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### The Editor's Corner

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THE EDITOR'S CORNER

Mr. James Willard Milgram of 216 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn 1, New York, had an interesting cover and letter in a recent issue of the *Weekly Philatelic Gossip*. With the permission of that publication, a condensation of his article with the letter is reproduced for our readers:

A FLORIDA COVER UNDER AMERICAN OCCUPATION  
OF SPANISH TERRITORY

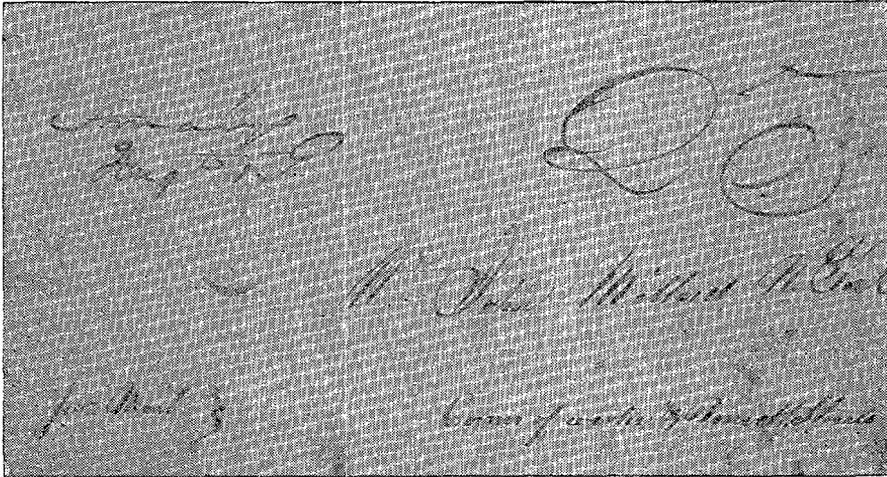
Every so often a collector will own an item for a while and will only appreciate its full significance when he looks at it from a different angle. The letter described herein is a very nice piece with a most interesting historical background discovered only by reading in the Columbia University Libraries.

It is a letter written from Fernandina, Florida in July, 1818. Up to the present time there were no known covers with postmarks until after the transfer of Florida from Spain to the United States, the earliest cover was mailed in September, 1821. To understand the usage, it is necessary to examine the town's history, which is very colorful.

Fernandina is the main town on Amelia Island, an island which lies in the Atlantic Ocean at the northernmost part of Florida. North of the Island the St. Mary's River flows out into the Atlantic at St. Mary's, Ga. An 1821 writer described the river which formed the northern boundary of East Florida at the time. It was navigable for 60 miles by vessels up to 160 tons. The military post of Trader's Hill or Fort Alert, 40 miles up the river, had acted since its establishment in 1812 as a barrier to Indian penetration into Georgia as well as a check upon the smugglers trading between the Americans and the Spanish. South of the island the Nassau River also issues out to the ocean. Two channels from these rivers cut off the island from the mainland. The upper channel forms an excellent harbor, and it is here that the town is situated.

Because of the nautical considerations of Fernandina, it had been used occasionally as a harbor since early Spanish occupation of Florida. Its location had been the site of a Spanish mission

during the 16th and 17th centuries. After the reoccupation of Florida by Spain in 1784 few of the former inhabitants returned, and Fernandina before 1808 consisted of a few huts and was noted only for wells dug by the English to procure fresh water for their ships.



But beginning with 1808, because of Jefferson's Embargo Act, Fernandina became a thriving port with more business than even St. Augustine. The reason was that from it, merchants had easy access to the states and smuggling became a most profitable business. At one time it was stated that there were more than 150 ships in the harbor.

Even after the embargo the town was active, and in 1812 a garrison of ten men led by Captain Jose Lopez held the fort. The American groups allied themselves; by using the Patriots as a front, the government, as represented by Mathews, interceded. Commodore Campbell with nine gunboats entered the harbor under the pretense of protecting American interests. The gunboats drew up in a line before the fort, and the Patriots disembarked and demanded a surrender. Lopez had no choice and capitulated on May 17, 1812. In the articles signed by Lopez and McIntosh (note that it was McIntosh and not Mathews that signed) were provisions for keeping the harbor open as a free port and even in the event of actual war between the United

States and Great Britain, the harbor was to be open to British vessels until May 1, 1813.

This capture of Fernandina was just intended to be the first step in the entire conquest of Florida (for those who would like to go into this in great detail see *Florida Fiasco* by R. W. Patrick). Ashley next marched on St. Augustine picking up some regular troops on the way. He was prevented from taking the town because the Indians helped the Spanish since they disliked American settlers in general because the Americans stole their cattle, and Matthews and McIntosh in particular, who told them to return to their camps and leave white men alone. There was a counter attack by a gunboat and Spanish Negroes in which several Americans including soldiers were killed.

After the close of the War of 1812 the Spanish garrisons at the principal forts of St. Augustine, Pensacola, Fernandina and St. Marks were weak, and the region between St. John's and St. Mary's, which was the home of most of the Patriots, was virtually without any kind of government.

In Fernandina at this time the population was perhaps 600 and a lot of money was circulating as usual because of the smuggling. The place was a perfect haven for pirates and attempts to enforce the laws were ineffectual, which led many political adventurers to go to Fernandina at this time.

On December 23, 1817, Maj. James Bankhead with some soldiers and Captain J. D. Henley with a naval squadron of six boats occupied Fernandina. Bankhead and Henley found they had a real job to clean up Fernandina. Some one described the population as "British adventurers of the Woodbine and Ambrister type; Irish and French refugees; Scotch enthusiasts; Mexican and Spanish patriots; several of Lafitte's Baratarians band; . . . the original inhabitants of Fernandina, and large numbers of privateersmen, slaves and seafaring scoundrels." It was held by the Americans until January 1, 1820, when it was returned to the Spaniards. Forbes described it in 1821 as a town of 40 houses all of wood, six streets, a small fort with eight guns, and 150 inhabitants all except the planters, who were out of the town, extremely impoverished.

After this brief survey one can better appreciate the letter of which an exact copy follows:

Fernandina, Amelia Island  
July 29, 1818

Dear Brother I now write to inform you that I am in very good Health-and that I have made up my mind to stay in the Country Six Months You perhaps may think me Fickelminded I know I wrote you a shorte time since by mail that I should Leave here and come to New York-but since that I have bin up the Nassaw River to the Mill, and all tho it is a dredful Looking place I have concluded to go there for Three Months my agreement is to Stay on this Island in Mr. Setons Store untill the First of October and then go to the Mill and Stay on till the First January and then I am at Liberty to go where I please. my Pay is Twenty Five Dollars pr Month. the people are considerably alarmed aboute the Indians up the Nassaw, but I went to bed with my Gun and Pistel with in reach and Slept very Sound. Nassaw River runs very Crooked, with Large Marshes on each Side from one to Three Mildes wide. all tho the Mill is in the woods, I could see off one way acrost the Marsh at least Six Mildes. I saw a number of Aligaters up the River but did not Shoote any. I had one very good chance but my Gun Flashed Twice so I was obliged to be contented with Shooting some Large birds along the Shore.

I was Three days up the River Rowed by Foure Large Negroes. This place is famus for Pirets. there has bin at least Three or Foure Vesels Took since I have bin here. wether they are Fitted out neare here I can not Say at all events they come here to Smugel in there Goods. there is on Vesel off the bar now that is sunk in aboute Six Fathem Warter. they have Foure men in Custody that was on board of her. They came to St. Maryes and reported that the Vesel was Struck by a white squall and upset and that the Captain and mate were Wounded and that they were Pasengers and Owned the Cargo one of the Mens Name is Dexter the others I do not Know I saw the Affidavid that Mr. Dexter made which is as above Stated. but now it is reported that the Captin and mate were both Murderd. it will not be ascertained untill they get her up which will be soon. there has bin a number or Trunks of Goods found Secreted in different directions along Shore. The troops here are Healthy except Fever and ague. they parade Twice a day. they have a band of Musick which plays

every evening untill Nine oclock which makes it verely pleasant here.

I wrote you in my last Letter by Mail that You must not write untill you heard from me-for that ocason I have write you as soon as posible, for I want to here from you verely Mutch I had some Idea of enclozing some Money to you for to get me some few Articles but I concluded it mighte not go safe therefore I did no do it if You have the Money to Spare I wis you would buy me Two white Mersailes Nes [?] of prety good quality. . . Also one pr of Shoes let them be made at the Shop where I got one pr. you will let them mesur your foot I think youre foot and mine boue of aseise do not buy these artcils untill you have a chance of sending them. send the Bill and I will send you the Money first oppertunity if Capt. Done Brig - Porter has left their I think you will have an oppertunity by the schooner Madison Cpt. Sawyer do not fail to write as soon as you receive this and let Farther know that I have concluded to stay here so that he may write direct yours Letters to me to the Care of Robert R. Henry St. Maryes. I under stand by de papers you have had warmer wether with you than wee have had here. the Thermomerter has not bin higher than Ninety Seven here except once and then 99 Wee have warter mellons verely plenty her some peatches but not verely good I frequently here of Murders and Swindlers here or at no grate dstance The people here play Bileards Fiddle and dance on Sunday as much as any other day. I heard of Mr. Lezers Son Plexer he was clerk in the Hospittal under the Patriots but he since enlisted in to the United States Service and then Run away. business is verely dull at present wee do not average in the Store Ten Dollars a day which makes my work verely Little. give my Love to Farther and all my Brothers and Sisters and Likwis all enquiring Friends This from youre affectionate Brother

Ch Millard Jr. [?]

*John Millard*

There are many interesting features in this letter. Most of the common trademarks of Florida are mentioned, such as alligators, Indians, swamps, pirates, fruit, and even the weather. What strikes me most is that the historians who assume that

every thing was changed after the Americans occupied the town are not correct. Mr. Millard described the presence of the pirates and mentioned that murders and other crimes were frequent. I think the mill referred to is the sugar mill, the ruins of which still stand today.

What has also come out is that obviously there was a provisional type of postal system. After the Americans seized the town, the Spanish post office in Fernandina could not have existed any longer, and people could not have sent letters from other places in Florida to Fernandina because there could have been no possible agreement concerning a postal treaty since one party was in possession illegally. Therefore, an arrangement was made by which all letters were sent to St. Mary's, Georgia, which was the closest point in *bona fide* U. S. territory. Perhaps Robert R. Henry, who is mentioned, forwarded all the letters addressed to the inhabitants of Fernandina. Letters were also dispatched by means of private ships. This letter was carried to St. Mary's and was placed in the post office at that town. Since the letter was written July 29th and postmarked August 1st, there was evidently quite frequent communication with the mainland. The distance from Fernandina to St. Mary's is only eight miles by water. The 25 cents paid the rate under the Act of 1816 for over 400 miles to New York City.

If any of the readers of this article wish to correspond, I should like to hear from them.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the April, 1961, number of the *Quarterly* (Vol. XXXIX, No. 4, pp. 390-92,) Dr. Charles W. Arnade had a review of Mr. Warren Hager Wilkinson's, *Opening the Case Against the U. S. De Soto Commission's Report, and other De Soto Papers. . . .* The following are Mr. Wilkinson's and Dr. Arnade's replies. The editor has made no changes in the letters as submitted, but he has deleted a section from Mr. Wilkinson's letter. The deleted section pertained to an offer whereby individuals interested in Mr. Wilkinson's work could obtain it without cost or for little cost. Those who are interested should write directly to Mr. Wilkinson.

Mr. Editor:

I placed the purported "review" of my book you published

last April, minus heading and signature, before two metropolitan newspaper editors who have handled many hundreds of reviews.

To my question, "Is expectancy justifiable that a review convey to the public the nature of the treated book's content?" Both answered, "Certainly."

Each was asked to read the alleged "review" and state if it conveyed any real nature of some book. Both replied, "No."

One remarked, "What's your book about? Seems the guy who did this was running scared from some controversy about De Soto's landing. Who is he?"

I replied that, having read that article he knew as much about him as I. The controversy was about De Soto's entire route -he whittled it down to his capacity and designs. (Except to those defeated the Florida controversy is ended.) Apparently he was a "bonafide historian of Spanish Florida" but seemingly doesn't practice it at all since he's interested in other than "historical minutiae" of a "glorious chapter in American history." (Contemporary scholars divulge it was actually bestiality unlimited which he glorified: Girls and women hunted; raped upon capture; dogs given live humans for food; continuous murder, tortures and maimings; 'gifts' of women forced from cowed tribes for slave concubines; etc!) He felt them "unimportant" and had "no feeling for the whole matter" being "completely removed." He was not "convinced" by exposures of forensic fraudulence employed by a report that its claims were baseless. He chose weapons -"brutally frank words"-yet screamed "violence" when others used them.

He was, seemingly, one of many historians who had remained hoaxed for a score of years by that public report (rejected by many archaeologists) he dubbed "famous" though my book showed it "infamous." He dodges the study which indubitably would compel him to descend from his aloofness act, to pronounce courageously his verdict in a Spanish historical matter.

What was my book about? Two Papers were exposures of worthlessness, sophism, erroneous translation, quoted definition ditched, warping and dodging of true facts in Florida Historical Quarterly articles. (Vol. XVI, No. 3, January, 1938, pp. 149-173; Vol. XXX, No. 4, April, 1952, pp. 311-316.) Your Reviewer avoided giving such information to keep readers unaware of one-sidedness?

Two other Papers exposed the report - U. S. De Soto Commission's Report - by quoting its pages to prove truths were stated one place and the opposite elsewhere. Among deceitful (and worse) inferences and statements: One day the wind blew opposite directions at the same time; De Soto's army built a bridge in dry weather to cross a wet weather stream bed; his armada was represented as entering a bay but another sentence said it couldn't; fake deductions were made from a premise self-acknowledged worthless. All this was messed with "scientific" confusion to outwit readers seemingly by a "trained scholar" vanity "bribed" - your Reviewer asserted such had been "bribed."

Another Paper informed historians, specially of Spanish Florida, (overlooked by most for a century) how De Soto victimized his men with conscienceless trickery. Did your Reviewer skip this to save face?

Among other Papers one gave, "A Sketch Of Hernando de Soto's True Route In Present Florida." (With maps.)

I asked both editors if all such was properly mentionable. Both said, "Yes."

The second, who knew my book (pronounced it a crushing ending of the Florida controversy) opined that such had been crowded out by minimizing "cover-ups" concerning matters may be embarrassing to your Reviewer and, by his defense-mechanism attacks.

Thanks for past friendliness and anticipated unbiased official attitude.

Warren K. Wilkinson,

1224 S. 1st St., Jacksonville Beach, Florida.

Academic custom gives (or demands from) the reviewer the right to answer the author's objections to a review of his book. With all frankness I do not understand Mr. Wilkinson's whole set of ideas and motivations. I think that Mr. Wilkinson's presentations are confusing and quite biased, and where is his documentation? But I am most happy that Mr. Wilkinson has achieved the long-sought goal of every scholar: to have come to a definite end because there is nothing else for him to do, since what he has said is the final truth. I rejoice with Mr. Wilkinson over this happy status of his. I wish him a delightful good-bye.

Charles W. Arnade  
State University of Iowa