

# Florida Historical Quarterly

---

Volume 40  
Number 2 *Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol 40,  
Issue 2

Article 3

---

1961

## The Loyalist Migration from East Florida to the Bahama Islands

Thelma Peters



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

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

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

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Peters, Thelma (1961) "The Loyalist Migration from East Florida to the Bahama Islands," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 40: No. 2, Article 3.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol40/iss2/3>

## THE LOYALIST MIGRATION FROM EAST FLORIDA TO THE BAHAMA ISLANDS

by THELMA PETERS

**D**URING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION many Loyalists fled from the southern states and sought refuge in British East Florida. At the close of the war, when Florida changed hands again, these refugees as well as the British residents of Florida were forced to choose between living under the flag of Spain or seeking new homes elsewhere. Most of them left Florida and many of them established their new homes in the sprawling archipelago which is Florida's neighbor to the east, the Bahama Islands.

An intensive study of eighty southern families who made this double move, from the South to East Florida and from East Florida to the Bahamas, was made by Lydia Austin Parrish from 1940 to 1953. At the time of Mrs. Parrish's sudden death in 1953 her manuscript had attained a length of almost five hundred typed pages but it was still incomplete. The manuscript is now in the Widener Library, Harvard University.<sup>1</sup> It offers much sympathetic insight into the problems which these displaced persons faced and tells what eventually became of them.

The presence of a large number of Loyalists in the southern colonies was due in part to the influence of the Anglican Church and in part to commercial ties between British mercantile houses and colonial merchants. Moreover, Georgia was the most youthful of the thirteen colonies and many of its residents, far from straining at the aprong strings, wanted the protection of the Crown. This was true, for example, of a large mercantile establishment at Sunbury, Georgia, which has been called the colonial forerunner of Sears, Roebuck. Roger Kelsall and James Spalding started their store in 1763 and by 1774 the partners had five Indian trading posts in Georgia and East Florida. To them any threat of a change of administration was alarming. Kelsall, who

---

1. Lydia Austin Parrish, "Records of Some Southern Loyalists, Being a collection of manuscripts about some eighty families, most of whom immigrated to the Bahamas during and after the American Revolution," hereafter cited as Parrish MSS. A microfilm copy of this typed manuscript is in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida.

lived his last days in exile in the Bahamas, stated in his will, dated 1788: “. . . if my Estate should fall short. . .impute it to no fault of mine, but to the unavoidable [*sic*] misfortunes in which I have been involved in consequence of the late most accurs'd Rebellion. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Many of the Loyalists who fled to Florida during the Revolution expected to make their residence there. Some acquired plantations along the St. Johns or started businesses in St. Augustine. Their knowledge of the Bahamas at this time was slight. Yet East Florida and the Bahamas had something in common: both were sparsely-settled British outposts. From the time Britain had acquired Florida in 1763 there had been some contact between the two outposts, usually limited to a ship or two each year passing from St. Augustine to Nassau or from Nassau to St. Augustine.<sup>3</sup>

In 1781 the Spanish seized Nassau and occupied it for almost two years. In 1783 an expedition of Loyalist refugees was organized at St. Augustine to drive the Spanish from the Bahamas. This volunteer invasion, sometimes called the last action of the American Revolution, occurred after the Treaty of Versailles had already called for a return of the Bahamas to Britain, but neither the Loyalists nor the Spanish at Nassau knew this.

The Loyalist expedition was led by Colonel Andrew Deveaux, a native of South Carolina, who had fought with the British in the South until that campaign closed and then had fled to Florida with many of his comrades-in-arms. In St. Augustine Deveaux and his volunteers outfitted several small ships, probably four, and enlisted the aid of two privateers, the *Perseverance* of twenty-six guns, owned and commanded by Thomas Dow, and the *Whitby Warrior* of sixteen guns, owned and commanded by Daniel Wheeler. The fleet proceeded to the Bahamas and dropped anchor, March 30, 1783, fifty miles north of New Providence at Hole-in-the-Wall, Abaco.

Colonel Deveaux and Captain Roderick Mackenzie left the fleet to seek volunteers among the inhabitants of neighboring islands, Deveaux going to Harbour Island and Mackenzie to the “mainland” of Eleuthera. Together they enlisted 170 men, which

2. Parrish MSS, 377.

3. Charles Lock Mawat, *East Florida as a British Province, 1763-1784* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943), 157.

brought the total to about 300, according to Mackenzie.<sup>4</sup> Deveaux, probably at a much later date when his memory had undergone some distortion, claimed there were only 160 men altogether.<sup>5</sup>

On April 11, 1783, Dow and Wheeler jointly issued the following order to Major Archibald Taylor:

Sir :

You are hereby ordered and directed to take part of the Perseverance and Whitby Warrior's crews under your command, and proceed to the Island of Providence, then take possession of the Town and Forts with all the Vessels in the Harbour, in behalf of his Britannic Majesty Hoist British Colours on all the places you take and dispatch a Boat as soon and as often as opportunities will admit to let us know every circumstance that may occur, and take care that no property is touched or Embezzled by any person whatever, and the people hindered from scattering about as much as in your power for which, this and a Copy of our Commissions shall be your Order.<sup>6</sup>

It would seem from this order that the two privateers did not engage in the attack on Nassau but remained at Hole-in-the-Wall. Deveaux, Taylor, Mackenzie, and their little army landed on New Providence four miles east of Fort Montagu, the waterfront fort which guarded the eastern harbor of Nassau. Before they could attack the fort the Spanish abandoned it and withdrew to a nearby field. In the brief clash which followed the Americans managed to take two prisoners without suffering any casualties. Here is Deveaux's account of what happened next:

On my going to take possession of the fort, I smelt a match on fire, which circumstance, together with their abandoning their works so readily, gave me reason to suspect their intentions. I immediately had the two prisoners confined in the fort, and halted my troops at some distance from it; but, self-preservation being so natural a reflection, they soon discovered the match that was on fire, which in half an hour, would have been communicated to the magazine and two mines that were laid for that purpose.<sup>7</sup>

4. Roderick Mackenzie, *Strictures on Lt. Col. Tarleton's History to which is added the recapture of the Island of New Providence* (London: Printed for the author, 1787), 167-184.

5. Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of the Loyalists of the American Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1864), I, 377.

6. Nassau, Bahamas, Registry Office Records, M, 494, Hereafter cited as Bahamas Reg. Of.

7. Sabine, *op. cit.*, I, 377.

Deveaux occupied Fort Montagu and commenced to fortify Society Hill, a ridge about four hundred yards from the main fort, Fort Nassau, using cannon stolen from ships in the harbor. By means of straw men and other devices he thoroughly deceived the Spanish into thinking they were outnumbered. The climax came when the Americans lobbed a shell into the house occupied by the Spanish governor. The Spanish surrendered.

The six hundred Spanish troops were allowed to depart for Cuba but the governor, Don Antonio Claraco Sanz, and five others were held until an equal number of Nassau merchants should be released from a Havana dungeon.

Governor Patrick Tonyn of East Florida reported the action at New Providence to Thomas Townshend, the British Home Secretary, May 15, 1783, as follows:

I have the honour of acquainting you, of the reduction of the Island of New Providence, by the intrepid and spirited conduct of Major Deveaux, of the South Carolina Militia. A young Gentleman who had resided here for some time as a Refugee, having lost the greatest part of his fortune in South Carolina, with the remains, he fitted out and collected a small fleet of Privateers, and about two hundred Loyalists; with these, and by an allowable artifice he reduced the Spanish Garrison. As I was doubtful of his success, I claim not the credit for countenancing the Expedition. I am confident that his spirit and success will, Sir, recommend him to your favor and protection.<sup>8</sup>

The Harbour Islanders were ultimately rewarded for their assistance to Deveaux by a grant of 6,000 acres of land on the "mainland" of Eleuthera. This land is still held today in commonage by the descendants of those volunteer troops.<sup>9</sup>

The Deveaux Expedition, followed as it was by the catastrophic news that Florida was being handed over to Spain, directed the thinking of many Loyalists toward the Bahamas as a possible place for the establishment of new homes.

The Floridians did not leave East Florida without making a vigorous appeal to the home government that some consideration be given to their plight. Some dared think that the treaty could

8. Joseph Byrne Lockey, *East Florida 1783-1785, a File of Documents Assembled and Many of them Translated* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1940), 99. Hereafter cited as Lockey, *Documents*.

9. Mary Moseley, *The Bahamas Handbook* (Nassau: The Nassau Guardian, 1926), 72.

be changed. Even Governor Tonyn may have hoped for a countermand. In May, 1783, he wrote the British colonial secretary, Thomas Townshend, that the colony was prospering. He said that 12,000 inhabitants had been added to East Florida during the war years and that there were settlements and plantations all along the coastal region for two hundred miles. To have to abandon their labors and give up their homes would be a sad blow to the settlers. He said a move to West India, as proposed, would require more capital than the people possessed. Moreover, West India was overstocked. "Providence and the Bahama Islands are mere rocks, fit only for fishermen and the Inhabitants live chiefly by wrecking," he wrote. "Nova Scotia is too cold a climate for those who have lived in the southern colonies, and entirely unfit for an outlet, and comfortable habitation for owners of slaves."<sup>10</sup>

Lord North in a letter to Tonyn, December 4, 1783, admitted that the Home Government was perplexed and embarrassed over the East Florida residents and refugees. To mitigate their distress somewhat North advised that the eighteen months allowed in the treaty for evacuation might be extended. North recommended migration to the Bahamas. He wrote:

The Islands of the Bahama being nearly in the same Latitude with their former Possessions, very thinly Inhabited, and but little Cultivated, it was proposed to Government to purchase the proprietary of them for the accommodation of such as may chuse to become Settlers thereon; The King's Servants very readily attended to the proposal, and Measures are at this time pursuing to obtain the possession of them, and, where Tracks of Land will be given to them (gratis) proportioned to their former situations, and ability to cultivate them. . . . For those who prefer the Bahama Islands, a considerable Quantity of Provisions, has already been provided and dispatched, and Supplies will be sent to the West Indies, proportioned to the number who may desire to become settlers upon those islands.<sup>11</sup>

Many Floridians felt they knew too little about the Bahamas and were unwilling to migrate to those islands until they had more information. Deveaux himself had not returned to St. Augustine after the defeat of the Spanish but had remained in

10. Lockey, *Documents*, 104-105.

11. *Ibid.*, 178-180.

Nassau where he occupied Government House and employed a white man at one dollar a day to reside in the fort and fire the morning and evening gun.<sup>12</sup> The Spanish government had departed and the British government had not yet returned to Nassau during the summer of 1783 when Deveaux undertook to fill the vacuum. During this summer the East Floridians sent one of their leaders to the Bahamas to make a personal investigation of conditions there. The chosen emissary was Lewis Johnston, a member of the Council of East Florida. The big question was whether the islands could support a slave economy, inasmuch as the wealth still remaining to the Loyalists was largely in slaves. Johnston reported that large tracts of land usually associated with the successful employment of slave labor did not exist. He reported the soil to be rocky and in patches. The trip must have convinced him, at any rate, that the Bahamas had little to offer, for he and his family, after a sojourn in Scotland, settled in Jamaica.<sup>13</sup>

Another investigation of the Bahamas as a place for future settlement was made by Lieutenant John Wilson, a British army engineer stationed in St. Augustine. In July, 1783, Sir Guy Carleton, British commanding-general in charge of the evacuation of all British troops and Loyalist civilians from America, ordered Wilson to go to the Bahamas and make a report of conditions there. Wilson arrived in Nassau on the seventh of August and found the town virtually without defences and with Deveaux acting as the government.

Wilson reported the population for the preceding year as 4,002 people scattered through the seven islands which were inhabited: New Providence, Eleuthera, Harbour Island, Cat Island, Exuma, Long Island, and Turks Island. Of these, some 800 were slaves and 75 were free Negroes or mulattoes. More than two thirds of the population, or 2,750, lived on New Providence Island. The islands were largely uncultivated, he reported.

. . . owing to the indolence of the inhabitants, who pay no attention to the improvement of their land, but content themselves with whatever is produced by nature without being at

12. James H. Stark, *History and Guide to the Bahama Islands* (Boston: James H. Stark, 1891), 169-174. Stark gives excerpts from Wilson's report. A copy of the entire report is in the Boston Public Library.

13. Wilbur H. Siebert, *Loyalists of East Florida, 1774-1785* (DeLand, Florida: Florida State Historical Society, 1929), I, 362.

any trouble to assist it. In the planting season they generally go into the bushes, where they make holes in the ground with a piece of hard wood pointed for that purpose, in which holes they drop the seed of guinea corn and after covering it up go away and never visit it any more until they think it is fit for gathering in. They also plant a few yams, sugar cane and cassava in the same manner, without being at any trouble to clear the land.<sup>14</sup>

Wilson found very little soil and that in shallow pockets of twelve or fourteen inches in depth. "One fifth part of the face of the country is nothing but rock," he stated, but he surmised that skillful planters from America might be able to produce very good Indian corn and other vegetables and fruits since they were more accustomed to industry than were the Bahamians.

Though Wilson was scarcely more optimistic about the Bahamas than was Johnston, there were many people in Florida and some in the Loyalist colony in New York City who, perhaps from desperation, were eager to believe the best and hence were willing to risk what fortunes they had left by going to the Bahamas.

At least one unconvinced Loyalist, however, as late as 1784 clung to the hope of remaining in Florida by working out a "deal" with the Spanish. John Cruden, in October, 1784, petitioned Charles III of Spain to grant the area along the east coast of Florida between the St. Johns River and the St. Marys River to him and his Loyalist associates and to allow them "internal government" of the same. In return he promised "reasonable Tribute" to the king of Spain and expressed a willingness to aid in the defense of the Spanish province against all powers except Britain. With emotional impact, and both inveighing against the mother country and professing loyalty to it, he stated the alternatives which weighed heavily on so many East Floridians as they faced evacuation:

Abandoned by that Sovereign for whose cause we have sacrificed Evry thing that is dear in life and deserted by that Country for which We fought and many of us freely bled, and may it please your Majesty We are all Soldiers-Thus left to our fate bereft of our slaves by our Inveterate Countrymen, We may it please your Majesty are Reduced to the dreadful alternative of returning to our Homes, to receive

---

14. Stark, *op. cit.*, 170.



insult worse than Death to Men of Spirit, or to run the hazard of being Murdered in cold blood, to Go to the inhospitable Regions of Nova Scotia or take refuge on the Barren Rocks of the Bahamas where poverty and wretchedness stares us in the face Or do what our Spirit can not brook (pardon Sire the freedom) renounce our Country. Drug the Religion of our Fathers and become your Subjects.<sup>15</sup>

Cruden sent one copy of his petition to Spain by way of friends in England and another copy to Vicente Manuel de Zespedes, the Spanish governor of East Florida. In a letter to the governor's secretary, Carlos Howard, he spoke of the distress of his friends "for whom I cant cease to feel land think" and said he had asked Governor John Maxwell of the Bahamas to send a supply of provisions to the "poor unfortunate sufferers," presumably the Loyalists gathered at St. Marys.<sup>16</sup>

In March of 1785 Cruden was in Nassau and still concerned for his "constituents" in Florida. He wrote to de Zespedes expressing hope that those unfortunate persons might be allowed to remain as British subjects until he could get to Havana and consult with Count Bernardo de Galvez concerning what he called his "grand wish" to bring about a "happy, cordial, and lasting Union between Britain and Spain."<sup>17</sup> There was nothing small about the plan which he had now evolved: it was to let France recover Canada and to unite the Loyalists, the British, and the Spanish in retaking the United States from the Americans and giving it back to the Loyalists.<sup>18</sup>

Governor de Zespedes considered Cruden a "restless soul" and a "mere visionary" but he did give him permission to proceed to Havana to see his own superior, Bernardo de Galvez, the captain-general of East and West Florida. De Zespedes sent a copy of Cruden's plan to Galvez with this explanation:

I would not trouble Your Excellency with such nonsense except for the consideration that its abounding fanaticism throws some light on the man's intentions, which, though they will hardly make any impression on thinking people, will perhaps have a great influence on the large number of impoverished and desperate exiles from the United States, who find no means of subsistence in the Bahama Islands.<sup>19</sup>

15. Lockey, *Documents*, 301-02. //

16. *Ibid.*, 311-312.

17. *Ibid.*, 485.

18. *Ibid.*, 486.

19. *Ibid.*, 484-485.

There is no evidence that John Cruden ever reached Havana personally to lay his preposterous plan before the captain-general or that he ever again addressed the king of Spain. Perhaps his money or his zeal had run out. Cruden moved to the Bahamas where he was mentioned by the *Bahama Gazette*, January 28, 1786, as "the Commissioner of the Sequestered Property of the Southern States of America and Commanding Officer of the Militia in the Province of East Florida." He subsequently settled down on Exuma Island and became a school teacher.

In 1783 there were about 17,000 people in East Florida of whom 5,090 whites and 8,285 Negroes were classified as refugees, though many of these had been in Florida for several years, had built homes there, and were occupied in running plantations or businesses.<sup>20</sup> Most of the 17,000 people chose to leave. The few who remained included the Minorcans, whose colony at New Smyrna had failed and who had moved to St. Augustine. Probably as many as four thousand East Floridians melted away into the wilderness, some going as far as the Mississippi River. The majority, about 10,000, departed by boat, most of them going to the Bahamas or the West Indies, some to Nova Scotia and England.<sup>21</sup> At least 260 "miserable wretches" from St. Augustine were reported to be in Nova Scotia in 1784.<sup>22</sup> Some of these may have been among the thirty persons who arrived in Nassau from Shelburne, Nova Scotia, in 1789, at the time Shelburne was abandoned because of unproductive soil and inclement weather.<sup>23</sup> The lure of the sun for those who had once known a sunny land must have been as powerful then as now. This same lure may explain why a number of East Floridians, among them Peter Edwards, Stephen Haven, and Robert Cunningham, who went to England, were not content to stay there but soon moved to the Bahamas.

The evacuation of East Florida was in charge of Brigadier General Archibald McArthur whom Carleton in 1783 made commandant of the Bahamas. John Winniett served as commis-

20. Siebert, *Loyalists*, I, 131.

21. Mowat, *op. cit.*, 144-147. It is to be noted that the Bahamas were not considered a part of the West Indies.

22. George W. Wrong, *Canada and the America Revolution* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1935), 426.

23. *The Bahama Gazette*, December 12, 1789. Microfilm copies of this remarkable newspaper, published in Nassau by Loyalist John Wells from 1784 to 1799, are in the University of Florida Library.

sary for the St. Augustine refugees and William Brown, speaker of the Assembly of East Florida, was in charge of embarkation at that port. According to Brown's record, there were 1,033 whites and 2,214 Negroes who left St. Augustine for the Bahamas, but he probably counted only those who availed themselves of transportation at public expense.<sup>24</sup> Others like Panton, Leslie and Company and Denys Rolle either owned ships or hired them for the evacuation.

A German writer, Johann David Schoepf, who visited East Florida in the spring of 1784 at the height of the evacuation, was critical of the harbor of St. Augustine. He said the entrance was difficult to locate when approached from the sea because of the general flatness of the land and the lack of distinguishing landmarks. The bar he called "dreadful" and said it could not be crossed "without mortal danger."<sup>25</sup> Schoepf, as passenger coming from Charleston to St. Augustine on a small coasting vessel, was conditioned to expect the worst by stories told him on the voyage. The nervous young captain recounted to him how sixteen vessels carrying refugees from Charleston to Florida in 1782 were wrecked on that bar in a two-day period, with the loss of many lives.<sup>26</sup>

Schoepf landed safely but when he attempted to leave St. Augustine for the Bahamas he again was confronted with problems. Now he declared the harbor to be a "mousetrap," easy to get into but hard to get out of. He reported seeing a brigantine, bound for Nova Scotia, which had been lying in the harbor for five weeks waiting for a tide high enough to float it across the bar. Schoepf himself, on March 24, boarded a small Bahama-bound vessel heavily loaded with refugees and their belongings, but it was not until March 29 that she was able to cross the bar and then only after several bumps that threatened to split the seams. He told of Florida beaches strewn with wreckage and estimated that there was one wreck near St. Augustine every two to four weeks.<sup>27</sup>

---

24. Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Legacy of the American Revolution to the British West Indies and Bahamas* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1913), 23.

25. Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation*, trans. and ed. by Alfred J. Morrison (Philadelphia: William J. Campbell, 1911), 226.

26. *Ibid.*, 228.

27. *Ibid.*, 248-249.

Many evacuees embarked from the port of St. Marys, Georgia, because it was safer than the port of St. Augustine. Evacuees usually arrived at St. Marys aboard small coasting vessels and then transferred to larger ships. Lieutenant Robert Leaver was in charge of embarcation at St. Marys.

That some of the public transports sailed from St. Augustine is evidenced by the following report filed in Nassau:

These certify to who it may concern that Thomas Bryden, Master of the Brigantine *Clementina* Transport by order of B. Gen. McArthur did take on Board the Said Brigantine at St. Augustine East Florida in the month of December 1783 a party of the 37 Regiment of Foot also discharged Soldiers, refugees & Negroes in all 160 and Victualled by Assistant Com. Ferguson Then on Board, that he landed the Troops & Refugees & their Property in good Order at Nassau, New Providence, January 7, 1784.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, a notice in the *Bahama Gazette* for September 25, 1784, stated:

Since our last there has arrived here from St. Mary's several Transports and Ordnance Vessels, with the Garrison and Stores of St. Augustine, and a number of the late Inhabitants of East Florida.

Since there were not enough transports to move all the possessions of the refugees many things had to be left behind. These were offered for sale to the Minorcans and the others who remained in Florida and to the few Spaniards who had returned, altogether not a thousand persons. The few purchasers took advantage of the situation to drive hard bargains. John Wood, who had come to St. Augustine from Georgia, was obliged to sell his lot and buildings, valued at 400 pounds, to a Spaniard for only 54 pounds.<sup>29</sup> Francis Levett, another Georgian, sold property in St. Augustine which had cost him 1,282 pounds for the sum of 160 pounds.<sup>30</sup> A few tore down their houses and managed to transport a part or all of them to the Bahamas. Unless one owned or rented a ship it was not possible to take so much bulk. Those who went by public transport were given limited space. In his memorial asking compensation for losses, Peter Edwards declared that he had pulled down his three-room house in St. Augustine with the in-

28. Bahamas, Reg. Of., M, 75.

29. Siebert, *Loyalists*, II, 268.

30. *Ibid.*, II, 328.

tention of taking it to the Bahamas, but a part of it rotted in St. Augustine, a part was lost on the way to St. Marys, and a part was lost as it was being unloaded at New Providence.<sup>31</sup> Horses and horned cattle usually had to be left behind. Slaves, the most valuable property, were taken, but in some instances the slaves ran away or were stolen before the sailing date. One former South Carolinian who had expected to take his thirty slaves to the Bahamas gave in to them when they raised a vehement objection, and took them back to South Carolina where he sold them.<sup>32</sup>

Governor Tonym shipped to the Bahamas the fire engine, bells, and the church pews which he had been unable to sell to the Spaniards.<sup>33</sup> There was much lawlessness, especially toward the last of the evacuation. Those who were the last to leave were robbed not only of slaves but of horses, carts, and furniture.<sup>34</sup> One of the last transports, with 114 whites and 249 Negroes aboard, arrived in the Bahamas in September, 1785, most of the passengers in a pitiable condition and short of the necessary provisions and tools with which to begin a new life.<sup>35</sup>

Most of the ships used for transports were quite small, brigantines or schooners, and most of them made several round trips from East Florida to the Bahamas. One brigantine, the *Countess of Darlington*, was employed by Panton, Leslie and Company to take a load of slaves and freight from St. Marys to Nassau. When the ship arrived in Nassau on October 4, 1784, the master registered it and listed its cargo. Some of the items were:

72 slaves	1 iron oven
18,035 feet of lumber	5 chairs
33,600 shingles	1 table
8 casks of nails	8 window frames
4 chests of tools	4 pistols
16 axes	2 blunderbuses
12 hoes	16 muskets
2 grindstones	1 canoe
1 desk	4 cart wheels
6 whipsaws	1 axle tree <sup>36</sup>
3 crosscut saws	

31. *Ibid.*, II, 181.

32. *Ibid.*, II, 134.

33. Mowat, *op. cit.*, 146.

34. Siebert, *Loyalists*, I, 178.

35. *Ibid.*, I, 192.

36. Bahamas, Reg. Of., M, 71.

At least one vessel was wrecked on the dangerous reef of Abaco Island. This was a schooner, the *Swift*, which was bearing dispatches from Patrick Tonyn to James Edward Powell, lieutenant-governor of the Bahamas,

. . . which Vessel Struck upon a Reef on the 27th of same month [September, 1785] where she together with the Cargo were totally lost and the Master and the Mariners of the said Schooner used their utmost Endeavor to save the said Dispatches but by the Violence of the Sea the Cheste containing the Dispatches aforesaid and Sundry other Papers the Property of Edward Corbete of St. Marys in the Province of East Florida, merchant, was Stove and the Contents washed out and the Darkness of the Night and the violence of the Sea Rendered it impossible to recover any part thereof. . . .<sup>37</sup>

In the lost dispatches Tonyn had asked the return of several vessels to St. Marys to take on some evacuees left stranded when a frigate, the *Cyrus*, was damaged as it attempted to cross the bar and the passengers refused to sail on a leaky ship. Tonyn wrote to Lord Sydney from St. Marys, November 10, 1785 :

Fortunately, My Lord although the Express vessel was wrecked upon the Island of Abaco and my dispatches were all lost the Master thereof reached New Providence in time to establish the purport of his voyage, and two Transports have returned in which His Majesty's faithful Evacuists will proceed with all dispatch. . . .<sup>38</sup>

Nothing caused more friction in East Florida during the hectic months of evacuation than did the problems arising from slavery. Some Negroes had run away to Florida, others had been brought away by refugees who had stolen them from Patriots. Still others were legally owned by refugees though proof of ownership was often lacking. The ensuing slave trials in Nassau resulted from this confusion in East Florida and caused many bitter quarrels among the Loyalists.

During the evacuation a number of persons came to East Florida from Georgia and the Carolinas looking for stolen or runaway slaves before they could be taken from the country. According to a letter written in St. Augustine, May 20, 1783,

37. Deposition sworn to before Cornelius Blanchard, J. P., October 5, 1785, *ibid.*, M, 255.

38. Lockey, *Documents*, 738.

The Town of Augustine is full of People from Georgia & South Carolina taking the Negroes that have been plundered from them during the War, this will hurt many of them that were never legally condemned so that they will be taken from them in course, I am happy that I never brought either Negroes or any thing else that has been taken during the War.<sup>39</sup>

On the other hand many Loyalists in Florida owned slaves which they had left behind in Georgia or the Carolinas. Some of these had been permanently lost through confiscation, others might have been recovered had the owners been permitted to go back to look for them. South Carolina in particular was reported to be "violent" toward Loyalists. Most did not dare go back. Charles Wells who went from St. Augustine to Charleston, his old home, on business and under a flag of truce was arrested and put into prison.<sup>40</sup>

Since an owner was never sure of a slave until he was aboard ship, the custom was to put Negroes aboard as soon as possible and to hold them there as prisoners until tide and weather permitted sailing. Advice given Daniel McGirtt was to take his slaves.

. . . in some Good large cunnoo and as soon as the vessel comes into St. Maries Board them in the Night and take the Negroes and carre them away till the times are settled. . . .<sup>41</sup>

In testifying in Nassau to the status of a slave named Robin, a witness said that at the time Robin was purchased by Anthony Steward of St. Marys the Negro "was on board his Majesty's ship, Cyrus, lying in St. Marys River to prevent him from running away." In this case Steward claimed his bill of sale was lost in a shipwreck on the coast of Abaco.<sup>42</sup>

Some of the Creek Indians of East Florida had become quite friendly with the British and resented the return of the Spanish. A few of these went with the Loyalists to Nassau where they lived in a small Creek settlement on the edge of town.<sup>43</sup>

St. Augustine was evacuated within the eighteen-month period specified in the treaty. The British troops and their com-

39. *Ibid.*, 172.

40. *Ibid.*, 142.

41. *Ibid.*, 216.

42. Bahamas, Reg. Of., N, 151.

43. Lawrence Kinnaird, "International Rivalry in the Creek Country," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, X (October, 1931), 64.

mander, Archibald McArthur, had departed from East Florida by August 14, 1784.<sup>44</sup> But a few Loyalist civilians remained at St. Marys for several months longer. Among these was Patrick Tonym, whose dalliance may have been due to his hope of being appointed governor of the Bahamas.<sup>45</sup> Tonym explained his delay as due to the damaged frigate, the *Cyrus*, as referred to above. By November the ship was repaired and no appointment had been made, so Tonym sailed for England.

Among the last to leave was a Protestant minister, the Reverend James Seymour, who stayed to administer to the few still in Florida in the summer of 1784. Seymour had had a church in Augusta, Georgia, until he was forced to leave because of his sympathy for the British. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel then appointed him a missionary to East Florida. In 1784 some of his old parishioners in Georgia promised to get his Bill of Confiscation set aside if he would return to Augusta but he refused because of his antipathy toward persons in power. He asked for an appointment in the Bahamas because he had come to like warm weather and dreaded the severe winters of Nova Scotia. He died aboard ship on the way to his new post in the Bahamas.<sup>46</sup>

The East Floridian Loyalists in the Bahamas were joined by 1,458 Loyalists from New York, at least half of whom were British soldiers and some of whom were free Negroes. The soldiers were soon to be discharged and they probably requested assignment to Abaco because they expected to make that island their future home. All received provisions for six months.<sup>47</sup>

Most of those who sailed to the Bahamas from New York were not New Yorkers. They came from various states and some were from West Florida. The latter had been permitted by the Spanish "to go behind the British lines" in New York after the Spanish had taken over West Florida in 1781. Generally speaking, the New York refugees were poorer and humbler than the refugees from East Florida and fewer of them owned slaves.

Siebert gives the number of Loyalists who went to the Bahamas as about 5,000.<sup>48</sup> Deans Peggs, recent headmaster of the

44. Lockey, *Documents*, 273.

45. *Ibid.*, 746.

46. Edgar Legare Pennington, "The Reverend James Seymour, S. P. G. Missionary in Florida, *Florida Historical Quarterly*, V (April, 1927), 198-199.

47. Siebert, *Loyalists*, I, 150.

48. *Ibid.*, I, 159.



Government High School in Nassau and a Bahama historian, believes the number to have been between six and seven thousand.<sup>49</sup> A letter from "a gentleman at New Providence to a friend in Glasgow" which was printed in the *Bahama Gazette*, September 11, 1784, stated:

This place bids fair to become a flourishing settlement from the number of refugees of property now settled and daily coming into these islands from New York, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

A week later the *Gazette* gave the total number of refugees as "near 4,000." But many Loyalists did not move to the Bahamas until they had "tried" other places, usually England, Nova Scotia, or various of the West Indian islands, and by then the Bahamas had already lost some of the early refugees to "greener fields" elsewhere. Probably the exact number of Loyalists who resided in the Bahamas at one time or another will never be known.

Schoepf, the German traveller, who accompanied a shipload of refugees from St. Augustine to the Bahamas, described the island capital and its inhabitants in lively detail. Like a modern tourist in Nassau he found space at a premium and thought himself lucky when he was able to find a place in a carpenter's home a half mile from town. All houses and other buildings were crowded with refugees and their possessions.

Nassau hugged the hilly north shore of New Providence Island and had only one tolerably regular street, the forerunner of today's famous Bay Street. That earlier street was narrow, followed the shore, and had houses and shops on one side with the docks and open harbor on the other. The street was unpaved but, as Schoepf observed, there was little need for paving where an island was almost wholly composed of rock.<sup>50</sup> The Bourse (generally called the Vendue House) was a roofed and open-sided market where sales of all kinds were conducted, including the sale of slaves. This was a popular gathering place for buyers, sellers, ship captains, and other persons of affairs, who wanted to learn or discuss the latest news.

The other public buildings included a church, a jail, and an assembly house. The governor, John Maxwell, occupied a private

49. Deans Peggs, *A Short History of the Bahamas* (London: The Crown Agents, 1955), 17.

50. Schoepf, *op. cit.*, 263.

home on the top of a ridge, a landmark for in-coming ships. The Spanish governor had lived in this house the year before and had built a wall around it and fortified the terraces. On this hilltop, known as Mount Fitzwilliams, the present Government House was built in 1801.

The houses and other buildings of Nassau were built of wood of simple and light construction. Most of them were of one thickness of boards nailed to a frame, the frame exposed on the interior. Better homes were ceiled to make them more attractive. Chimneys were unknown and the cooking fire of wood was in a detached kitchen, often a half-open shed. Glass windows were rare. Solid wooden shutters were used to cover windows at night and during bad weather. Cellars were unknown until introduced by the Loyalists. Houses stood apart from one another in their own gardens.<sup>51</sup>

In its wild state the island was overgrown with shrubs, trees, and vines and thus the rocks were somewhat concealed. When this wild growth was cleared away the result was anything but attractive. "An acre or piece of arable ground here has indeed a fearful look," Schoepf wrote, "for there is to be seen hardly anything but rock, full of larger and smaller pits and holes, containing a pretty strongly reddish earth."<sup>52</sup> Plowing was unknown and even hoeing was uncommon. Little tillage was needed and the favorite tool for that was a sharp stick.

Yams were a year-round staple crop but watermelons, maize, and most European vegetables could be grown if planted to take advantage of the rainy season during the summer and fall. Among the tropical fruits which Schoepf noticed were papaws, limes, avocados, bananas, pomegranates, figs, oranges, soursops, and pineapples. Sugar cane was grown for syrup but not for sugar. The several coffee "orchards" which Schoepf observed were doing well. Indigo would grow but there was insufficient water to process it. He thought cotton offered promise as the best crop for export.<sup>53</sup>

A few cows and goats were kept for milk and there were some sheep and swine but the lack of proper pasturage and the scarcity of water limited production of livestock. As substitutes for beef the people ate turtles and iguanas. The iguanas, measuring about

51. *Ibid.*, 262.

52. *Ibid.*, 267.

53. *Ibid.*, 268-269.

three feet long, were caught in the wilds by dogs trained for the purpose. They could be kept alive for several weeks, or until needed, by sewing their jaws together with a needle and coarse thread, probably to keep them from devouring one another.<sup>54</sup>

Woodcutting, like wrecking, was an occupation engaged in by almost everyone at one time or another. Slave owners often put their slaves to cutting wood when there was nothing else for them to do. Everyone had the right to cut wood where he might find it and by 1784 New Providence and the adjacent islands had been fairly well cut over. Mahogany was valued in ship-building for planking vessels below the waterline, for it withstood worms, but it was too heavy a wood for the superstructure. *Lignum vitae*, a hard and oily wood, was used for pulleys and rigging blocks. Braziletto wood was exported for dyes.<sup>55</sup>

Exports included pineapples sent to Europe and pineapples, limes, and yams to the United States. According to Schoepf, limes were preferred to lemons in the United States for making punch. Imports from England and the United States included meat, butter, rice, corn, wheat, utensils, and clothing,

“Amiable,” “courteous,” and “hospitable” were words Schoepf used to describe the inhabitants of Nassau. He said they liked to drink and dance the time away. “One is puzzled,” he wrote, “to see most of the white inhabitants of Providence living well and yet going about in idleness; but they live by the sweat of their slaves.”<sup>56</sup> Yet even the slaves seemed to him to be quite content. Some of them paid their masters something each week and in return were virtually free to do as they pleased.

Into this sparsely-populated, easy-going, sea-nurtured colony which Schoepf described came the Loyalists, some embittered by their losses, some with feelings of superiority toward the old inhabitants whom they derisively called Conchs, and almost all with driving ambitions to remake their fortunes and to assume positions of leadership in the government. A conflict was inevitable and since the Loyalists outnumbered the old inhabitants almost two to one they felt that they were certain to win. They did win, for a time.

In the long run environment played the key role. It is ironic

54. *Ibid.*, 282, 291.

55. *Ibid.*, 272-274.

56. *Ibid.*, 273.

that in spite of all their zeal for work and their modern ideas about plantation management, the Loyalists who survived were those who learned to accept the ways of the old inhabitants: the casual attitude toward agriculture and the close dependence on the sea.