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Pensacola in 1810

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PENSACOLA IN 1810 *

[Pensacola] is situated almost in a wilderness. The woods consist entirely of the long leafed pine. There are very few families in the whole of the country between the bay of Pensacola and the bay of Mobile, and as to that part of West Florida, which lies N and East of Pensacola, as well as the greater part of E. Florida, it may be considered as an uninhabited desert. . . . The country round Pensacola is remarkably poor. For the space of four or five miles, it is a deep, loose, driving sand, which in dry weather is very laborious to travel over. Beyond that, although it is entirely a pine country, there are frequently considerable bodies of land, which, having a firm foundation is no doubt capable of being improved with the assistance of those immense herds of cattle which the country is capable of supporting. . . . The town of Pensacola is beautifully situated on the North side of the bay of that name-which, as you stand on the scite of the old fort at the back of the town, has the appearance of a crescent, with the town lying about midway of the hollow. . . . This bay forms a harbor at once safe, commodious and delightful.

None of the streets are paved. All are incumbered with a deep sand. It is fatiguing to walk through them.

Three of the streets are parallel to the general course of the bay, and are probably from 215 to 220 poles ** long. Five other streets cross them at right angles, and are from eighty to ninety poles long. The breadth of the widest streets is about 90 feet, but some of them are not more than half as wide. There are in the main street parallel to the bay about eighty houses, which are pretty equally distributed, as there

* In his research for a doctoral dissertation on "The Federal Government's Factory System, 1796-1822," Rev. Aloysius Plaisance, O.S.B. read numerous newspaper files of that period and came upon several descriptions of Pensacola in that era which he has sent us for publication. All are interesting and will be published here in time. Little is known, first-hand, of the Pensacola of 1810, so this account from the St. Louis *Louisiana Gazette* of September 27, 1910 is of much interest.

** A pole or rod is equivalent to 16 1/2 feet.

are considerable spaces not built upon between the several habitations, so that the town has a very airy appearance. The other two long streets are less populous, one of them having but about 60, and the other about 70 dwelling houses. The whole number of families in Pensacola, probably amounts to about 300. All the buildings are of wood, framed and painted, with brick chimnies; and there is on the opposite side of the bay a brick yard at which not only bricks but excellent paving tiles are made. The houses are for the most part only one story high, with piazzas; a mode of building certainly the most eligible in a southern climate.

There are no public buildings which merit peculiar attention. A large capacious two story house, formerly the residence of the British Governor, is now employed as a barracks for the troops. . . . A large warehouse which formerly received the stores of the King of England, now answers the purpose of a Catholic church. They have a small, neat rotundo for public balls, and in the public rooms adjacent, as well as some other houses in the town, is exhibited that rage for excessive gaming. . . . Taverns for the entertainment of strangers can scarcely be said to exist in Pensacola.

Travellers, after undergoing a mortifying scrutiny, are sometimes admitted as guests in private houses on the same terms as are usual in professed houses of entertainment: -and there is one small house kept by an American - the sign post of which announces a tavern. Nothing can be procured for the horses, but Indian corn, at a high price. Hay, fodder and straw are unknown, and the writer of this is not certain that there is even a stable in the town. The few cows that are kept there appear to be in a miserable condition, and there is nothing near which they seem to browse upon but the hard leaves of poor, stunted palmettos. There is no public market. In fact there is no animal food of which the people of Pensacola have any regular supply but beef. There are two licensed butchers, one for the town, and the other for the troops. These usually

purchase their beeves in droves, which are brought down from the settlements on the Mobile, Tombigby and Alabama. . . . Live hogs are likewise occasionally driven down by the American settlers on the Tombigby, and some have even found their way from the western part of the state of Tennessee. As to veal and mutton, they have none: and their very scanty supply of vegetables seems for the most part to depend upon the few that are occasionally dealt out to them from the coasting vessels which trade to this port.

The number of stores, considering the size of the town is considerable. Their stock in trade, exclusive of groceries, is generally, it is said, laid in at New Orleans. The large mercantile house of Messrs. John Forbes & Co. which was formerly under the firm of Panton Lesslie & company, imports its goods from G. Britain, and has heretofore enjoyed a most extensive and lucrative trade with the most numerous Indian nations lying between the Mississippi and the Atlantic ocean. It is a circumstance not a little gratifying to the friends of American manufactures, that our common home made cotton cloth has found its way into many of the stores of Pensacola, and has even been carried about the streets for sale in baskets by negro women, according to the Spanish fashion, intermixed with other more elegant articles of dress. . . . The Spanish settlements of Florida afford but little for exportation from the towns of Mobile and Pensacola, and a little tar occasionally and a small quantity of lumber are perhaps the only articles which go from thence to the West Indies. There is a valuable saw mill with two saws only, the property in part of Governor Folch, on a branch of the Escambia, about 16 miles from Pensacola, and another belonging to the same proprietors has been just completed. The plank, which is entirely of pine, is generally sawed 13 feet long and 10 or 12 inches wide, and every board (of which it is said that the two saws will sometimes cut 400 in 24 hours) sells at thirty

seven cents and a half. It finds a ready sale at Pensacola, Vera Cruz and the Havanna. . . .

As to manufactures, Pensacola boasts of none. There are in the town some house carpenters and a tailor or two. Whether there be any other mechanics that are residents of the place, the writer of this account does not know. There are no printers, potters, tinmen, copper-smiths, watchmakers, hatters, or saddlers; and probably no silver smiths, black smiths, or boot and shoemakers. In fact the population of the town seems to consist almost entirely of the officers of government and soldiers, and of such other persons as either directly or indirectly find employment from the former and are indispensably necessary to their comfortable existence. Should the Floridas be ceded to the United States, Pensacola can only be important as a military and naval station for the southern country.

The healthfulness of its situation will always render it a place worthy of the attention of government in this point of view. . . . Its freedom from marsh influence, and the freshness and purity of its sea air, render it both a healthful and pleasant place of residence even in the hottest season of the year. The winters are mild. The weather is seldom more severe than it was about the middle of December last. The vegetation of green pease - then in blossom and even in pod, in a small garden in the town, was at that time suddenly checked by the cold, and large cakes of ice were seen in the tubs which had been sunk in the ground for the purpose of collecting water. On the 15th of that month at nine at night, and on the next day at nine in the morning, the quick silver in the thermometer stood at 38 and a half. It had been at 41 in the shade at two in the afternoon, but on being hung in the sun, it presently rose to 83. Every one, however, was wrapped in warm great coats.

We shall conclude this sketch with a statement of the ordinary price of provisions, &c at Pensacola, as given by a house-keeper in that place.

Beef 8 cents per lb.

Pork, fresh, 12 1/2 - salt pork 19 3/4

Fowls, from 6 to 12 dollars per dozen.

A good capon, a dollar and a half.

Oysters 50 cent per 100.

Flour \$12 per barrel,

Indian corn, \$4 1/2 pr. Spanish barrel of shelled corn, and the Spanish barrel nearly corresponds with our common flour barrel,

Sweet potatoes \$2 1/2 per Spanish barrel,

Turnips, half a bit a piece,

Bananas 50 cents per dozen,

Onions, 25 cents per dozen,

Eggs, 6 1/2 cents each,

Butter, 50 cents per pound.

Milk 25 cents per bottle in the summer season; but in the winter none can be procured.

Oranges 50 cents per dozen.

Pine apples 50 cents each.

Coffee 22 cents per pound.

Sugar 7 1/2,

Negro hire \$1.50 per day and provisions, or \$42 per month.

Laboring carpenter, \$2.50 per day,

House rent - A small house, with two or three little rooms, and an indifferent kitchen in the yard, and not in the best situation, estimated there as worth \$1000, rents for \$20 per month.

Board in the family of a decent mechanic, \$22 per month, or \$1.25 per day.