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ZESPEDES AND THE SOUTHERN CONSPIRACIES *

By HELEN HORNBECK TANNER

THE PEACE TREATY by which the American colonists gained their independence in 1783 created a situation along their southern border almost designed, it seemed, to provoke hostility. By the treaty, the provinces of East and West Florida, which had belonged to Britain for the previous twenty years and had remained loyal to the Crown, were returned to Spain. Thus Europe's oldest colonial power regained a foothold on the southeastern seaboard of North America, but now was threatened by an ambitious young republic - the first independent nation in the western hemisphere. Furthermore, a portion of the border remained in dispute until 1796. The controversy between the two governments concerned the northern limit of West Florida, from the Mississippi River to the source of the St. Mary's River, which was the northern border of East Florida.¹

Out of this background arose the series of plots, generated largely by southern frontiersmen and political leaders, which were for the most part opposed to Spanish interests although some schemes sought Spanish support. The objectives were mainly: to acquire land in the disputed area or in recognized Spanish territory; to secure the right to navigate the Mississippi River, which Spain had forbidden in 1783; to seize Spanish posts along the Mississippi; and even to encourage rebellion in the Spanish colonies. A pattern of border intrigue with periodic hostilities continued until the Floridas were wrested from Spain through diplomatic negotiation in 1819.

While the chief theater of action was clearly the Mississippi Valley, conspirators and informers were in contact with Spanish officials from New Orleans to New York, in Havana, France, and in Spain itself. Governor Zespedes of East Florida, located at the extreme southeastern corner of that 2,000-mile border, was inevitably involved in these frontier problems. One of the ambitious projects came to his attention during the fall of 1787.

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1. The background discussion is based on Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The Spanish American Frontier* (Boston and New York, 1927).

Vicente Manuel de Zespedes, the first governor of East Florida during the Second Spanish Regime, came from Havana in 1784 and served until 1790. A veteran of over forty years service with the Spanish army,² he had served at Pensacola in 1761 during the previous war against England which had ended so ignominiously for Spain with the capture of Havana and the loss of the Floridas.³ He was stationed in Cuba, as colonel of the Havana Regiment, at the time he was selected to restore Spanish authority to East Florida.⁴ For Zespedes, this was a challenging opportunity, his first administrative appointment, and with it went an advancement to the rank of Brigadier of the Army.⁵ Although his primary concern was to hispanicize the few thousand polyglot inhabitants under his authority, he was also responsible for maintaining peaceful relations with the neighboring state of Georgia and for forwarding any rumors, facts, or observations of interest to His Catholic Majesty.

He was most apprehensive concerning the behavior of the Indians and the Georgians, and the secret designs of the court of London. He knew that during the first Spanish regime, hostile Indians had repeatedly forced the population of St. Augustine to remain within the fortified town, its land entrance protected by a moat and drawbridge. The Georgians, in military and naval expeditions into East Florida, had driven the residents to seek refuge within the walls of the Castillo overlooking the harbor. The

2. Zespedes to Jose de Galvez, Havana, Nov. 24, 1782. AI 86-6-7. Stetson Papers.

Documentary references are to photostats in the Stetson Papers and transcripts in the Lockey Collection, both at the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History in Gainesville, Florida. The following abbreviations are used in the citations:

AGI: Archivo General de las Indias, Seville

AHN: Archivo Historico Nacional, Madrid

ANC:F Archivo Nacional de Cuba: Florida

DAB: Dictionary of American Biography

EF: East Florida Papers in the Library of Congress. Numbers following refer to box numbers in the Library.

Est: Seccion Estado

Leg: Legajo

PC: Papeles de Cuba

3. Zespedes to Antonio Valdez, March 28, 1788, AHN Leg. 3901. Lockey Collection.
4. Zespedes to Jose de Galvez, Havana, Aug. 1, 1783. AI 86-6-7. Stetson Papers.
5. Jose de Galvez to Vicente Manuel de Zespedes, San Lorenzo, Oct. 31, 1783. ANC:F, Legajo 10. Translation printed in Joseph Byrne Lockey, *East Florida, 1783-1785* (Berkeley, 1949), 174.

situation fortunately appeared less dangerous during his governorship, but he could not disregard the possibility that such events might recur.

In general he relied on annual gifts and a supervised trade to pacify the Indians, whom he expected to restrain the Georgians. In his direct contact with the Georgians and other English speaking people, Zespedes depended on the good judgment of Carlos Howard, who had the title of Secretary of Government but was a general administrative assistant. Howard was an officer of the Irish infantry regiment stationed at St. Augustine. He had a cosmopolitan background, spoke English, French and Spanish, and exhibited both diplomatic and military talent.⁶

Governor Zespedes readily perceived that activities in the trans-Appalachian wilderness directly affected the security of his own province, and the endless stream of disturbing rumors kept him constantly on the alert. For example, late in 1785 warnings came from Viceroy Bernardo de Galvez in Mexico⁷ and from Alexander McGillivray in the Creek nations concerning a proposed American invasion of the Natchez district. These were linked with the audacious attempt of the State of Georgia to establish a western county, called Bourbon, on the Mississippi River in territory still claimed by Spain.⁹ Zespedes feared that such action, if successful, might create an open break between Spain and the United States certain to precipitate military aggression by Georgia.

Even in times of nominal peace, the St. Mary's River was a troubled border. Antipathy persisted between the few former British Loyalists who remained in northern Florida as Spanish subjects and the Georgians who had opposed them in the recent revolution. Renegades, who had flourished during the breakdown of civil order accompanying the war, still infested both sides of

6. Zespedes to Jose de Galvez, Havana, March 3, 1784. EF:b 40, in Lockey, *op. cit.*, 183-184.

7. Zespedes to the Count of Galvez, St. Augustine, February 17, 1786. EF: B 41 b4, Lockey Collection. (He is acknowledging receipt of a confidential letter from Bernardo de Galvez dated Nov. 22, 1785).

8. Zespedes to Jose de Galvez, St. Augustine, Jan. 18, 1786. AHN:Est, leg. 3901. Lockey Collection. (Enclosed is a translation of a letter from Alexander MacGillivray to Zespedes, Apalache, December 10, 1785).

9. Zespedes to Jose de Galvez, St. Augustine, January 3, 1786. AHN: Est. Leg. 3885 bis. Lockey Collection.

the river in the inaccessible creeks and swamplands.¹⁰ Under cover of hostilities they could murder and plunder indiscriminately in raids more destructive than open warfare.

In 1786, Governor Zéspedes was horrified to read in an American newspaper an inflammatory article which contended that both the Floridas and Louisiana must fall under the dominion of the United States, and that this undertaking could be financed by conquering the rich silver kingdom of Mexico.¹¹ He hardly believed that such extravagant threats could be carried out, but he was thankful that internal problems preoccupied the new states. If these were solved, he was convinced, Spain must fear these energetic people. A year later the thirteen states did manage to overcome some of their difficulties and devise a stronger system of government.

By 1787, the general atmosphere was more critical. Governor Zéspedes found indications that England was trying to gain control of all the Indian fur trade from the Straits of Mackinac to the Gulf of Mexico, which would exclude both Spanish and American interests.¹² This new element in the picture was most disquieting, because Spain counted heavily on the friendship of the southern Indians. At almost the same time came a frontier rumor of the death of Alexander McGillivray of the Creeks, the only Indian chief in whom Spain had any measure of confidence.¹³ And in 1787, instead of perennial reports that the Creeks were going to attack the Georgians - or vice versa - the news was that war was raging all along the frontier as a result of American encroachment on Indian lands. Zéspedes knew that hostilities could easily spill over into Florida if the Creeks crossed Florida to attack Georgia communities, or if Georgians took refuge in Florida.

The Georgia Assembly wrote Governor Zéspedes asking his cooperation in preventing further bloodshed, and intimated that the Creeks were murdering Georgians with ammunition supplied

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10. Zéspedes to the Count of Galvez, St. Augustine, January 25, 1786. Box 41 B4. Lockey Collection.
 11. Zéspedes to the Count of Galvez, St. Augustine, May 6, 1787. EF: b 41, B4. Enclosing translation of an extract from an American newspaper, April 3, 1786. Lockey Collection.
 12. Zéspedes to the Marques de Sonora, St. Augustine, March 30, 1787. AHN:Est. Leg. 3901. Lockey Collection.
 13. Zéspedes to Jose de Ezpeleta, St. Augustine, October 27, 1787. AGI: PC, Leg. 1395. Lockey Collection.

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by the Spanish government.¹⁴ Georgia military forces also set up a camp on Cumberland Island a short distance across the water from the Spanish outpost at Amelia Island.¹⁵ The crisis passed as the smoothly phrased and reassuring letters of Zespedes and Carlos Howard eased tension.¹⁶

All in all, during his first three years as governor of East Florida, Zespedes learned of many plots, threats, and rumors. He was aware that a variety of factors could affect the stability of the border and the internal security of the province.

During the dangerous situation which developed in the early fall of 1787, Governor Zespedes received his first clues concerning a large scale conspiracy. A letter arrived from a Thomas Powell in Charleston, who claimed to have information of importance to the Spanish nation about a project which had originated in Kentucky. Zespedes thought that the man was probably an imposter of some sort, but almost simultaneously Carlos Howard received a letter from an Irish comrade in New Orleans¹⁷ saying a stranger had just arrived in town from Kentucky. His name was James Wilkinson, and he was said to be a former brigadier in the American army, though he claimed to be a doctor by profession. Wilkinson seemed an affable fellow, according to the report, who allegedly planned to settle among the Spaniards, but who probably had other motives.¹⁸

In view of this vague, but corroborating evidence of suspicious activities originating in Kentucky, Governor Zespedes hurriedly arranged for Thomas Powell to come to Florida for a personal conference. He sent a sloop to Charleston, with a trustworthy captain, to take him a passport for the voyage. The captain found Powell suffering from a severe throat infection, but brought word that he expected to be able to travel within ten days.¹⁹

14. George Matthews to Zespedes, Augusta, November 6, 1787. EF b108, D9. East Florida Papers, Lockey Collection. Also, George Mathews to the President of Congress, Augusta, November 15, 1787. Transcript from the Georgia Archives in the Lockey collection.

15. Zespedes to Ezpeleta, St. Augustine, November 14, 1787. AGI: PC. Leg. 1395. Lockey Collection. Enclosure is Gregorio del Castillo to Zespedes, Amelia Island, Nov. 10, 1787.

16. Zespedes to George Matthews, draft of letter dated St. Augustine, December 10, 1787. EF:b108, D9. Lockey Collection.

17. Enrique White, the author, was later governor of West Florida, 1793-1796; and East Florida, 1796-1811.

18. Zespedes to Ezpeleta, St. Augustine, Nov. 21, 1787. AGI:PC, Leg. 1395. Lockey Collection.

19. Captain was Lorenzo Coll, a Minorcan who had come to the New Smyrna settlement in 1767.

The young man who stepped ashore at St. Augustine early in December, 1787, was quite evidently in frail health, weak and trembling from recurrent attacks of fever. Carlos Howard accompanied him from the wharf across the open square bordered by orange trees to the Governor's house, and later recorded his testimony.

The plot which came to light in this fashion was so comprehensive that it merits close scrutiny. It suggests the casual manner in which a man in the eighteenth century could become involved in conspiracy. Also this project was probably one of the earliest plans to promote rebellion in the Spanish colonies of Central and South America.

Thomas Powell had a fairly eventful personal history.²⁰ Joseph Powell, his father, was a Welsh immigrant who had become an independent merchant in New York City, closely associated with de group protesting English oppression of the colonies. Thomas was born in 1759 at the family home on Bond Street and was raised as a Roman Catholic until he was twelve years old, when his father died and he came under the influence of his mother's Protestant convictions. His two brothers were given early introductions to trades—one as a sailing master, the other as a coach maker—but Thomas at sixteen was inflamed by youthful patriotism to join the revolutionary army. After eight months in the second regiment of New Jersey, he joined the New York corps of Colonel Marinus Willet,²¹ a close friend of his father. Three months later he transferred to the artillery regiment of Colonel John Lamb,²² who was married to a cousin. At

20. The Interrogation of Thomas Powell, St. Augustine, December 21, 1787, enclosed in Zepedes to Ezpeleta, St. Augustine, January 16, 1788. AGI:PC Leg. 1395. Except as otherwise noted, Powell's story is based on this testimony.

21. Marinus Willet participated in invasion of Canada in 1775. Was left in charge of St. Johns after it was captured on Nov. 3. On Nov. 21, 1776, he was commissioned Lieut. Col. of the 3rd New York regiment. In 1790, he was George Washington's personal emissary to Alexander McGillivray, and succeeded in bringing the Creek chief back to New York. Zepedes sent Carlos Howard to try to dissuade McGillivray from entering into an alliance. See Whitaker, *op. cit.*, 136. In 1792 he declined an army commission because he opposed an Indian war. DAB.

22. John Lamb was married to Catherine Jaudine, of Huguenot descent. He was closely associated with Willet all of his life. They were business partners, worked together in Sons of Liberty organization; both participated in siege of St. Johns, Canada, in 1775. Lamb was captured at siege of Quebec, Dec. 31, 1775, imprisoned six months

the end of a year he held the rank of third lieutenant in the artillery, but his term of active service was short because he was soon captured by the British. At the end of six months of imprisonment he left the army, embittered because he thought authorities could have arranged his exchange earlier.³³

The next few years he lived with his mother in New Jersey, during which period he struck up a friendship with Light-Horse Harry Lee, whose dragoons carried out some of the most dramatic exploits of the Revolution. Lee was skirmishing in New Jersey from 1777 to 1779,²⁴ attacking British installations and rounding up supplies for Washington's army.²⁵

Near the end of the war, Thomas Powell joined the southern army of General Nathanael Greene,²⁶ which was closing in on Charleston. Arriving in South Carolina, he almost immediately came upon his friend Colonel Lee. At this time the American army was virtually destitute of clothing. Over a thousand men were unable to be assigned to duty because of their nakedness, and others had only fragments of garments pinned together with the thorns of locust trees.²⁷ The British in Charleston were equally destitute of food, since advancing Americans had cut their supply lines to the country. Under these circumstances, Colonel Lee recommended that Powell go through the British lines with a flag of truce and arrange for the exchange of the necessary food and clothing.³³ This was accomplished with the

before his parole, and later exchanged. In Jan., 1777, he was commissioned Lt. Col. of 2nd continental artillery. DAB. A group of his men were captured at Fort Montgomery, on the Hudson River, in October of 1777. See: Isaac Q. Leake, *Memoir of General John Lamb* (Albany, 1850), 176.

23. Powell blamed the American General Livingston. James Livingston also participated in the capture of Fort St. Johns, and the later unsuccessful siege of Quebec. On Jan. 8, 1776, he was commissioned colonel in command of a battalion on the New York line. He was with Willet on the expedition to relieve Fort Stanwix. DAB.
24. Thomas Alexander Boyd, *Light-Horse Harry Lee* (New York-London, 1931), 24 ff.
25. *Ibid.*, 30, 32.
26. Nathanael Greene assumed direction of the Continental force in the south on December 3, 1780, replacing Gates. John Richard Alden, *The South in the Revolution, 1763-1789* (Baton Rouge, 1957), 251.
27. George Washington Greene, *The Life of Nathanael Greene* (New York, 1871. 3 vols.) III. 448.
28. *Ibid.*, 449. Powell's testimony is substantiated by the following quotation: "A contraband trade was carried on with Charleston under the eye of Lee and Laurens, and some articles of first neces-

mutual consent of both commanders²⁹ on the basis of the credit of John McQueen,³⁰ at whose plantation Lee had his headquarters.³¹

Powell also managed to smuggle out of Charleston, with McQueen's aid, such items as gunpowder, salt and spirituous liquors. Finally the British apprehended him and sent him to New York as a prisoner for the second time. He escaped into New Jersey almost immediately, and returned to Charleston at the end of the war to collect from the State of South Carolina the sum of three thousand pounds sterling due to him for furnishing supplies to the American army.³²

Since money was scarce in South Carolina, Powell received payment in goods which were disposed of on commission by a business associate, George Farragut,³³ captain of an American frigate, whom he had known during the war. In June, 1786,

sity were procured by the exchange of goods for rice. When the army advanced to Bacon's Ridge at the head of the Ashley, a communication was opened by water and a brisker trade was carried on, the authorities on both sides winking at the illegality in consideration of the mutual advantage Rum, blankets and hospital stores, some articles of clothing and the indispensable article of salt were obtained through these channels and paid in drafts on the Superintendent of Finance."

29. British Commandant at Charleston was Nisbet Balfour (1743-1823). He was appointed Lieutenant Colonel of the Twenty-third British Regiment in 1778 and accompanied Lord Cornwallis to Charleston, becoming Commandant when the city surrendered in 1780. *DAB*.
30. John McQueen of Charleston supplied the Continental Army with food and lumber in 1781 and 1782. See: *The Letters of Don Juan McQueen to his family, written from Spanish East Florida, 1791-1807*, with a biographical sketch and notes by Walter Charlton Hartridge (Columbia, S. C., 1943), Introduction, xxiv. Powell's testimony refers to the fact that McQueen had moved to Sapelo Island, Ga., and was living there in 1787. He moved to Spanish East Florida in 1792.
31. Boyd, *op. cit.*, 141.
32. No evidence of this claim has been located. The claim for a Thomas Powell included in Return No. 15, filed Oct. 11, 1784, is that of a drummer, and amounts to only 70 pounds. It is listed in South Carolina, State Auditor. *Copy of the Original Index Book Showing the Revolutionary claims filed in South Carolina between August 20, 1783, and August 31, 1786, kept by James McCall, Auditor General* (Columbia, Janie Revill, 1941). Photostat in possession of author.
33. George Farragut was a captain in the South Carolina Navy from May 12, 1780, to March 10, 1783. His claim for payment of services amounted to 442 pounds sterling. Original is in South Carolina Archives, Document No. AA2309, Acct. 7 F. A petition to secure payment was presented to the state senate of February 13, 1786, signed by Jacob Milligan, Charles Crowley, Joseph B. Matthews, Edward Allen, and Crowley signing for George Farragut, and John Milligan signing for Jacob Milligan. Photostats in possession of author. Farragut's claim is listed in the Index Book cited in Footnote 32.

Powell traveled about eighty miles on horseback to Farragut's home in Orange County, on the North Fork of the Edisto River, to settle their accounts. Other members of this household were Farragut's uncle, Gaspar Trolty and another nephew, who both spoke broken English with a suggestion of an Italian accent. At a distance, Powell could recognize Farragut, with his black hair drawn back in a queue, and his left arm hanging awkwardly due to gun shot damage to the bones below the elbow. Coming closer, he realized that his friend's thin, dark face betrayed extreme agitation, and before long Farragut revealed the conspiracy in which he was already associated.

A number of gentlemen of property and military talent in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia had subscribed a hundred thousand pounds sterling to purchase uniforms and ammunition in Europe for equipping five thousand men. They were to infiltrate the Spanish settlements under the pretext of colonizing and ultimately combine with a force from Kentucky to overthrow Spanish rule. This whole process might take several years to accomplish, of course.

Another branch of the intrigue had already extended to the Caribbean area where a New Yorker named Thomas Brown had established a lodging house at Trinidad with the manifest intention of becoming a Spanish subject. This base was to be a springboard for operations into Central and South America with the object of inciting those colonies to rebellion against Spain.

At Farragut's invitation, Powell agreed to join the project and contribute to the fund the only wealth he possessed, which was the credit still due him by the State of South Carolina. He was interested to hear that another member was Thomas Brown, whom he remembered from his school days as a tall, auburn-haired fellow with clear blue eyes. He knew that Brown had taken a schooner to the Island of Santa Eustacia, but of course had not learned earlier of his other connections.

Farragut was eager to secure Powell's participation and wanted to leave immediately for North Carolina to meet the leader, Colonel Tate, also of Orange County, South Carolina. Powell said he would have to make a quick trip to settle some business affairs in Charleston, and he really intended to return immediately to the Edisto upcountry. But he came down with an attack of fever, which was so prevalent along the rivers in the

summer,³⁴ and was severely ill during most of the winter. He was still battling a high fever in November, 1786, when Farragut came to Charleston to see if he could attend the first general meeting of the conspirators to be held in North Carolina. Farragut even brought along pen-drawn maps of the Mississippi Valley indicating the Spanish establishments which were the objects of attack and the places where they anticipated cooperation from Spanish subjects.

Farragut went on to North Carolina alone and disappeared from Charleston until March, 1787, when he slipped into town at night to bring Powell information about the developments of the intrigue. To maintain absolute secrecy, and since Farragut was well known in Charleston, they conferred at Farragut's lodging during the day, but after dark transferred their discussions to Powell's quarters.³⁵

At the first general meeting, plans for the overseas venture had matured. Three men were to carry the action into Central America. Farragut was assigned to this job because of his nautical and linguistic skill, and Powell because of his unusual business experience. The third man was Thomas Brown of Trinidad. Other details were to be settled at a second meeting in the early summer, again in North Carolina-and again Thomas Powell was unable to attend because of illness. But in June of 1787 he received a letter assuring him that everything was organized and urging him to be ready for action in January of 1788. Colonel Tate had appointed subordinates in North Carolina and Virginia. Traders were ready with goods to deal with the Indians. On the rivers all supplies except nails had been accumulated for building boats. Farragut assured him that the Creoles would receive the conspirators with open arms. He also made a vague reference to a shipload of indigo from country to the south, which had been shipped to Europe via Charleston to pay for some of the equipment.

34. David Ramsay, *History of South Carolina, from its first settlement in 1670 until the year 1808* (Charleston, 1809, 2 vols.) Appendix No. 4. "A statistical account of the Orangeburgh district, chiefly from the communications of Dr. Jamieson and Dr. Shecut. The District lies 79 miles northwest of Charleston. Stagnant ponds and river swamps are a scourge of the country settlements. Inhabitants are annually visited with fevers."

35. Among the people mentioned, Powell recalled Major Tate, a brother of Colonel Tate, and a group from Virginia: Captain O'Sullivan, Captain Anderson, a man named Morgan and another named Dickens or Dickenson.

Either the imminence of the action, or the vast proportions of the scheme, or the melancholy results of persistent attacks of severe headache and fever-or a combination of all three-reduced Thomas Powell to a soul-searching frame of mind. Alone in his quarters, he felt tortured by personal problems and moral issues which involved his early religious training. He visualized that this activity could result in shedding human blood, and perhaps open warfare between the United States and Spain. Yet, if he backed out of the conspiracy at this late date, he feared for his life. He couldn't bring the plot to the attention of the American authorities without testifying against his friends, which could also bring retaliation. In his wretched state, he turned to a Catholic priest ³⁶ who brought the first letter to Governor Zespedes in St. Augustine giving an intimation of the conspiracy.

After Carlos Howard had taken down the testimony of Thomas Powell, he made a Spanish version for the Governor. Zespedes must have recognized some of the names. John MacQueen visited St. Augustine in 1784. General Greene had been Zespedes' guest in 1785 for several days of festive entertaining, and was provided with a military escort for his trip back to the St. Mary's River border. The Spanish governor should probably have taken note of the name Thomas Brown. In June of 1787, Gardoqui, the Spanish representative in New York, had given permission to a Thomas Brown, who had arrived with a valid passport from the governor of Trinidad, to return to Trinidad by way of St. Augustine. ³⁷ Brown stopped briefly in St. Augustine in August, a few weeks before Zespedes received his first letter from Thomas Powell. This coincidence was never mentioned in Zespedes' subsequent correspondence with higher colonial officials.

36. Powell refers to the priest as the Rev. Roan, superintendent of the Catholic parish in Charleston. Official history does not mention such a man as early as 1787. See: John Gilmary Shea, *Life and Times of the Most Rev. John Carroll, embracing the History of the Catholic Church in the United States, 1763-1815* (New York, 1888), 316. "In 1788 Dr. Carroll sent to Charleston the Rev. Mr. Ryan, a very pious Irish priest who found the Catholics, few, poor and timid. He hired a ruined building, once used by protestants. Here the Catholic religion was first publicly exercised in Carolina." A footnote on page 317 says, "It is somewhat strange that the good priest the Rev. Mr. Ryan has been ignored." The writing of the name as "Roan" is probably a copyist's error.

37. Zespedes to Ezpeleta, St. Augustine, August 3, 1787, AGI:PC Leg. 1395, enclosing Gardoqui to Zespedes, New York City, June 8, 1787. Lockey Collection.

The whole story still seemed preposterous to the Governor, who wondered if Powell were of sound mind, but once more he received corroborating evidence from other sources. Gardoqui wrote of definite indications that a band was gathering on the Ohio and Tennessee rivers to attack New Orleans. Also, the *Richmond Gazette* of May 10, 1787, had printed an editorial which appeared to be the work of the conspirators.³⁸

Zespedes decided to keep in contact with Powell, so he arranged for him to correspond in cipher with Carlos Howard. He also suggested to Gardoqui that it might be a good idea to have a subordinate consul of His Majesty's government established at Charleston, since it was a seaport of considerable importance for the southern states.³⁹

Before leaving St. Augustine, Thomas Powell was urged to accept a hundred pesos to cover the expenses of his trip, and he was assured that asylum was always available in His Majesty's dominions. Zespedes emphasized that he particularly wanted definite information as to the time of Farragut's planned departure from America, his destination, and his prospective time of arrival in the Spanish Indies. He further promised Powell that if Farragut were apprehended, he should not suffer capital punishment. Powell could not bear to be responsible for the death of a person who had placed confidence in him.

After Thomas Powell returned to Charleston, an acquaintance named Dr. James O'Fallon inquired about his trip to St. Augustine, and Powell said he was thinking of settling in Florida. The idea appealed to O'Fallon, who was momentarily discouraged because his party—the more plebian faction—had lost out in the recent municipal election. Powell arranged for O'Fallon to correspond with Carlos Howard, sending along the warning that O'Fallon was probably associated with the western projects.⁴⁰

38. Enclosures in Zespedes to Ezpeleta, St. Augustine, Jan. 16, 1788. AGI:PC, Leg. 1395. Lockey Collection.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Zespedes to Ezpeleta, St. Augustine, Oct. 11, 1788. AGI:PPC, Leg. 1395. O'Fallon became the agent of the South Carolina Yazoo Land company and managed to pervert the company's colonizing plan, which had some Spanish sanction, into a projected attack on Louisiana in 1793. He was exposed by James Wilkinson, whose suspicious arrival in Pensacola had impressed Governor Zespedes earlier. Wilkinson, after a vacillating career as a Spanish agent to separate Kentucky from the Union, was the American general who received the Spanish post at Natchez when it was evacuated in 1798. Whitaker, *op. cit.*, 141, 221. See *supra*, n. 18.

The unrealistic schemes for populating Florida developed by Dr. O'Fallon were of no interest to Governor Zespedes, who tried to get rid of the spirited Irishman by honoring him with a letter of recommendation to Gardoqui.

Carlos Howard's letters from Powell brought no further information about the plans. January of 1788 passed without any sign of the action which had been forecast,⁴¹ but by March he expected to have news of Powell's attendance at the third general meeting of the conspirators. Zespedes finally decided that this rumored conspiracy was outside his jurisdiction, since it did not directly concern the internal affairs of East Florida. He suggested that Gardoqui follow up the matter, and sent Thomas Powell a letter of recommendation for that purpose, but there were no further developments.⁴² Thomas Powell disappeared - a conscience-stricken eighteenth-century adventurer with a brief career. He may have returned to New York to join his brother in the business of making coaches, but more likely he succumbed during the next fever season.

Zespedes concluded that the matter would probably end in the back country - a final judgment which coincided with his first reaction. He completely ignored the references to securing independence for the Spanish colonies.⁴³ Such motivation was

41. The anti-royalist sentiments in the upper Edisto river came to the surface again in the 1790's, stimulated by the fall of the French monarchy in 1789. One group volunteered their services to the representatives of Republican France in Charleston and offered to fight in Austria, but were not accepted. William Tate - possibly one of the Tates whom Farragut knew - was commissioned by Citizen Genet colonel in charge of the legion of South Carolina, which was to march into West Florida in 1793. They were successfully opposed on the frontier by Carlos Howard, who had just been transferred from East Florida. See Richard K. Murdoch, *The Georgia-Florida Frontier, 1793-1796* (Berkeley, 1951), 13-14.

42. Zespedes to Ezpeleta, St. Augustine, May 14, 1788. AGI:PC, Leg. 1395. Lockey Collection.

43. "In 1786, while negotiations were taking place (between Jay and Gardoqui concerning navigation of the Mississippi River), John Adams wrote to Governor Bowdoin of Massachusetts, cautioning American officials against 'intrigues of individuals . . . said to be on foot to set South America free from Spain. But I hope that States will not only be prudent but compel individuals to be so too.' " - Adams to Bowdoin. James Bowdoin, *Papers* (Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., Series VI, Vol. IX; Series VII, Vol. VI, 97.) See Harry Bernstein, *Origins of Inter-American Interest, 1700-1812* (Philadelphia, 1945), 28.

incomprehensible to a loyal Spaniard, who found real glory in serving his King as a faithful vassal.

He saw no reason to doubt the perpetual validity of monarchy as a system of government. In Spain, Charles III had ruled for over a quarter of a century, during which the empire had progressed continuously. Her overseas dominion, since de acquisition of Louisiana and reoccupation of the Floridas, was at the peak of geographic expansion. In France, another Bourbon monarch was still secure on his throne. England, Spain's colonial rival, was humbled slightly by these upstart colonists. But the American states still appeared floundering and disunited, with every prospect that another political grouping would form in territory west of the Appalachians.

Zespedes was insensitive to the contagious spirit of independence and self-government. He had no respect for these turbulent and ambitious frontiersmen who knew no law but their own caprice. In the plot revealed by Thomas Powell, Zespedes saw only further indications of the boundless avarice of adventurers who believed that in the Spanish dominions one had only to scratch the earth to find gold and silver, and who therefore were capable of the wildest schemes to realize their foolish dreams.⁴⁴

44. Zespedes to Valdez, March 24, 1788, AHN:Est. Leg. 3901. Lockey Collection.