

1950

## Book Review: East Florida, 1783-1785. A Pile of Documents Assembled, and Many of Them Translated

Donald E. Worcester



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Worcester, Donald E. (1950) "Book Review: East Florida, 1783-1785. A Pile of Documents Assembled, and Many of Them Translated," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 29 : No. 1 , Article 9.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol29/iss1/9>

BOOK REVIEW

Joseph Byrne Lockey, *East Florida, 1783-1785. A Pile of Documents Assembled, and Many of Them Translated*. Edited by John Walton Caughey (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1949. pp. xxiv, 764. index. \$7.50).

This volume is the first of a series planned by the late Joseph Byrne Lockey on various aspects of the second. Spanish period of Florida. It was to be followed by a similar volume on West Florida, and many others had been projected. It is to be lamented that this work was cut short before his huge task had been fulfilled, for the program was one of extraordinary value for the study of Florida history in an epoch concerning which we have only vague outlines and unverified and possibly erroneous conclusions.

The first thirty-eight pages are devoted to a historical introduction—a brief survey of the events of the turbulent years immediately after the return of Florida to Spain. This sketch is in itself of considerable interest; for similar syntheses of the period are extremely scarce. The more than 400 documents—letters and miscellaneous papers—are arranged in chronological order, and those not found in English have been translated. Although they were obtained from, a number of, different depositories, the bulk of them came from the East Florida Papers of the Division of Manuscripts of the Library of Congress, the Public Record Office in London, and the *Archivo General de las Indias* in Seville. The widespread distribution of source materials for colonial Florida is one obvious reason for the absence of many similar projects, for collecting these documents has been an enormous and expensive enterprise. Without this outlay of time and energy, however, the history of this significant period would have to remain fragmentary.

One of the most vital aspects of Florida history in the late 18th century was that it was an area of international rivalry. This competition, of which the protag-

onists were Spain, England, and the United States, took various forms. Probably the most urgent matter was control of the numerous and powerful southern Indian tribes, and in the struggle for their adherence England and Spain conspired to undermine the efforts of the agents of the United States. For this reason documents concerning Indian affairs are of profound importance, far deeper than would appear on the surface. It was because of the critical nature of Indian policy that the Spanish government permitted the English firm of Pantton, Leslie and Company to continue its trade in Florida after England had surrendered title to the region. For Spain this meant a fundamental change in method of Indian control similar to that which had been necessary in Louisiana after 1762. The Spanish system of dealing with unsubjected tribes had been largely through missionaries, while France and England employed agents whose inducements to the Indians were material rather than spiritual. Since the Indians of the Southeast had learned to rely upon gifts and trade to provide them with firearms and other articles, the best way to retain their loyalty was in seeing that their wants were satisfied; and the Spaniards received many subtle hints as to the consequences of a change in this practice.

Another matter of considerable concern in the documents was that of controlling the bands of lawless men who raided the plantations for horses, cattle, and slaves. The McGirtt brothers were among those most prominently mentioned in this regard, and much suspicion was voiced concerning their activities. As the period under consideration was one in which both the outgoing English and incoming Spanish governors were present, legal questions were unusually complicated and difficult of solution.

Other internal matters concerned such things as the staff of the hospital at St. Augustine, the return of runaway or stolen slaves, land for the Greeks, Italians, and Minorcans of St. Augustine who wished to remain, and the usual administrative complaint of lack of sufficient

funds. The personal problems of Governor Zéspedes also appear in some of the papers, for his daughter clandestinely married an officer in the Irish regiment.

Many of the letters contain instructions for the conduct of affairs in Florida. One of the most interesting of these, which came from the Minister of the Indies in Spain in 1785, concerned precautions to be taken in case of smallpox epidemics. To the governor of St. Augustine he wrote: "You will direct that as soon as a case of smallpox is found in any town in your jurisdiction, the first person stricken with the disease, and those later stricken, be removed to a sanctuary or house in the country which you shall have designated or had built at a sufficient distance from the town in a healthful region so situated that the prevailing winds in that district cannot communicate the contagion to the towns or nearby plantations, though according to the general opinion of savants, and in the light of repeated experiments, this pestilence is spread only through contact with the diseased or with the things they make use of."

This large volume of select documents for a three year period is an indication of the vastness of archival materials available for a study of Spanish Florida. It is to be hoped that further research in the papers assembled by Dr. Lockey, of which this volume represents only a small portion, will bring into clearer focus the periods of Florida history which are not well known or understood. Copies of the hundreds of documents collected by Dr. Lockey are deposited in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History at the University of Florida. Their presence as well as the first volume of the proposed series are a challenge to students in this field. For the interest of further enlightenment on this period another collection of documents also recently published and complementary to the present book should be mentioned. It is *Spain in the Mississippi Valley, 1765-1794*, edited by Lawrence Kinnaird. (3 vols., Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1945, Washington, D. C., 1946-49). And finally, attention

should be called to the Cuban archives for manuscripts concerning Florida history in the same era. These are listed in the *Catálogo de los Fondos de Las Floridas* (Publicaciones del Archivo Nacional de Cuba, III, 1944). These suggestions are merely indicative of the potential sources for materials on Spanish Florida, or more accurately, the Spanish Southeast, and do not pretend to be a full catalog.

**DONALD E. WORCESTER**

*The University of Florida*