sup>47</sup> Quite likely the prospectus behind this verbal outpouring was either partially or entirely the work of Lyman D.

46. Chase Diary and Correspondence, pp.93, 289-290; Rice, Life of Thayer, Chapter 35, pp.23-24.

47. New York *Times*, October 3, 8, 1862; Baltimore *Clipper*, October 11, 1862.

Stickney who, after his own appointment as Direct Tax Commissioner, lingered in Washington to aid Thayer. Earlier, of course, Stickney had produced a similar article for the Commissioner of Agriculture's report, and he was also interested in turning out a popular "history" of Florida for circulation in the North. Chase, he later testified, approved of his promotional activities "which it was believed would greatly promote the success of the Florida Direct Tax Commission." Armed with a copy of Williams's *Territory of Florida*, and Blodget's *Climatology*, Stickney began work, and in a short while produced "several quires of manuscript." The book was not forthcoming, but portions of his "pot boiler" did appear in the 1862 report of the Commissioner of Agriculture.<sup>48</sup>

Stickney was able to use the Florida unionists as a pressure group on behalf of Thayer's plan. On December 5, "citizens of Florida" headed by the three Direct Tax Commissioners (Stickney, Sammis and Reed) drafted a petition to Lincoln calling for Thayer's appointment as military governor of the State; concurrently about 125 Senators and Representatives signed a corollary document.<sup>49</sup> Unionist writers also began to send to the metropolitan press public letters advertising the advantages of Florida for prospective immigrants. One such communication which appeared in the *New York Times* boasted: "Florida has the best climate of any State of this Union . . . [it is] the best watered, [has] the greatest variety of fruits, game, timber, soil and the [most] extended coast of any State; and is, and has been, the most healthy State in the Union for the

48. *House of Representatives Executive Document*, No. 18, 38th Congress, 2nd Session, pp.99-100; Lyman D. Stickney, "Florida, Soil, Climate, and Productions," in *Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture for the Year 1862*, *House of Representatives Executive Document*, No. 78, 37th Cong. 3rd, pp. 59-65.

49. Both petitions are in the Lincoln MSS., Vol. 94, Man. Div. L. C. The Congressmen's petition read: ". . . fully concurring in the views of Judge Fraser and the other prominent and loyal citizens of Florida, we respectfully ask that the request (made in the first petition) be granted."

past twenty years. . . . Any man, white or black, can live [there] comfortably by farming, if he will work like a Northern farmer two days in the week." <sup>50</sup> Calvin L. Robinson, an immigrant to Florida from Vermont in 1857 who was about to become an accomplice of Stickney in Florida, further recounted with what extreme delight refugees from Northern winters already had "basked in the sunshine of Florida, and with gratitude. . . [had drunk] in the healing breezes, so fragrant with the pitch pine of her forests. . . ." <sup>51</sup> Philip Fraser, another friend of Stickney and originally from New Jersey, upbraided one New York daily newspaper which had raised objections to the Thayer expedition; he recalled that armed occupation wasn't an untried experiment in Florida, because twenty years before then the government had "settled out the Indians" in that way. While an army of 20,000 soldier-immigrants could "Hold, pacify and protect the State," an equal number of enterprising laborers might come in to "gather from her fields and forests wealth untold." <sup>52</sup> An anonymous contributor who signed his letter to the press "A Democrat From the South" contended that: "What Mr. Thayer seeks is to bring a free labor Democratic element of the South into affiliation with assisting free labor from the North. . . ." <sup>53</sup>

Just after mid-December, a substantial delegation from both Houses of Congress headed by Vice-President Hamlin called at the White House to convince Lincoln that he should appoint Thayer to be military governor with additional authority to raise twenty thousand emigrants. The Congressmen appeared to be pleased with their reception, but they failed to get a commitment." <sup>54</sup> Whatever impression he had first given to Thayer, the President had estimated the military folly of such a

50. New York *Times*, October 19, 1862.

51. New York *Evening Post*, January 30, 1863.

52. New York *Tribune*, February 19, 1863.

53. *Ibid.*, February 10, 1863.

54. New York *Times*, December 18, 1862; Charles E. Hamlin, *The Life and Times of Hannibal Hamlin* (Cambridge, Mass., 1899), p.510.



scheme. The implications contained in its provisions—confiscation, resettlement, and the permanent subjugation of the Southern white population—all these ran counter to Lincoln's stand against the anti-slavery radicals (such as Chase, Thaddeus Stevens, Benjamin F. Wade, and Zachariah Chandler) within his own party. But his interview with the delegation was just a week after the Fredericksburg disaster, and Congress, in an ugly mood from the lack of military success, was unwilling to be put off by a soft presidential answer. On the 22nd, John Bingham, the Ohio radical, introduced a joint resolution which authorized 20,000 volunteers to serve not more than nine months within the State of Florida, and to be disbanded there at the expiration of their term of service. In the House of Representatives, this resolution was read twice, and referred to the Committee on Military Affairs.<sup>55</sup> Less than three weeks later (January 9) James Buffinton made the majority report from that committee. It was an interesting document, and showed clearly the influence of the pro-Thayer pressure group. After announcing that much of Florida consisted of still unsold public land, and dismissing most of the remaining 17,000,000 acres as the possession of "undisguised and active rebels", Buffinton's report proposed that the "rebels' " property be put upon the market "under the requirements of the confiscation and tax laws." The spokesman for the majority then rivaled the propagandists in enumerating the natural advantages of the peninsula: "equability of climate", naval stores, sugar cane, long staple cotton, tobacco, live-oak and yellow pine of almost priceless value to our navy, and a commanding position on the Gulf. "Twenty thousand resolute loyal men with guns," he thought, would perform two valuable services. First, they would free blockading vessels for use elsewhere, and, secondly, they might protect the "desolated possessions" of the Florida

55. *House of Rep. Journal*, 37th Cong., 3rd, p.110; *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong. 3rd, Dec. 22, 1862, p.166.

unionists who were importuning Congress. The unionists, in turn, would bring Florida back to its allegiance. George H. Yeaman in the committee's minority report merely stated that when the government encouraged emigration it should do so without submitting to the political prejudices of the emigrants, and without disseminating "any given political creed."<sup>56</sup>

With a hint at the criticism Lincoln had undergone since the Fredericksburg disaster, a correspondent of the anti-slavery Cincinnati *Gazette* praised the Bingham resolution shortly before the appearance of Buffinton's report, and added: "It is supposed that, under the variety of new lights the President has lately been getting on the conduct of the war he will not long hesitate to put the [Thayer] plan into practice."<sup>57</sup> But Lincoln remained quietly adamant to the pressure. The day after Christmas he again discussed the plan with his cabinet, and perhaps Chase, Montgomery Blair, and Gideon Welles had a favorable word for it; at least they had assured Thayer they would help him, and if they did so it was on the ground of practical considerations that the President met their pleas.<sup>58</sup> When, on January 5, a "numerous delegation" of Germans from nine States made a presidential call to commend Lincoln's attention to the five thousand German-Americans who had notified Thayer that they were ready to settle in Florida upon the terms of his plan to restore that State, all their group received was the usual informal and friendly reception together with a reply that the Thayer plan "had received the earnest and cordial attention of himself and Cabinet, and that while recent military events had forced the postponement of the enterprise for the time . . . yet he trusted that the delay was but for a few days."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup>. *House of Rep. Report*, No. 5, 37th Cong. 3rd, 3 pp.

<sup>57</sup>. *Cincinnati Gazette*, January 10, 1863.

<sup>58</sup>. *Diary of Gideon Welles* (3 vols., Boston, 1911). I, p.206 (entry of Dec. 26, 1862) ; Chase, Blair, Caleb B. Smith, and Gideon Welles on Nov. 24 addressed a letter to Lincoln recommending Thayer's plan, see, Chase *et als.* to Lincoln, Nov. 24, 1862, Thayer MSS., Brown University Library, Providence, R. I.

<sup>59</sup>. *New York Times*, Dec. 29, 1862, Jan. 6, 1863.

In attempting to push Lincoln into acceptance of the scheme, Thayer and his group sought and won the assistance of some leading New York newspapers. William Cullen Bryant's New York *Evening Post* called such a project "splendid, yet practical," and argued there was no danger of diverting troops from other tasks because this expedition by its nature would require a "new corps of adventurers" which would be unlikely to enlist for any other military service. The New York *Times* praised Thayer, saying, "He is a man of fresh and original views, of suggestive mind, and steady resolution in pushing any project which has secured his faith."<sup>60</sup>

#### *A Florida Liberia*

Some encouragement came from those who held to the conservative notion that Florida might become a future home for the colored masses. Occasionally Thayer himself mentioned the possibility of black migration to the state, but he always made it a secondary consideration and no alternative to his major premise that the South must be reclaimed by free white labor from the North and Europe. In one address, he went so far as to note that there were 7,000 negroes in Florida who could be used to protect his soldier-colonists from invasion, and that in other ways the colonists might hire the negroes to work for them at good wages. Cleverly appealing to those who feared negro migration to Northern States, he reasoned that negroes would not go to New York, Maine, or Missouri when "just employers" were ready to hire them in the South.<sup>61</sup> Some opponents of proposals to colonize the blacks in Central America and other tropical regions outside the United States saw an alternative in Thayer's proposal, and placed exaggerated emphasis upon Florida as a refuge for freedmen; the peninsula would become "the land of Canaan to the race

60. *Ibid.*, Feb. 7, 1863, New York *Evening Post*, Feb. 9, 1863; Manchester, N. H., *Democrat and American*, Feb. 5, 1863.

61. New York *Times*, Feb. 8, 1863.

that is now going forth from their house of bondage." <sup>62</sup> Westerners who did not wish to see negroes living north of the Ohio river, or to be given important responsibilities in fighting the war found merit in such a use for Florida. In this spirit Major General William T. Sherman wrote to his brother, Senator John Sherman: "I don't oppose negro arming further than I have no confidence in them & don't want them mixed up with our white soldiers. I would rather see them armed & colonized in Florida & North Arkansas. . . ." A constituent further suggested to the same Ohio senator: ". . . the work of planting a colony of free laborers in Florida . . . might be kept up so as to give the slaves an opportunity to escape. . . ." Still another Ohioan was more vehement when he entreated Sherman to free the slaves, and then make certain that they were "colonized somewhere South. Some country around the Gulf must be set apart for the Black. . . . Give them Florida . . . let them have the low Cotton and Rice lands of the Carolina[s] or provide some other place South, but *let them have a home*. . . ." This was not disinterested philanthropy. <sup>63</sup>

Thayer's plan also received favorable consideration from a number of New York merchants. With George William Blunt (prominent in shipping circles and a publisher of maritime charts) presiding, and Charles Gould (a broker) acting as secretary, Thayer addressed a small meeting of "influential gentlemen" who gathered to hear him at the Fifth Avenue Hotel on the night of January 23. After some general remarks to the effect that "a complete social and political reconstruction of the Southern States . . . [was] the only means of ending the war

62. *Ibid.*, Oct. 3, 1862; New Orleans *Delta*, Oct. 22, Nov. 2, 1862; Columbus *Crisis*, Oct. 29, 1862.

63. William T. Sherman to [John Sherman], April 26, 1863, William T. Sherman MSS., Vol. 12, Man. Div., L. C.; A. H. Dunlevy to *id.*, January 13, 1863, John Sherman MSS., Vol. 54, Man. Div., L. C.; Justin Hamilton to *id.*, Dec. 26, 1861, *ibid.*, Vol. 43; See also, J. M. Palmer to Lyman Trumbull, Dec. 19, 1862, Trumbull MSS., Vol. 52, Man. Div., L. C.; New York *Evening Post*, Jan. 16, 1863; New York *Times*, Dec. 8, 1861.

on a basis of prosperity to the South or to the country", Thayer plunged into a discussion of his specific proposals. He described the Florida area intended for colonization as a space comparable to Massachusetts in size, bounded on the east by Atlantic Ocean, and on the west by the St. Johns river. To the dollar conscious commercial leaders he promised that the government would bear the costs of migration; the emigrants would be enlisted in military service for nine months. Earlier, Stickney and Thayer had been willing to use the Direct Tax Law to procure the necessary lands, but now Thayer was ready to suggest another device: the colonists might form a new State constitution, send representatives to Congress, and institute a State legislature whose first task should be the confiscation of the "rebels' " lands for apportionment among the immigrants. He hastened to add, however, his suggestions did not point to socialistic tendencies. In response to a question from a banker, Edgar Ketchum, Thayer remarked that a farming experiment with free colored labor which the Federal government had been sponsoring on the Sea Islands for a year had not been successful, nor could the government ever "carry on farming to advantage." The rebuilding of the South must be an enterprise for free labor and private initiative. At length, following a suggestion from Gould, the promoter agreed with the others to call another meeting which should be larger and open to the public ; a committee of twenty with George Opdyke, a manufacturer of shoddy and mayor of New York, as its chairman, began to make arrangements.<sup>64</sup>

On the night of February 7, Cooper Institute was filled by those whose interest in Florida was manifestly great. J. B. Beers (merchant dealing in writing supplies) wielded the gavel, while Thayer outdid his previous efforts at oratory as he bragged that all he and his associates asked from the government was transportation, pay and rations for one year, and they would

64. *Ibid.*, Jan. 25, 1863.

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agree to bring Florida back into the Union within ninety days after they arrived there. Twenty thousand additional Northerners soon would visit the new tropical paradise each winter. His colonists would produce in Florida more cotton in one year than slave labor had produced there in ten years before the war. Reflecting his criticism of Lincoln's non-cooperation, he carped that the Emancipation Proclamation was "worse than nothing" so long as the "rebels" possessed the Southern lands. The anti-slavery crusader, Cassius Clay, spoke briefly too, and reminded the crowd that the South had been tolerating the same evil the Gracchi had fought against in ancient Rome - land monopoly. William Cullen Bryant, interested in Florida for nearly thirty years, and a warm advocate of Thayer's colonization activities since the struggle for Kansas, came forward to present resolutions which underlined Thayer's criticism of Lincoln by declaring that Congress should not only authorize but request the President to enlist enough volunteer emigrants to accomplish the results which Thayer had promised them. Quickly these resolutions were put to a voice-vote, adopted, and Bryant was then appointed chairman of a Committee of Five to present them to Lincoln and Congress.<sup>65</sup> By the time this group reached Washington it was larger than its original number; among its members were W. H. Tyler (real estate), Cephas Brainerd (lawyer), J. C. Haselton (financier), William O. Giles (strawgoods merchant), William Seligman (merchant), Lemuel Bangs (publisher), and W. P. Strickland (editor, *Christian Advocate and Journal*).

This "Committee of Five" received, on February 17, a hearing before the House Military Committee. After reading Bryant's resolutions, members of the delegation stressed an urgent motive for favorable action: the North's supply of ship timber was "comparatively exhausted", and to prevent a critical shortage it would be essential to get larger amounts of Florida live oak and

65. *Ibid.*, Feb. 8, 1863.

pine. The House committee listened, but it would agree to nothing further than point to its favorable report on the Bingham resolution. The House of Representatives as a whole never voted on that measure. In the Senate, Preston King of New York, obliged Bryant and the rest by reading the resolves of the Cooper Institute meeting in the Senate ; but there they were tabled without further consideration.<sup>66</sup>

Although some propaganda kept the topic alive for a time, the "Committee of Five's" failure was a final defeat for Thayer's Florida plan. By February the season was so far advanced as to make the expedition impracticable for that year. Already in December Stickney had told Thayer to impress upon Lincoln that the enterprise must "be actively set on foot before the first of February next" if any good were to result from it.<sup>67</sup> Still the weeks passed without decision, and the answer did not entirely remain with Lincoln. In some quarters there was a disposition to entertain Thayer's plan as an ultimate measure, while shrinking from its execution because it did violence to private property rights. In this regard the Portsmouth (New Hampshire) *Journal* commented: "The idea of 'giving every man a farm' in Florida who chooses to emigrate from the north is one of *conquest*, making the State a *province*. Let us first put down the rebellion - but if Florida or any other single State still resists unto blood (a hardly supposable case) individual as well as State rights may be justly forfeited. . . ." <sup>68</sup> Reticence also was due to a distrust of Thayer himself. Perhaps there was no one in New England who was more bent upon "regenerating" the South through "free labor" than John Murray Forbes, financier of the Michigan Central and Burlington railroad lines; yet he frankly admitted his misgivings about the

66. *Ibid.*, Feb. 19, 1863; *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong. 3rd, p.1017.

67. Stickney to Thayer, Dec. 7, 1862, Chase MSS., Vol. 68, Man. Div., L. C.

68. Portsmouth, N. H., *Journal*, Feb. 28, 1863.

irresponsibility of Thayer's leadership, and professed a hope that "some other Moses" would arise.<sup>69</sup>

With a view to practical military consideration, Horace Greeley's *Tribune*, which at first had adjudged the plan to be not without virtue, decided upon further reflection that it would vote "no" for the reason that Thayer's proposal would, like the "Anaconda" policy, attack only the outposts of the rebellion. Instead of concentrating, it would diffuse the national forces. It was "the strategy of a nest of wasps attacking an ox." How, queried the editorialist, could Thayer be certain the Confederates would not send twenty thousand veterans aided by the State militia to repel the invading colonists, or at least force them to call for help "to hold a footing on the peninsula instead of pushing the Rebels readily out of it...."?<sup>70</sup> As a New England periodical later remarked, Thayer might have borrowed his idea from the military colonies of the Romans, but if he did so he overlooked one essential feature: "The Romans planted military colonies in districts already subdued, in which the colonists were in reality to form a military aristocracy, and rule the conquered district. . . ."<sup>71</sup>

In the later war years, Thayer's Florida plan was all but forgotten; neither Lincoln nor any other important official in his administration executed it. To Thayer, however, the promotion of immigration was as much a part of life as breathing, and his defeat became only an occasion for changing the direction of his efforts. After organizing a private agency, he sent representatives to Europe for the promotion of other projected colonies in the South and West. Others who had worked with him were more loathe to forget Florida. Even if the Thayer plan had failed, Federal troops were still in the State,

69. Forbes to Charles Eliot Norton, March 22, 1863, New England Loyal Publication Society MSS. (Boston Public Library).

70. New York *Tribune*, Feb. 9, 1863; For the earlier attitude, see New York *Tribune*, Feb. 7, 1863.

71. "The Freedman and Free Labor in the South," *The Christian Examiner*, LXXVI (1864), p.371.



and military occupation might be widened at any time. With the extension of Northern control would come political and economic rewards for those who identified themselves with the conquest. Among the most strategically located of these imperialists were the Florida Direct Tax Commissioners. Their operations and the questionable activities of Stickney will be discussed in the second part of this article.

*(To be concluded in the next issue of the QUARTERLY)*