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James W. Covington



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TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN SOUTHWESTERN FLORIDA AND CUBA- 1600-1840

by JAMES W. COVINGTON

WHEN CUBA had been settled by the Spanish, heavy inroads were made into the nearby supply of edible fish, and the Havana fishing interests were forced to look elsewhere for a ready source. Southwestern Florida with its almost inexhaustible schools of drum, redfish, mullet, pompano, and grouper was situated only a short distance away and easily fitted into the Havana market situation. The combination of the excellent Cuban market and the nearby available supply of edible fish proved to be a business opportunity which would be profitable for many years for the inhabitants of both the island of Cuba and the peninsula of Florida.

After the glorious days of the *Conquistadores* in Florida had passed, the people of Cuba still maintained commercial contacts in southwestern Florida. Some Indians living in Florida had demonstrated on many occasions evidence of a strong desire to acquire some European items, and the Cuban traders and fishermen moving up and down the coast were able to promote a respectable amount of business. Of course, items traded to the Indians were highly restricted. There could be no firearms, large knives, or anything which might be used as a weapon. Jonathan Dickinson, who was shipwrecked at Jupiter Inlet in 1696, related how the Spanish searched the homes of the Indians for money and weapons, and took from them all metal objects, including the stub of a nail.¹ Some trade items which have been found in Indian mounds near the coast included glass beads of various colors, copper and silver hawk bells, olive jar sherds, mirrors, silver pendants, scissors, axes, and other similar items.²

During these days there were many West Indian sea otters and manatees to be found near the islands and rivers along the coast of southern Florida. The Spanish living in Havana used

1. Evangeline and Charles Andrews, eds., *Jonathan Dickinson's Journal* (New Haven, 1945), 63.

2. Hale G. Smith, *The European and the Indian* (Gainesville, 1956), 55, 61-62.

the fat of these animals to grease the bottoms of the ships. The Indians captured, killed, and cured large numbers of the sea otters and manatees and traded them, plus mats made from bark and grass, for European articles to the visitors from Havana.³

The natives of southern Florida soon realized that the Spanish greatly desired ambergris, that valuable substance from which perfume was made, and they eagerly searched along the sandy beaches for it. When a Spanish trading ship appeared, the Indians would paddle their canoes to the vessel and surround it on all sides. Even before orders were given to anchor, the red men climbed aboard and traded the ambergris to the captain, pilot, and members of the crew. In return for this valuable secretion from the whale the Indians received scissors, knives, axes, hatchets, and fishhooks, and were most happy even when it appeared to European eyes that the exchange was most uneven.⁴

Some members of the Spanish party which rescued Dickinson and his group from the Indian captivity decided to do some trading with the red people. The Indians desired tobacco so much that they eagerly traded a yard of linen, silk or wool material, stolen from Dickinson, for a single tobacco leaf. One Indian boasted to the English that he had taken about five pounds of ambergris to St. Augustine and exchanged it for a "looking glass," an axe, a knife or two, and five or six pounds of tobacco.

The captives observed some evidence of English contact with the Indians. They noted two English canoes, one of which was similar to those made in Jamaica, and other articles, including sheaves of *lignum vitae*, several tools and knives, and a razor with the name of Thomas Foster carved on the haft. One Indian living in the village had been seized by an English sloop and forced to work as a diver at a sunken wreck in the waters near eastern Cuba. When the vessel stopped in Cuba for water, he escaped

3. William Roberts, *An Account of the First Discovery and Natural History of Florida* (London, 1753), 19.
4. Material taken from Spanish manuscript, "La Florida," written by Escobedo during the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries. This material is now in the process of being edited for publication by the author.
5. Letter dated November 20, 1655, with no signature, published in Annie Averette, editor and translator *The Unwritten History of Old St. Augustine* (St. Augustine, 1902), 101.

and made his way to Havana, then to St. Augustine, and back to his village.⁶

In July, 1654, a party of Indians, residing on the coast near the Bahama Channel, visited St. Augustine carrying with them a sizable amount of ambergris. Part of their valuable load they presented to the governor, and the remainder they exchanged for Spanish goods. Some members of the garrison were most eager to supplement their often tardy pay by trading their extra or old clothes for ambergris. The governor took advantage of this golden opportunity by dispatching a scouting force to the Indian village, where broken and seemingly useless iron implements were exchanged for the valuable ambergris. Realizing that the situation really was a golden opportunity, word was relayed to Havana to send all discarded iron implements posthaste to Florida. About five hundred tons of iron arrived from Cuba and was given to the Indians, and the Spanish received in return an amount of ambergris which sold in Havana for forty thousand dollars.

Many of these Indians traveled from the mainland to Havana in their small canoes, making the journey from the Keys in twenty-four hours, and traded with the people in the city and the sailors. They carried fish, ambergris, tree bark, fruit, and a few hides or furs to the Cuban city. A very profitable item was the sale of cardinal birds to the sailors at a price ranging from six to ten dollars apiece. The Indians received a princely sum of more than eighteen thousand pesos during the month of March, 1689.⁷ Thus, these half-clad natives in their frail canoes carried on a considerable traffic but, according to the Spanish, acquired very few articles or cultural traits from Cuba.

After 1763, when some surviving members of the original southern Florida tribes migrated to Cuba, and the remainder have somehow vanished from the searching eyes of the historians, a large area without any hostile population was opened to the advancing Seminoles coming in from Georgia, Alabama, and northern Florida. These Indians had traded with Cuba even when they were living in the extreme northern part of Florida. They owned large, handsome canoes made from the trunks of cypress trees which were capable of holding from twenty to thirty men. These

6. Andrews, *op. cit.*, 61-62.

7. Anthony Kerrigan, ed., *Barcia's Chronological History of the Continent of Florida* (Gainesville, 1951), 344-345.

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sea-going canoes were used to carry the Seminoles on visits to the Florida Keys, Cuba, and the Bahamas. Usually, these people traded deerskins, furs, dried fish, beeswax, honey, bear's oil and other articles, for rum, coffee, sugar and tobacco. One Seminole presented William Bartram, in 1773, a piece of tobacco which he had received from the Governor of Cuba. A band of Seminoles, which had roamed as far south as Charlotte Harbor, traded furs and hides for dried fish which the Spaniards caught and salted or cured on the islands lying off the coast.⁸ The traffic between the Seminoles and the natives of Cuba probably continued until the Second Seminole War. A visitor to Charlotte Harbor in 1824 noted that it was a frequent event for the Indians to be transported to Havana, where they received a cordial welcome. Captain Isaac Clark met, at Charlotte Harbor, Jumper, a leading Seminole, who was waiting for his followers to return from Havana with a supply of rum.⁹

The knowledge that the coastal centers of Florida contained a bountiful supply of edible fish had brought Spanish fishing vessels to the waters of southwestern Florida as early as around the beginning of the seventeenth century, and by 1770, it was reported that thirty or more vessels from Cuba were engaged in this trade. However, it is a tradition at Key West that the first fishermen on the island, engaged in supplying de Havana market, had come from St. Augustine. Perhaps the inhabitants of the other ranchos had come from the same city.

The fishing season usually lasted from the end of August until the last of March of each year, and during this period the Cuban vessels used coastal islands as their headquarters. These bases or ranchos were located in the general area from Tampa Bay to Jupiter Island. A varied assortment of fish, including drum, sea bass, the highly prized pompano, and sea trout were caught and dried or salted at the ranchos. Valuable oil from the livers of sharks was collected to be sold at high prices in Havana. The roe from mullet and drum was carefully cured by the smoke

8. Mark Van Doren, ed., *Travels of William Bartram* (New York, 1928), 193-194.

9. George Humphreys to John C. Calhoun, March 2, 1825, Florida Seminoles, 1825, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, hereafter cited as RBIA.

of burning corncobs; thus making a dish which one person claimed was as good as caviar.¹⁰

When the fishermen first arrived at the ranchos to start a new fishing season, they usually prepared their nets and built a new hut or repaired the old one. Then they erected the racks, on which the fish were hung to cure in the sun, by stringing fresh lines, made from silk grass, to the wooden hooks and stakes. This native silk grass was very useful to the fishermen, as they often wove their nets and other similar apparatus from it.

The fish which were caught by the Cubans were dried upon the curing racks, as mentioned above, but the roe was treated in a different manner. It was placed in a salty solution for fifteen minutes, partially dried in the sun, and finally pressed between two boards. After some time has passed, the roe was placed on a rack in a small hut and cured by the smoke of corncobs.

The men engaged in these fishing operations had a typical arrangement in regard to a share of the profits from the trip. Each man furnished his piece of net, lines, share of salt and food for the trip. The proceeds were divided as follows: owner of the vessel received one-third; the captain was given two shares of the remaining two-thirds; each crew member received one share, and the young helpers were counted as two for one full share.

One expensive but indispensable item required for the voyage was salt. The fishermen were not allowed by Spanish law to go to any convenient spot along the coast and boil sea water in large kettles, and thus make a ready supply of salt. They were obliged, instead, to go to the King's warehouse at Havana and pay one dollar and fifty cents, or twelve reals, a fanego - a measure which was approximately equal to two bushels for salt they had previously collected at Cayo Sal and carried to the Warehouse.¹¹ These men were particularly unhappy about the forced purchase of salt at four times the sum they had received. How-

10. Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*, II (New York, 1775), 185. One of the first accounts of fishing along the coast of southwestern Florida is related in Escobedo's "La Florida." It tells how a Spanish vessel stopped at a rise in the shore and the crew was able to catch two thousand trout and more than one thousand "gold fish." Since there was no salt available in the flat areas, the fish were cleaned, split, and exposed to the sun and breeze. Such a procedure seemingly kept the fish from spoiling.

11. Cayo Sal is a small island group lying to the northeast of Havana.

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ever, the only other tax they were required to pay was the two and one half per cent duty of entry for the fish.

Since competing products from Newfoundland were not as well liked as the ones from Florida, the profits from the Florida fishing industry were most favorable. Sometimes these profits from fishing were supplemented by deals in skins traded with migratory Seminoles who hunted near the coastal areas during the fishing seasons. The hides usually were exchanged for salt and dry goods. One captain of a fishing vessel told James Forbes that each schooner averaged about two thousand dollars profit per trip, and sometimes two voyages were made per season.¹²

One possible use for the dried fish in Cuba was as food for the Negro slaves. It could be easily carried, stored, and eaten when desired without fear of spoilage.

When the English acquired Florida in 1763, they kept a close watch over the fishermen, but allowed them to continue their activities. Governor James Grant was ordered to bring their operations to a halt, but he did not enforce this command. When it was suspected that the various fishing boats might be a threat to the British control of Florida, the entire operations of the Cuban fishing vessels were completely reviewed and found to be harmless by the British in 1767-1768.¹³

Some of the fishermen liked the beautiful coastal islands and decided to live there permanently instead of traveling from Cuba to Florida and back again each year. They worked for the various companies during the fishing season, and then cultivated their small garden plots during the remainder of the year. They usually did not hunt in the interior for game but depended upon their cast-nets for fish during the slack season.

Since it was not the custom to bring white women to the ranchos, these fishermen married the Seminole women and the marriages were regarded as legally binding in Cuba. Many of the children born of these unions were taken to Cuba, baptized, and educated there. Some remained in Cuba, obtaining jobs on the island and enjoying all the rights and privileges of Spanish subjects.¹⁴

12. James G. Forbes, *Sketches: Historical and Topographical of the Floridas* (New York, 1821), 118.

13. Charles L. Mowat, *East Florida as a British Providence, 1763-1784* (Berkeley, 1943), 20.

14. Petitioners to Joel Poinsett, Secretary of War, 1838, printed in "Petition From Some Latin-American Fisherman: 1838," James W. Covington, ed., *Tequesta*, XIV (1954).

The fishing ranchos contained an interesting variety of persons and cultures during this period. Most of the white Cubans living at the settlements had Indian wives, children, and even grandchildren. The mixed-blood children usually acquired mates from the Seminole tribe proper. Most of them were born at the ranchos, spoke Spanish, and had not gone ten miles into the interior of Florida. Several of the male full-blood Seminoles worked as crew members aboard the fishing vessels and were acknowledged by white observers to be capable sailors.¹⁵

By 1818, a limited number of persons had established permanent residences on islands along the coast and had planted vegetable gardens and small citrus groves. One, Andrew Gonzales, had cultivated fifteen acres of orange and lime trees and ten acres of corn, peas, pumpkins, and melons.¹⁶ Sometimes these farmers earned some money by selling the products of their gardens to the fishermen during the season. Since no legal title to these various farms was required or could be established in court, the United States Government, in 1828, refused to acknowledge the claims of such settlers to the land.¹⁷

One of the best accounts concerning the most widely known rancho is the description of Toampa Island by John Williams in the *Territory of Florida*:

Toampa Island lies five miles South of Boca Grande. It is about a mile long from east to west, is a rich shell hammock and produces many tropical fruits, as cocoanut, limes, oranges, etc., but is badly cultivated. The proprietor is a stout, healthy, old white-haired Spaniard, very industrious; carries on fishing to a great extent; keeps two small schooners running to Havana with fish and turtle. His village is built on the west side of the island and consists of from eighteen to twenty palmetto houses, mostly occupied by various branches of his extensive family.

There are three other fishing establishments in the bay. Most of the islands in this bay are fertile, but the Spanish and Indians who occupy them cultivate very little land. A small quantity of corn, beans, and melons satisfy them as they live principally on fish.¹⁸

15. Augustus Steele to General William Thompson, January 10, 1835, Florida Seminoles, 1835, RBIA.

16. *Spanish Land Grants in Florida*, I (Tallahassee, 1940), 43.

17. *Ibid.*, 26.

18. John Williams, *The Territory of Florida* (New York, 1837), 25.

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There were several plantations located near Caximbus Sound. John Durant, from Savannah, Georgia, owned one, and another farm was owned by a mulatto man. Both owners employed some Seminoles to help cultivate the soil, and the crops were sold to the fishermen at a high price. Sometimes the garden vegetables were exchanged for clothing, powder, lead, and other Cuban products. The Indians often captured wild birds, put them in willow cages, and sent them to Havana to be sold.¹⁹

After the United States had acquired title to Florida in 1821, it took some time for the federal authorities to understand the extent of the trade relations with Cuba. However, as early as March, 1822, Acting Governor Worthington of East Florida wrote a letter to Washington telling about eight or nine American fishing smacks, which weighed between thirty-eight and forty tons apiece and operated under Spanish license near Cape Sable. The fishermen usually caught grouper-fish weighing from three to eighteen pounds and sold the catch in Havana at prices ranging from one dollar to one dollar and a half apiece. It was reported that every seven or eight days each vessel visited Cuba and sold the catch, receiving from three to four hundred dollars.²⁰ Such a year-round activity must have proved profitable indeed.

A number of Negroes who had run away from their masters in Georgia feared that they would be returned to slavery and migrated into southern Florida. One such group settled at Fine Island, near present-day Fort Myers, and established a little colony. They obtained muskets from the fishermen and made a living cutting timber and fishing, selling the wood and fish in Havana. It was said that this settlement was protected by several armed Spanish vessels. Some of the other Negroes who did not join this settlement fled by boat from Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor to the Florida Keys, and thence to the Bahamas via fishing boats.²¹

S. S. Seymour visited Tampa Bay in 1822 and discovered that one large fishing establishment situated there had been deserted since the change of flags. Someone told him about a very

19. *Ibid.*, 26.

20. W. G. S. Worthington to John Q. Adams, Secretary of State, March 18, 1822, *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, XXII. The Territory of Florida, 381-382. Hereafter cited as *Territorial Papers*.

21. Governor William Duval to John Calhoun, Secretary of War, September 23, 1853, *ibid.*, 744-745.

popular item which the fishermen had sought—the fat of the manatee or sea cow. It commanded a high price in Havana—as high a price as purest lard in the United States. The Cubans preferred the flesh of the manatee when it was salted.²²

It was due to the uncontrolled activities of the wreckers from the Bahamas, rather than the Cuban and American fishermen, that a customs house was established at Key West, and revenue cutters made regular patrols along the coast.²³ Federal control over Florida was thenceforth demonstrated in several ways which were somewhat restrictive to the Cuban trade. Lieutenant Colonel George M. Brooke, who would soon establish a fort at Tampa Bay, was ordered to check on the cutting of wood at Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor, and to arrest all persons engaged in that activity. Unfortunately, he was so busy with the establishing of the cantonment, which would soon be known as Fort Brooke, that he was unable to check on the illegal wood cutting activities.²⁴ By 1824, however, Brooke had received some information about the Charlotte Harbor ranchos, and he requested that the United States Navy patrol the area. On March 19, 1824, the Secretary of the Navy ordered such a patrol, and at least one vessel stopped at Charlotte Harbor.²⁵

Fishing vessels flying the American flag were soon seen along the coast of southwestern Florida, and their owners pressed the congressmen for a tax to be levied upon the foreign craft. Such a bill was referred to the House of Representatives Committee on Territories, and this committee studied a letter from the Key West Collector of Revenue, William Whitehead. In the letter, Whitehead related how he had visited the ranchos at Charlotte Harbor and found one hundred and thirty men at the four establishments there. Half of the men were Indians; there were about thirty Indian women in the settlement and from fifty to one hundred children. They lived in palmetto huts in a simple manner and had as their chief food fish which they caught. Each establishment had a small schooner which carried the salted and

22. S. S. Seymour, *Titles and Legal Opinions, Lands in East Florida Belonging to Richard S. Hackley* (Brooklyn, 1822), 100.

23. See John DuBose to John Rodman, May 21, 1823, *Territorial Papers*, 684-686.

24. William Duval to Brooke, January 15, 1824, *ibid.*, 834.

25. See *Pensacola Gazette*, October 16, 1824, for the report of the visit of the U. S. Schooner *Terrier* to the rancho "Punta Rosa."

dried catch to Cuba. Whitehead pointed out that at least thirty American vessels from Connecticut had been in the Florida coastal fishing business for some years, and carried their catch to Cuba and sold it there. This business was very profitable and realized a total figure of between twenty and twenty-five thousand dollars, but did not compete with the Cubans as the Americans sold only fresh fish, while the Cubans salted or dried their catch. It was only in 1831 that Whitehead heard of any Americans salting their catch, and they had not complained about the Cubans.

Whitehead had some very kind words for the Cuban fishermen. They paid all of their taxes which were due, and some wanted to become American citizens but were hesitant because they did not know English. The oldest fisherman had resided at Charlotte Harbor for forty-seven years. Whitehead believed the fishermen could openly navigate the water without fear of heavy taxes because Article Fifteen of the Adams-Onís Treaty gave equal protection to American and Spanish vessels for twelve years.²⁶

Most impressive were the duties paid by the fishing vessels. Duties on reported stores for 1829, 1830, and 1831, amounted to \$1,49,140. Salt purchased at Key West amounted to two thousand pounds; duties on salt imported from Cuba during the three years totaled \$1,297.70 and tonnage fees paid during the same period amounted to \$1,223.43. The entire sum for 1829-1831 paid into the United States Treasury was \$4,717.53. The exports of the fishermen during the year 1831 were valued at \$18,000 and consisted of dried fish, fish roe, and articles of American manufacture.²⁷

When Fort Brooke was established at Tampa Bay, the fishermen realized that a potential market was available, and they soon began selling Cuban cigars, oranges, pineapples, and other items to the officers and men of the garrison. Sometimes the fishermen captured large sea turtles and sold them to the army officers.

Captain William Bunce of Baltimore, Maryland, had probably become interested in the rich store of fish available in southwestern Florida waters during his visits to Key West. It is diffi-

26. Whitehead to Lewis McLand, Secretary of the Treasury, November 17, 1831, printed in *Key West Gazette*, May 30, 1832.

27. *Ibid.* William A. Whitehead served as Collector of Customs at Key West from 1830 to 1838.

cult to ascertain when Bunce became active in the West Coast fishing business, but the Key West *Enquirer*, on November 15, 1834, reported that Bunce's schooner *Enterprise* had left the harbor with a catch of dried and salted fish for the Havana market. He established a fishing village at the mouth of the Manatee River, at what is now known as Shaw's Point. This site had probably been purchased from an earlier owner and contained the usual assortment of huts and drying racks, but Bunce soon turned it into the most elaborately equipped rancho along the entire coast. Bunce's house contained a sleeping apartment and a store. "The whole interior was neatly finished and partitioned by planed and grooved boards, with planked floors and paneled doors. One hut served as a blacksmith's shop; another contained a neat turning lathe; the third was a carpenter shop. They, in fact, appeared to have appliances and means that you find in one of our small towns."²⁸ The fishermen lived in the thirty to forty circular huts constructed with palmetto thatched sides and roof.

In 1835, the ranchos began to experience much of the trouble which would ultimately lead to their liquidation. Military authorities at the nearby posts were disturbed about the number of Indians living away from the reservation at the fishing establishments, and pressure was brought to bear on Bunce. The owner defended his Indian employees by explaining that they had never gone into the interior of Florida, but he promised to discharge several temporary employees and to order all visitors to return to the reservation. The fishing ranchos, including those operated by Bunce, Caldez, Pelow, Rassa and Eslave, had experienced a poor season in the year 1834-1835 due to the outbreak of cholera in Havana, and only Bunce and Caldez operated to full capacity.²⁹

Judge Augustus Steele also wrote a letter in defense of the Bunce operations. He related how some of the fishermen were of Seminole descent but owed no allegiance to the tribe. They were not recognized by the tribal leaders and had not received any annuities from the federal government. He concluded by stating that if these mixed bloods were removed to the reservation, they

28. Taken from N. S. Jarvis' *An Army Surgeon's Notes*, printed in the *Tampa Tribune*, November 27, 1955.

29. Bunce to Thompson, January 9, 1835, Florida Seminoles, 1835, RBIA.

would be placed in want without means of support.³⁰ Finally, in April, 1835, it was agreed that Bunce was in the right and his employees could remain at their posts.

Trade barriers were raised higher around the United States with the laws passed in 1816 and 1828. In 1832, Spain imposed new discriminatory rates on American imports and, consequently, started a tariff war. The United States then raised the tonnage duties on vessels coming from Cuba and Puerto Rico. In 1834, an additional duty of one dollar per barrel was placed by Spain on items imported in American ships; but Congress, in turn, raised the rates on Spanish ships and imposed a special tax on Cuban coffee.³¹ The *Key West Enquirer*, on January 31, 1835, related how the Act of June 30, 1834, placed a tonnage duty on Spanish vessels coming from Cuba and Puerto Rico. A subsequent issue told how there had been no duty until January 1, 1833, when a ten per cent levy was imposed, and the rate was raised to twelve and a half per cent in 1834. The paper implied that the Spanish rate for American vessels entering Cuban waters was still much higher than the American charge.³² From the available evidence it is difficult to determine if these federal laws had much effect on the Spanish fishing company but, certainly, they were restrictive. It really did not matter much, for the Seminole War of 1835-1842 was soon to cause the destruction of the trade.

In December, 1835, the bloody Second Seminole War blazed forth, and its terrible effect was felt in all parts of Florida. One Seminole raiding party, composed of twenty-five men commanded by Wyhokee, struck at Charlotte Harbor and burned several houses, including the customs building. Dr. Crews, the former customs inspector at Charlotte, and Martin Lopez from St. Augustine were killed by a supposedly friendly Seminole employee while on a hunting trip to a nearby island.³³

The frightened inhabitants of one rancho jumped into two large cypress canoes and headed for the Gulf of Mexico. Near the mouth of Charlotte Harbor they were picked up by the U. S. *Van-*

30. Steele to Thompson, January 10, 1835, *ibid.*

31. Basil Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba: 1848-1855* (New York, 1948), 30-31.

32. *Key West Enquirer*, January 31, 1835.

33. *Ibid.*, May 7, 1836.

dalia and were returned to their homes with adequate military protection.³⁴

Within a short time a force of five hundred soldiers under General Smith moved along the Peace River searching for the Indians, but they could not be found. The Spanish fishermen aided the soldiers by serving as guides through this comparatively unknown area.

When the troops were transferred to another theatre of war, the fishermen became alarmed and one hundred of them decided to move closer to Fort Brooke where they might have adequate protection. The U. S. Cutter *Washington* discovered such a group on Palm Island where they had stopped en route to join one of Bunce's ranchos on Passage Island.³⁵ Even when the fishermen had settled on the islands at the entrance of Tampa Bay, the Seminoles threatened to attack them from Charlotte Harbor, using canoes to cross the water. The Passage Island (Cabbage Key?) settlement was composed mostly of whites, a few friendly Indians, and many children.³⁶

Several of the military leaders were certain that the Seminoles were receiving arms and ammunition from Cuba *via* the fishermen. Accordingly, revenue cutters increased their patrols and a tight net was drawn about the area, but there were always numerous gaps which never could be closed.³⁷ In June, the Dexter captured one Cuban in a canoe near Indian Key, and one of his Seminole Indian companions was killed, but the other jumped into the water and swam to safety.³⁸

34. Lieutenant L. M. Powell to Captain Thomas T. Webb, April 27, 1836, Records of the United States Navy during the Seminole War, 1835-1842, Navy Department Records, National Archives. Hereafter cited as "Naval Records."

35. M. P. Mix to Commodore A. J. Dallas, August 5, 1836, *ibid.*

36. Dallas to Mahlon Dickenson, Secretary of the Navy, September 18, 1836, *ibid.*

37. *Pensacola Gazette*, March 12, 1836.

38. *Ibid.*, June 25, 1836.

On January 21, 1836, the following order was sent to Commodore Dallas: "It has been represented by Governor Eaton to the War Department that the Spanish fishing vessels on the coast of Florida furnish aid to the Indians now at war. Want you to take measures to stop that trade." Mahlon Dickenson to Dallas, January 21, 1836, "Naval Records"

Three years later, on June 14, 1839, the Commander of the U. S. Steamer *Poinsett* was ordered to "stop all communication between the Indians and the fishing and other boats between the United States and Cuba."

J. K. Paulding to Commander I. Mayo, June 14, 1839, *ibid.*

In 1837, the officers and men of the naval squadron commanded by Commodore Dallas landed at Bunce's mainland rancho and burned some of the buildings. Bunce transferred the bulk of his operations to Cabbage Key in the mouth of Tampa Bay and hoped to stay in business. Unfortunately, however, the United States Army moved into every establishment, seizing those who had some or all Indian blood, and transported them to Oklahoma. Wives were even separated from husbands. One newspaper reported that about a hundred and fifty of these so-called Spanish Indians had been removed from Florida. Seven full blood Spaniards were caught up in the dragnet but, after many protests, were allowed to stay at New Orleans until the close of the war.³⁹

General Thomas Jesup, who had ordered the removal of the Indians from the ranchos, explained the reasons for his action in a letter to Bunce. He pointed out that the other Seminoles would refuse to go to Oklahoma if a few members of the tribe were allowed to remain. Both the treaties of Moultrie Creek and Payne's Landing forbade the Indians' living away from the reservation. Thus, Jesup ordered all full and part blood Indian men, women and children to be taken from Bunce's establishments and shipped to Oklahoma.⁴⁰

Another raid took place at the Cabbage Key rancho in the summer of 1840, and the sheds and palmetto thatched buildings were burned to the ground by orders of General Armistead. He took such action because he believed the rancho was a hiding place for "renegade Spaniards who had previously, and at this time, had intercourse with the savage band my troops had to contend against."⁴¹ Henry Wright, administrator of Bunce's estate, later sued the United States Government for damages resulting from the raid. The value of the several sheds on the island was estimated to be one thousand dollars, and Bunce's fishing operations had given him a profit of five thousand dollars in 1840. Several persons, including military officers, testified that Bunce and his men were most loyal and had not associated

39. Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal* (Norman, 1953), 365.

40. General Thomas Jesup to William Bunce at Mullet Key, May 15, 1837, Florida, 1838, RBIA.

41. Letter of General Armistead quoted in "History of William Bunce," by Walter P. Fuller, *Tampa Tribune*, January 9, 1955.

either with the "renegade Spaniards" or the hostile Seminoles. The estate was awarded the sum of one thousand dollars in compensation for the action of Armistead.⁴²

After their wives and children were deported and their employment terminated, the fishermen did their best to adjust to the new situation.⁴³ Several made a living selling fresh fish to the Seminoles waiting at Fort Brooke for passage to the West. It was reported that Luis Rojas received \$55.50, and Juan Castello the sum of \$53.69, from the government for fish during the period. Juan Montes de Oca sold fourteen dollars' worth of potatoes for the use of the Indians.⁴⁴ Some other fishermen went back to the ranchos where they would continue to ply their restricted profession for many years. One fisherman married another Seminole woman, but, by 1858, had lost three wives to the federal Indian removal policy. Certainly, the export trade to Cuba had suffered a harsh blow, but within a few short years the even more important cattle trade would soon take its place. That, however, was another complete account in itself.

42. *House Report* 194, Twenty-ninth Congress, First Session, 1-2.

43. The story of Bunce's rancho is related in the article by Dorothy Dodd, "Captain Bunce's Tampa Bay Fisheries, 1835-1840," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXVI (January, 1947).

44. *House Document* 247, Twenty-seventh Congress, Second Session, II, 1.