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## THE SPANISH FISHERIES OF CHARLOTTE HARBOR

by E. A. HAMMOND\*

**T**HE FISHERMEN from Cuba and other Spanish colonial settlements who had first sailed their smacks into the waters of Charlotte Harbor and Tampa Bay recognized that the bays, inlets, and rivers of the area abounded in edible fish and green turtle ready to be taken with minimal risk and perhaps even with substantial profit. The organic content of these waters provided ideal feeding haunts for many species for which there would be convenient markets. It may be reasonably assumed that commercial fishing, at least on a small scale, was carried on there in the latter part of the seventeenth and the early years of the eighteenth centuries, although evidence of such operations is meager.

With the capture of Cuba by the English in 1761 the restrictively mercantilistic trade policies under which the island's commercial interests had languished were suddenly relaxed, and its economy entered upon an era of expansion and prosperity. This transition affected the activities of the Spanish fishermen, facilitating their traffic with the west coast of Florida. The acquisition of Florida by the English in 1763 apparently did not hamper in any way the business of these people who had already established themselves on certain islands or keys near the mouth of Tampa Bay and inside Charlotte Harbor.<sup>1</sup> Their "ranchos" or fishing camps extended from Boca Grande (the entrance to Charlotte Harbor) southward to San Carlos Bay and the Caloosahatchee River. While Florida's lower gulf coast in earlier times was an area of remarkable beauty, its shallow inlets, mangrove swamps, and maze of uncharted waterways tended to repel the explorer in search of unflooded and productive soil.

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1. Dorothy Dodd, "Captain Bunce's Tampa Bay Fisheries, 1835-1840," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXV (January 1947), 246-56. For a general treatment of commerce between Cuba and Florida see James W. Covington, "Trade Relations Between Southwestern Florida and Cuba, 1600-1840," *ibid.*, XXXVIII (October 1959), 114-28.

The fact that only in the twentieth century have accurate surveys revealed the true characteristics of the country is not a matter of accident or oversight. It was long to remain a forbidding land whose maps a boatman could not trust and whose soil did not invite agricultural pursuits. Yet it usually provoked interest and comment from the traveler passing along its shores.

Shortly after the English occupation of Florida, George Gauld, a surveyor for the Admiralty, was commissioned to explore the southwest coast. He reached the Tampa Bay area in the summer of 1765 where he found Spanish fishermen living on the Mullet Keys. Later he moved south to Charlotte Harbor, entering the bay through Boca Grande and discovering the cluster of islands known to the Spaniards as *Los Cayos del Boca Grande*. Here again he found that the Spanish fishermen had

plenty of carp and other fish on hooks, a dressing on the stage.<sup>2</sup> They begin by pressing the fish with a great weight after it is split and salted, then hang it up to dry . . . the last operation is . . . to pile it up in the huts ready for loading. They supply the Havanna, and the other Spanish settlements in the West Indies, in the Lent season.<sup>3</sup>

Bernard Romans, writing in 1772 of these fisheries, said:

We See every Year from September to March the Spaniards Coming for fish . . . during the Season . . . it is not Uncommon to see three or four Hundred White Men Maintained who Only bring some Maize, Rice and Sweetmeats, and for the Rest depend upon their Musquets, Nets, hooks, Lines, and harpoons . . . [During my three years there] I have Yearly Seen About One Thousand Tons Weight of dry'd Salted Fish go from the Western Shore of the Province of East Florida to the Havannah, Besides what goes from the Eastern Shore.<sup>4</sup>

2. "Stage" is employed here in its archaic sense, meaning a platform or scaffold for drying fish.
3. George Gauld, *An Account of the Surveys of Florida, &c.* (London, 1790), 5. Although he had made his survey in 1765, Gauld's account of his findings was not published until 1796. George Gauld, *Observations of the Florida Kays, Reef and Gulf* (London, 1796), 26. The author is indebted to Captain John D. Ware, Tampa, for this information.
4. Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West Florida*, (New York, 1775; facsimile edition Gainesville, 1964). I, 185-88. Another account of the area, varying slightly in detail, was written by Romans on the earliest of his maps of Florida (1772). See P. Lee Phillips, *Notes on the Life and Works of Bernard Romans* (DeLand, Florida, 1924), 123-26.

A Spanish naval officer, Joseph Antonio de Evia, surveyed Charlotte Harbor in September 1783, and reported that the bay abounded in fish. According to his account, twelve to fourteen fishing vessels annually plied its waters carrying their catches to Havana.<sup>5</sup>

Thus by the middle of the eighteenth century these Spanish fishermen apparently had established permanent or semi-permanent camps or "ranchos" in Tampa Bay, Charlotte Harbor, and possibly San Carlos Bay. They had also achieved a *modus vivendi*, including miscegenation, with the Indians of the interior, and had settled down to a peaceful co-existence under the aegis of the Spanish government. There is little evidence that they had made legal claims to the islands and capes on which they had settled. Furthermore, during the British occupation of Florida, beginning in 1763, and when the Spanish returned after 1783, there was little change in the lives of these fishermen. The British were aware of their presence, as shown in the Gauld report, but the treaty of 1763 made no reference to Spanish fishing rights along the Florida coast, although it dealt at length with the French fisheries in the St. Lawrence Gulf and Newfoundland. The existence of some 200 or 300 Spanish and Indian fishermen engaged in a more or less seasonal enterprise in a little-known corner of the empire was not a matter of much concern.

The return of Florida to Spain in 1783, occurring in an era of commercial expansion and diminishing trade restriction, was advantageous to the Havana merchants. The population of the Cuban capital was increasing and its market places came alive with activity. The fisheries operations entered a period of prosperity, reflected in the increase in numbers of men and vessels along Florida's gulf coast. In the thirty-eight years preceding the acquisition of Florida by the United States the fishermen became more permanently fixed in their Florida sites while their business became larger and better organized. Until Cuban archives are once more accessible only tentative conclusions may be offered, but American sources suggest the existence of an entrepreneurial organization of some substance and refinement.

The principal fishing firm engaged in the Florida trade was

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5. Jack D. L. Holmes, "Two Spanish Expeditions to Southwest Florida, 1783-1793," *Tequesta*, XXV (1965), 101.

the House of Bardia, or Bardias, in Havana. In 1835, one of the leading Charlotte Harbor fishermen came into altercation with the local customs official, and he publicly declared that the fishery with which he was associated belonged not to him but to one Juan Bardias, a resident of Havana and head of a firm doing business in the Havana market.<sup>6</sup> The customs officer stated that another prosperous merchant, Joseph Ximenez of Key West, owned the sloop *Mary Ann*, and made his living from shipping—transporting fish and turtle from Charlotte Harbor to Havana, and returning with commodities from Havana to the Florida keys and the fishing establishments of the lower gulf coast.<sup>7</sup>

The transfer of Florida to the United States brought the legal status of these Spaniards in Florida into question and their business enterprises into jeopardy. To the territorial governors and federal administrators the presence of these fishermen was a source of minor but sometimes vexatious problems. Hundreds of settlers, new and old, people eager to obtain cheap land for homesteading and speculation, lost little time in making their demands on both Territorial Governor William P. DuVal, and Joseph M. White, territorial representative in Congress. There ensued a bitter struggle between Indians and whites over the lands of Florida which ended in the 1850s when the Indians, beleaguered and finally overpowered, protected only by the mangrove and marshlands of South Florida, submitted to their tragic fate. The Spanish fishermen, whose relations with the Indians of the southwest coast had been amicable, were suddenly suspect in the minds of many American settlers in Florida. They

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6. José Caldez had for many years previously operated the “rancho” on the island which bore his name (Caldez Island) but which in more recent times is known as Useppa. See John Lee Williams, *The Territory of Florida* (New York, 1837; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1962), supplementary map, on which it is designated at Toampe, or Caldes Island. The quarrel between Caldez and Henry B. Crews, customs officer at Charlotte Harbor, is described in the correspondence of William A. Whitehead, customs collector for the Key West district, with the secretary of the treasury. “Letters Received by the Secretary from the Collectors of Customs, 1833-69,” National Archives, Treasury Department. Microfilm copy, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville. Hereinafter cited as LRCC.

7. Ximenez, born in St. Augustine in 1793, was lighthouse keeper at the Dry Tortugas in 1826. He later established a shipping business based at Key West, where his eldest daughter, Mary Nieves, became the wife of Joseph Beverly Browne. To this union was born Jefferson Beale Browne, Florida jurist and historian. Henry B. Crews to William A. Whitehead, August 20, 1835, LRCC.

must be brought under surveillance, it was argued, and if need be, removed from the area completely.

The collection of duties on cargoes entering Florida was the responsibility of the treasury department in Washington. The extensive coast line of the territory was difficult to patrol, however, and, although Key West had been declared a port of entry in 1822, its remoteness from the Florida mainland rendered its collectors helpless to apprehend smugglers and others who would violate treasury regulations. Other ports of entry nearest Key West were St. Marks on the upper gulf and St. Augustine on the Atlantic. Although the volume of trade between Caribbean ports and the Florida fisheries was never very large, the department could not ignore even the smaller tonnage. The situation became more complicated as Indian troubles erupted in the early 1830s, and it became evident that vessels from Havana regularly brought rum, whiskey, and wine, as well as firearms, much of which found their way into Indian hands. As a consequence the fisheries were brought more and more under the surveillance of coast guard cutters, navy patrol boats, and treasury department agents.

It was clear from the beginning of the American occupation that a proper administration of the gulf coast, either civil or military, would be impossible until surveys were made, lands were charted, and topographical features were better known. The maps of Gauld, Romans, and Evia, for all their merit, provided little more than outlines of coastal indentations and irregularities. Even James Grant Forbes, a St. Augustine native and better equipped than most to produce an accurate description of the Florida coast, was able to supply only brief and unreliable information for the southwest coast.<sup>8</sup> Nor did the map of Charles Blacker Vignoles, published in 1823, provide much information. On September 29, 1823, James Gadsden wrote to the secretary of war, expressing his dissatisfaction with the existing maps.<sup>9</sup>

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8. James Grant Forbes, *Sketches, Historical and Topographical, of the Floridas* (New York, 1821; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1964), 109-10. Forbes devoted only slightly more than a page to southwest Florida.

9. Gadsden was commissioned to survey the Charlotte Harbor area early in 1824. On September 29, 1823, however, he had written Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, explaining the difficulties he expected to encounter. Clarence E. Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, 26 vols. (Washington, 1934-1962), XXII, 754.

The years 1823-1826 witnessed several attempts to survey the little-known coast. With the avowed purpose of providing a more realistic basis for dealing with the Indian problem, Gadsden, who had been appointed by President Monroe to supervise the removal of Florida Indians to reservations, made a partial survey of the territory around Charlotte Harbor. He reported the woeful inadequacy and unsuitability of the land previously allocated to the Indians.<sup>10</sup> On February 28, 1824, Congress authorized the more extensive survey, ultimately carried out by Captain Isaac Clark of the quartermaster's department.<sup>11</sup> Clark began by taking an inland route from Tampa Bay to Charlotte Harbor, but after enduring much hardship he concluded that the completion of his plan, which would have taken him as far south as Cape Sable, was unthinkable. Later he wrote from Cantonment Brooke in Hillsborough Bay:

From what I saw of the Country South of Charlotte River, I believe it will be extremely difficult to get through with Horses at Any season, the Indians all say they can go with Perougues all over the Country during the wet season . . . . There is no Settlement of Indians [farther] South, they say there is no part of the Country Sufficiently dry for Cultivation, and no good land, This I believe, I saw no good land from Cantonment Brooke through to Charlotte Harbor, thence up that River Sixty miles and down on the other side.<sup>12</sup>

Although Clark's journey was made during the winter months, it was still a dangerous and exhausting undertaking. Upon arriving at Charlotte Harbor and finding no supply ship awaiting him, he turned in desperation to the Spanish fishermen with whom he had been able to make contact. His report continues:

. . . my supplies being exausted, no game in the Country, no Settlements South either Indians or whites, where Supplies could be obtained . . . I procured from the fishery by entreaty and threats one hundred pounds of hard biscuit (*very bad*) Some Salt fish And a Small Hog, and from an Indian I obtained some dried venison in all about four days rations for the party . . . . There are three fisheries in the Harbour, They are established on the Keys near the Entrance in all

10. *Ibid.*, 905.

11. *Ibid.*, 924-25.

12. Isaac Clark to Thomas S. Jesup, February 20, 1825, *ibid.*, XXIII, 185.

forty three Spaniards, and several Indians, The[y] live in Huts Constructed of the Palmetto Similar to the Indians, they appear to be industrious and attend to their Fishery alone.<sup>13</sup>

In no part of his letter did Clark reveal any anxiety over the presence of the few Spaniards fishing along the southwest coast and occupying rude palmetto huts here and there in Charlotte Harbor. Colonel Gad Humphreys, Indian agent for the area, was far from indifferent, however. He had talked with Clark and was much concerned. He saw the fisheries as agencies for fomenting hostility among the Indians toward white settlers and territorial administrators. He claimed to have knowledge of a constant intercourse between the Indians and the island of Cuba where supposedly they were always warmly welcomed and laden with gifts. Especially obnoxious, he said, was the traffic in liquors which were channeled through the fisheries to the Indians of the coastal area. Clark had told him of seeing at Charlotte Harbor Chief Jumper waiting for the return of a party of his men who had gone to Havana to procure a supply of rum. A further complication latent in the situation was suggested by Humphreys when he added: "It is well understood also that Runaway Slaves are often Carried off in these vessels, sometimes as free, & at others taken to Cuba and Sold."<sup>14</sup>

It is a matter of minor interest that Humphreys had elected to communicate directly with the secretary of war, ignoring Florida officials. It was with obvious pique that Acting Governor George Walton wrote Colonel Thomas L. McKenney of the war department's Indian Affairs Office, from Pensacola, complaining that information such as had been imparted by Humphreys to Calhoun, had not been communicated directly to him. He had been forced, he said, to rely on rumor for such knowledge as he had concerning the coast of Florida and particularly the Spanish fisheries. He was inclined to believe, however, that the reports were exaggerated, and would await further information before taking any official action.<sup>15</sup>

Later in the summer of 1825 Colonel George M. Brooke, commanding officer at Cantonment Brooke, responded to the

13. *Ibid.*, 182-83.

14. Gad Humphreys to John C. Calhoun, March 2, 1825, *ibid.*, 202-03.

15. George Walton to Thomas L. McKenney, July 14, 1825, *ibid.*, 282-83.



pressure for action against the fisheries. He wrote to General Winfield Scott:

There are below this post (about forty miles) several fisheries owned by Spaniards, who by the treaty ceding the Floridas to the United States have become American Citizens, that is to say, they were in this country the day the flags of the two nations were changed. They trade directly with the Havanna, and I am informed carry on a traffick with the Indians in our neighborhood, purchasing their peltry, and Selling them whiskey . . . . I request permission either to Send parties or go myself when I may think it necessary, to break up this intercourse Existing between foreigners at heart and Indians.<sup>16</sup>

It may be inferred that Brooke's request was approved. His letter to Quartermaster General Thomas S. Jesup announced his preparation for a regular patrol of the coast south of Tampa Bay. He had even employed a Spanish interpreter since "the coast south of this is inhabited entirely by persons speaking the Spanish language only." Surprisingly, however, Brooke's attitude and avowed approach were those of benevolent protector. He argued that since these former citizens of Spain were now detached from Havana their only choice was to look to America for assistance. It had been reported to him, said Brooke, that these fishermen were frequently victimized by pirates calling themselves Columbians, who were given to raiding Florida's southern shores. These "helpless" Spaniards had applied to Brooke for American citizenship, and he was at the moment awaiting authorization to receive their oaths.<sup>17</sup> It was his firm intention, he stated finally, to end the liquor traffic with the Indians.

In spite of such professed plans to bring the fisheries under closer scrutiny, and notwithstanding the increased patrol activity by coast guard and navy, there is no evidence that the fishermen were either regulated or harassed during the years 1825-1830. If piratical raiders did actually carry out forays along the Florida coast, the increasing activity of commercial and military vessels flying the American flag would have discouraged their seeking

16. George M. Brooke to Winfield Scott, August 29, 1825, *ibid.*, 314.

17. Brooke to Jesup, November 30, 1825. Brooke's request for such authorization was made, not to federal authority, but to Governor DuVal of the Territory of Florida, *ibid.*, 365-6.

havens along the shore, and the major reason for a more careful patrol of the area would have been minimized. As for the fishermen and their Indian associates, little official attention seems to have been given by the authorities. The comparative isolation of their enterprise and the apparent willingness of their Havana masters to route north-bound cargoes through the Key West custom controls seem to have allayed official concern about their presence in and about Charlotte Harbor.

The total volume of these fishing operations is not easily determined; the very nature of such a commerce defies accurate accounting. William A. Whitehead, Key West collector from 1831 to 1838, a man of learning and intelligence, described two kinds of commercial fishing along the gulf coast. First, there was a small fleet of fishing vessels, about thirty in number in 1831, owned by New England masters, who regularly caught fish and turtle and sold them, either live or fresh, on the Havana market. The proceeds of such sales he estimated at between £20,000 and £25,000 annually. For these fishermen the work was seasonal, being restricted to the winter months; summers they spent in the North.<sup>18</sup>

The Spanish fishermen, on the other hand, cured or salted their catches, selling them over a more extended period on the Havana market. Whitehead could not ascertain that the two groups interfered with each other. The latter lived on their "ranchos," cured their fish with salt, and even sold them in a different quarter of Havana. Their exports, he had discovered, were dried fish, fish roe, fish oil, and articles of American manufacture, valued in the year 1831 at \$18,000.<sup>19</sup> As for the customs paid by these Spaniards, Whitehead found in the files of his office that for the three years, 1829-1831, collections totaled \$4,717.53.<sup>20</sup> Estimates of the number of persons engaged in the

18. *House Documents*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., No. 291, 2.

19. *Ibid.*, 1.

20. *Ibid.*, 2. Whitehead made his first visit to the Charlotte Harbor fisheries in the fall of 1831 to acquaint himself with the situation as it related to the collection of customs. On November 17 he reported to Lewis McLane, secretary of the treasury, explaining what he had found with respect to the Spanish inhabitants and requesting that they be permitted to remain in the area and continue their trade. He had discussed the matter of American citizenship with the head fisherman (undoubtedly Caldez) and was convinced that it was ignorance of the English language and the legal implications of the cession of Florida that had prevented these people from becoming citizens. Whitehead concluded, "it appears that the act allowing Spanish vessels to enter the port of

fishing business vary greatly, as did the number of "ranchos." Whitehead was able to locate four main establishments, employing altogether some 130 men, of whom probably half were Indians. In addition, he found some thirty Indian women and between fifty and 100 children.<sup>21</sup> Others reckoned the total number to have been about 400.

There were variances in the features of the "ranchos." Whitehead found that they were composed of a number of dwellings, each structure some fifteen to twenty-feet square and, except for a framework of wood, thatched—both walls and ceilings. They were equipped with a few cooking utensils, two or three stools, and perhaps a rude table. In one hut he had seen the figure of an angel, the only trace of religious observance noted by any of the visitors. Since these establishments had been in some instances on unnamed keys, most of the locations are difficult to determine. Whitehead named the following sites:<sup>22</sup> (1) Seven miles inside Boca Grande (evidence suggests the northern tip of Pine Island, at present site of Bokeelia); (2) Caldez Island (probably present-day Useppa);<sup>23</sup> (3) thirty-five miles south of Boca Grande (probably Punta Rasa, a surmise supported by Dr. Benjamin Strobel's account of his visit there in 1833. He spent a night at a fishing "rancho at Punta Rasa");<sup>24</sup> (4) about five miles from Punta Rasa, a mile or two up a river (probably on

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Pensacola, and of St. Augustine, on the same footing as American vessels, for twelve years, contained a clause giving them, also the right to fish on the coast for the same period." William A. Whitehead to Lewis McLane, November 17, 1831, "Correspondence with the Collectors of Customs, 1789-1833." National Archives, Treasury Department. Microfilm copy, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History. Hereinafter cited as CCC.

21. *Ibid.*, 3.

22. Thelma Peters, ed., "William Adee Whitehead's Reminiscences of Key West," *Tequesta*, XXV (1965), 34. These recollections by Whitehead were published serially in the Key West newspaper *Key of the Gulf* in 1877, and edited for *Tequesta* by Professor Peters in 1965.

23. On January 23, 1833, Caldez sold his island to Joseph Ximenez for the sum of \$372. Caldez, in providing information on the transaction for a Key West clerk, had apparently called the island "Josefa's" as it was commonly known. From the lips of the illiterate Caldez who spoke little if any English the clerk transcribed it "Tio Sespas." In the 1870 census it is called Giuseppe Island, having been Italianized by one of its inhabitants, who was Italian-born. Ultimately this became "Useppa." See Deed Record Book, A, Monroe County Clerk's Office, Key West, 442.

24. E. A. Hammond, ed., "Sanibel Island and Its Vicinity, 1833, A Document," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XLVIII (April 1970), 402-03.

the left bank of the Caloosahatchee River near its effluence into San Carlos Bay).

Strobel, who visited at least two of the fisheries in February 1833, reported:

[Punta Rasa] is the place at which the Spanish fishery is established . . . . Punta Rasa contains 10 to 12 houses, framed of wood, and thatched . . . . The principal inhabitants are Spaniards, but by far the largest number are Indians. These Indians are employed by the Spaniards; they go out in large canoes and catch fish, on the neighboring shores; they use the seine. When the fishing season is over, they go into the country, or on the neighboring islands, and plant provisions, such as corn, sugar cane, pumpkins, sweet potatoes & c.<sup>25</sup>

The identities of these Spanish fishermen are mostly unknown. The notable exception is Caldez, who was already an elderly man at the time of the American occupation of Florida. He was often sought out by visitors as an object of curiosity and as a source of assistance. John Lee Williams, who thought he was the survivor of a Spanish family which had once occupied Key West, wrote: "The proprietor [of the fishery at Toampe] is a stout, healthy, old, white-headed Spaniard, very industrious; carries on fishing to a great extent; keeps two small schooners running to Havanna, with fish and turtle."<sup>26</sup> Whitehead and Strobel found him friendly, even hospitable, although a customs inspector assigned to the area, Henry B. Crews, thought him wily, deceitful, and unworthy of trust:

The fishery nearest to which I had settled myself was and is under the charge of a Spaniard named José Caldes, who has long resided there in a state of Savage Barbarism with no associate but the Seminole Indians and the lowest class of refugee Spaniards who from crime have most generally been compelled to abandon the haunts of civilized life. He and those around him have long been unaccustomed to the restraints of law and I very soon discovered that the contiguity of my place of abode to his, and the opportunity which it gave me of witnessing transactions which he desired should be kept secret from the world would not be submitted to by him.<sup>27</sup>

25. *Ibid.*

26. Williams, *Territory of Florida*, 25, 33, 39, 294.

27. Crews to Whitehead, August 20, 1835, LRCC.

Notwithstanding the tolerance shown for Caldez by Whitehead, under whose supervision the commerce of Charlotte Harbor stood, there appeared by 1829 a deepening concern about these foreign-operated establishments. Rumors and complaints were finding their way into the customs offices of Key West and St. Marks (Magnolia). It was assumed that smuggling and duty-evasion were common in both Charlotte Harbor and Tampa Bay. Besides, there was an element of danger in the very presence of some 300-400 Spaniards and Indians along those waters. As the Indian issue became more sensitive the fisheries were regarded as particularly vulnerable points on a coast which was difficult at best to patrol. Several official dispatches mentioned the necessity of establishing custom agencies in both Charlotte Harbor and Tampa Bay. In March 1830, Jesse H. Willis, collector of the St. Marks district, toured both and reported finding settlements of Spaniards and Indians which in the fishing season numbered 400-600 inhabitants. Upon inquiring into the nature and extent of their business, he was assured that all incoming cargoes came by way of the Key West custom control point. But he added:

This . . . I did not believe and have no doubt of their bringing more than half of their supplies from Havana without paying duties thereon. But I do not think that all the violations of the Revenues at this harbor [Charlotte] are confined to the inhabitants, but [are] connected with the population of the Capes of Florida and Key West and Havana.

He concluded his report with the recommendation that a custom inspector be stationed at Charlotte Harbor, adding that it might be "a wholesome experiment."<sup>28</sup>

Whitehead, on the other hand, exhibited the utmost friendliness toward the fishermen. Were his public life not above reproach, one might be tempted to impugn his motives as having

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28. Jesse H. Willis to Samuel D. Ingham, April 26, 1830, *ibid.* Willis included a description of the topographical features of the area, which in his opinion provided splendid havens for illicit traders. An earlier letter to Ingham (*ibid.*, March 14, 1830) reveals that Governor DuVal had expressed anxiety concerning the presence of Spanish fishermen in Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor. Willis's inspection of these parts was undertaken as the result of DuVal's request to the secretary of the treasury for an investigation.

been tainted by self-interest or by the desire to conceal remissness on the part of his associates. But the evidence will not support any such charges. One concludes that he regarded any violation of revenue laws by the fishermen as of little consequence. More to the point, however, he seems to have regarded the fishermen as the victims of international legalities neither provoked nor wrought by them, but which nevertheless threatened their traditional mode of life. His dispatch of November 17, 1831, to Lewis McLane, secretary of the treasury, set forth his attitude:

I conceive it important that the fisheries of the United States should be preserved for its own citizens; but in this instance, there is no intrusion upon the established fishing ground of any American. There is no settlement nearer than the Cantonment at Tampa Bay, which is 70 miles distant, and the inhabitants have uniformly acknowledged themselves as amenable to the laws of the Territory . . . . I have thought it my duty to make this representation, understanding that it is probable that application will be made to have them dispossessed.<sup>29</sup>

Whitehead's plea for lenity went unheeded, however; there were stronger pressures from other parts. At least two years earlier Samuel D. Ingham, secretary of the treasury, had been urged by one J. Tilton of Cheshire County (New Hampshire?) to take measures against extensive smuggling along the Florida shores, of which he claimed to have ample evidence. Ingham responded by alerting the St. Marks custom office to the necessity of employing every possible means for the detection of smugglers.<sup>30</sup> Tilton claimed to know personally several merchant sea captains who possessed two sets of credentials— one American, one Spanish— which they switched as occasion dictated. For many of these the fishing business was of secondary importance, a mere front for vast smuggling operations, totaling annually up to \$200,000. Their cargoes were of an average value of \$1,500-\$2,000 on which in most instances no duty was paid.

Willis, the St. Marks custom officer, was apparently convinced. He acknowledged the necessity of controlling smuggling on the lower gulf coast, admitting that Charlotte Harbor was a

29. Whitehead to McLane, November 17, 1831, *House Documents*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., No. 201, 3.

30. Ingham to Willis, September 12, 1829, CCC.

smuggler's rendezvous, and that there was a considerable settlement of Spanish engaged in fishing there who received their supplies from Havana without paying duty.<sup>31</sup> Answering the inquiry, "Is Charlotte Harbor in the St. Marks Customs District?" Ingham vaguely suggested that the dividing line between the St. Marks and Key West districts lay near the middle of Charlotte Bay.<sup>32</sup> This demarcation was patently absurd in that it would have required agents of both districts to patrol the same waters. It was soon discarded, with the Key West office assuming the responsibility for all of Charlotte Harbor.<sup>33</sup>

Within a short time Governor DuVal had re-entered the discussions. He informed Ingham of the existence of a large fishery at Charlotte Harbor which supplied the Havana market and that large quantities of salt were brought back without payment of duty.<sup>34</sup> "The coast on the west side of the Gulf is well calculated to concele [*sic*] smugglers," he found, and he urged the assignment of customs officers to both Charlotte Harbor and Tampa Bay. On June 14, 1830, Ingham nominated Augustus Steele for the Tampa Bay post, and one year later he approved the appointment of George C. Willis for Charlotte Harbor.<sup>35</sup> Each was to serve in the dual role of deputy collector and inspector with wages set at \$1.50 per diem. The first official effort to regulate the commerce of the southwest coast was thus launched.

During the year 1831 pressures for the direct control of the fisheries by the territorial government began to mount. The nuisance factor represented by the presence of an unregulated enterprise within the territory was to some degree responsible, but there was without doubt an element of greed in the motivation of those who pushed for legislative action. Only by expelling the fisheries could clear title to the lands around Charlotte Harbor be confirmed to American citizens. As for the

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31. Willis to Ingham, December 23, 1829, *ibid.*

32. Ingham to Willis, December 22, 1829, *ibid.*

33. McLane to Whitehead, December 28, 1832, *ibid.* Reference is made to a congressional act of July 13, 1832, bringing Charlotte Harbor into the district of Key West.

34. William DuVal to Ingham, January 22, 1830, sent as an enclosure, Ingham to Willis, February 29, 1830, *ibid.*

35. Ingham to Willis, February 29, 1830, *ibid.* Ingham to Willis, June 16, 1831, *ibid.* George C. Willis was probably a brother of the St. Marks collector, Jesse H. Willis.

technicalities of granting American citizenship to the Spanish residents, the negotiations at the time of the cession from Spain had produced a simplified process. But this the territorial government neither desired nor encouraged. Richard K. Call, assistant counsel in land cases, brought the matter to the attention of the General Land Office in Washington. Charlotte Harbor, he recalled, was a place of rendezvous for Spanish fishermen from Cuba. He continued:

It is important that the lands along the margin of the Gulph should be disposed of as early as possible. But far [*sic*] the present it would be perhaps most prudent merely to have the country run off in townships, by which means the character of the lands would be developed and wherever they may be found sufficiently valuable to warrant the expense they can afterwards be divided into sections and sold.<sup>36</sup>

Whatever the motives, the territorial government was quick to seize the opportunity to gain control. Both Governor DuVal and Acting Governor James D. Westcott, Jr., threw their support to a measure to regulate. Westcott, in a message to the legislative council early in 1832, declared, "There is no subject in the scope of our duties that I deem of more importance to the interests of the Territory than the regulation by law of the valuable fisheries in the waters adjacent to the islands and keys, and in the bays and sounds, and on the coasts of our Territory, and their protection from the intrusion of foreigners."<sup>37</sup> Although he regarded the fisheries as wholly within the jurisdiction of the territory and subject to the control of its legislative body, he thought it "advisable that the express consent of Congress, to such a law as you may pass on the subject, be obtained before it is put into force."

The legislative council acted quickly. John C. Love of Gadsden County read the regulatory bill for the first time on February 6, 1832, and five days later it was given its third reading and passed.<sup>38</sup> It was a harsh and sweeping law, designed, as Whitehead observed, with the ultimate objective of driving the Spani-

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36. Call to Elijah Hayward, March 13, 1831. Carter, *Territorial Papers*, XXIV, 514.

37. *House Documents*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., No. 201, 6-7.

38. *Acts of the Legislative Council of the Territory of Florida* (Tallahassee, 1832), 82-87.



ards from the locality: "It is presumed that some smart individual thought 'it would pay' to dispossess the old settlers and fall heir to their business."<sup>39</sup> Its principal provision required the licensing of all fishing vessels in Florida waters, except for those supplying the needs of territorial inhabitants. For such licenses, foreigners must pay \$500 per annum, in addition to a bond of \$2,000 demanded of all vessels. Heavy fines were to be levied for fishing without license, while masters discovered trading with Indians would forfeit their vessels and pay a fine of \$500.

On March 22 Whitehead registered a protest with Joseph M. White, territorial representative in Congress, arguing, "[If] these Spaniards pay all their dues, and do not interfere in any manner with the sale of fish caught by the Americans, why should they be deprived of the rights which, but for the ignorance of the language would have been secured to them by their becoming American citizens?"<sup>40</sup> It was to no avail. On the day following the enactment of the law, George C. Willis was appointed commissioner to protect the fisheries at Charlotte Harbor.<sup>41</sup>

The untenable stand taken by the legislative council was evident to most of its members. John C. Booth, member from Walton and Washington counties, had brought the matter of the dubious sovereignty of the territory in such legislative areas to their attention. Whence would come the sanction, he wished to know. Then, dismissing the question of sanction, Booth boldly asserted that the rights and privileges of the people of the territory of Florida were no different from those of the citizens of states, who in his opinion had the indisputable right to regulate enterprises along their coasts. In closing his speech, however, he reminded the group that enforcement of the act depended upon congressional sanction and the cooperation of

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39. Peters, "Whitehead," 33.

40. Whitehead to Joseph M. White, *House Documents*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., No. 201, 1-2.

41. On February 12, after affixing his signature to the regulatory act, Westcott announced the nominations confirmed by the council. Commissioners included in the list were: "A[ugustus] Steele, to protect the fisheries at Tampa Bay, George Willis, to protect the fisheries at Charlotte Harbor, William A. Whitehead and Thomas Eastin, to protect the fisheries at Key West." This represents an interesting assumption of appointive power in that Steele, Willis and Whitehead already held appointments in the customs service of the treasury department of the federal government. Carter, *Territorial Papers*, XXIV, 660-61.

the federal government, and a resolution acknowledging such dependence was adopted.<sup>42</sup>

By congressional action in the summer of 1832, the Key West customs district was extended to include the Charlotte Harbor area. But a resolution of the Florida legislative council requesting congressional sanction of its fisheries regulation fared not so well. On April 9, Joseph M. White presented the resolution to the House of Representatives which promptly referred it to the committee on territories.<sup>43</sup> About a month later White presented a petition from a group of Key West citizens urging Congress to annul the act of the legislative council.<sup>44</sup> This was referred to the committee on commerce. Neither matter was reported out.

Collecting customs and protecting fisheries in Charlotte Harbor about 1830 were lonely and hazardous occupations. The post was accessible only by water, and neither commercial nor military craft, except for vessels involved in fishing, made regular entries into the bay. Nor was there a town to supply the essential commodities or even the semblance of social intercourse. The pay, \$1.50 per day, was adequate, but hardly sufficient to compensate for the isolation and hardship which such an assignment entailed.<sup>45</sup> The inspector of customs and guardian of the fisheries was a virtual castaway, his only human contacts being the Spanish fishermen and their Indian associates, none of whom were inclined to cultivate the companionship of a government agent charged with their surveillance.

George C. Willis did not long remain at his Charlotte Harbor post. Perhaps it was the loneliness, perhaps the pay, that discouraged him. Whitehead had requested a pay increase up to \$2.00 per day in view of "the deprivations and disadvantages" of the position, but when the treasury department failed to respond Willis resigned.<sup>46</sup> Whitehead recommended John W. Willis (perhaps a brother) as his replacement, but the nominee died before confirmation had been received.<sup>47</sup> Then Henry B. Crews, a Key West physician, was nominated and immediately dispatched to

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42. *House Documents*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., No. 201, 6.

43. *House Journal*, 22nd Cong., 1st sess., 575.

44. *Ibid.*, 710.

45. Whitehead to McLane, November 22, 1832, CCC.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Whitehead to William J. Duane, July 1, 1833, LRCC.

assume the duties of his office, the official approval coming a little later.<sup>48</sup>

Crews's tour of duty, which began in July 1833, was marked by harassment and frustration.<sup>49</sup> Accompanied by his wife he had chosen to establish himself on Josefa Island (Useppa), only a quarter of a mile from the "rancho" of Caldez. From the start the two men looked upon each other with distrust; eventually with outright hostility. Evidence strongly suggests that Caldez and his Key West business associate, José Ximenez, and possibly their Havana business partner, Juan Bardia, found the proximity of Crews irksome. From his vantage location Crews could observe the comings and goings of most vessels entering the harbor, and without doubt this rendered customs evasion virtually impossible. On the other hand, it is conceivable that Crews was, as Whitehead later charged, irascible and injudicious in carrying out the duties of his office. Wherever the blame, Caldez and his companions missed few opportunities to make life uncomfortable for Crews and his wife, while Crews employed what he interpreted to be the authority of his position to impede the hitherto free and easy flow of commerce to and from Havana.

Whitehead never really trusted Crews. In July 1835, Crews refused Ximenez permission to unload a cargo on Josefa Island, although it had previously cleared the customs office in Key West. Whitehead promptly suspended him,<sup>50</sup> explaining to the secretary of the treasury that such action was necessary as a "consequence of his having made use of his office to oppress and annoy the people among whom he resided."<sup>51</sup> If the secretary should concur in the decision to remove Crews, Whitehead would nominate Alexander Patterson to replace him. There followed a heated exchange of letters, in which Dr. Crews defended his action on the grounds that the cargo had included a supply of hard liquor destined for distribution among the Indians who, when intoxicated, were a threat to the safety of the doctor and his wife.

48. Whitehead to Duane, July 31, 1833, *ibid.*

49. Crews to Whitehead, August 20, 1835, *ibid.* In this letter Crews explained his grievances against Caldez and his associates, emphasizing the harassment he had endured since his arrival. The dispatch was forwarded to the secretary of the treasury.

50. Whitehead to Crews, July 27, 1835, *ibid.*

51. Whitehead to Levi Woodbury, August 24, 1835, *ibid.*

Several months elapsed before Secretary Woodbury approved Whitehead's request for the dismissal of the inspector. A long, persuasive letter from Crews had apparently raised doubts in the secretary's mind as to the accuracy of Whitehead's report.<sup>52</sup> In the meantime, Mrs. Crews returned to Key West in an attempt to arouse support for her husband's cause.<sup>53</sup> Finally, in mid-April 1836, with the approval of Woodbury, Whitehead dispatched Patterson to Charlotte to relieve Crews. A few days later, Patterson returned to Key West to report the murder of the inspector.<sup>54</sup> The crime was presumed to have been committed by "friendly Indians" employed by the fishery on Josefa. The inspector's house had been burned, his personal belongings either stolen or destroyed, and a new revenue boat, recently acquired for his use, was not to be found.

This event marked the beginning of the end of the Spanish fisheries in Charlotte Harbor. It is perhaps an overstatement to claim that the murder was a manifestation of the general outbreak of hostilities between Indians and whites in central Florida, especially if one considers the intense personal antagonism which had developed between Crews and Caldez. Still it must be recalled that Crews's death occurred about four months after the massacre of Major Francis L. Dade and members of his scouting party, the most shocking and significant of a series of incidents which heralded the coming of the Second Seminole War. Subsequent to that event no white man, regardless of his nationality, was safe in central Florida, least of all those who occupied undefended outposts such as Charlotte Harbor.<sup>55</sup>

There was mounting anxiety among both the Americans and Spanish of peninsular Florida in the spring of 1836. Alarms were sounded in many remote settlements— New River, Cape Florida, Indian Key, Key West, and even Tampa Bay. Military

52. Crews's letter, dated August 20, 1835, appears as an enclosure, Whitehead to Woodbury, August 25, 1835, *ibid.*

53. Whitehead to Woodbury, October 14, 1835, *ibid.*

54. Whitehead to Woodbury, April 25, 1836, *ibid.*

55. Even in the spring of 1836 Whitehead continued to defend the Spanish fishermen against the charges that they were supplying arms and ammunition to the Indians of the Charlotte Harbor vicinity. In March he refuted the allegation of Major William Wyatt that the fishermen were a threat to American security. Whitehead wrote, "The residents of the fishery alluded to, have been in as much alarm since the commencement of hostilities, as if they had never beheld an Indian,— a fact proving conclusively that no collusion exists between them and the Savages." *Key West Inquirer*, March 19, 1836.

authorities were by no means agreed upon a proper course of defense.<sup>56</sup> Fighting Indians was not an unfamiliar enterprise for many American soldiers, but tracking them to their hiding places in the marsh and mangrove of southern Florida was not a conventional or prescribed procedure. Each succeeding strategy was therefore tentative and experimental, consisting mainly of limited excursions along the coast and into the waterways, carried out ostensibly with the purpose of luring the Indian from his jungle haven to engage his white antagonist in a more traditional and open encounter. Well aware of his disadvantage in such a battle, however, the Indian was too shrewd to accept the challenge.

Charlotte Harbor, lacking the protection of a military post in 1836, was an early target of aroused Indians. The murder of Dr. Crews, coming so soon after the Dade massacre, produced near-panic among settlers from Tampa Bay southward. Rumors of Indian threats to life and property along the coast spread from settlement to settlement, while military commanders of both army and navy floundered in indecision. Suggestive of the confusion was the letter of Commander M. P. Mix of the U.S.S. *Concord* to Commodore Alex J. Dallas, commander of the West Indian Squadron. It told of Indians assembling from all directions with the determination to destroy the fisheries of Tampa Bay and burn all the transports in Hillsborough Harbor:

The troops have been withdrawn from Charlotte Harbor and the fishermen and inhabitants, about one hundred in number are on their way to Espirita Santa [Tampa] Bay for the purpose of fixing themselves on one of the Islands at the entrance of the Bay. The Indians, it is said, will send their periogues [*sic*] from Charlotte Harbor with the intention of destroying the Rancho and Fishery of Captain Bunce [in Tampa Bay] and also any inhabitants they may find on either of the other islands, which they can probably accomp-

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56. The sources and literature relating to the southwest coast of Florida at the time of the Indian wars are not abundant. They consist principally of correspondence of federal agencies in Washington and their representatives, military and civil, in Florida. The most significant investigation yet made into the military activity along the southwest coast during the Second Seminole War is that of George Edward Buker, in his doctoral dissertation, "Riverine Warfare: Naval Combat in the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842." For a more general study of dealing with all aspects of that war the standard work is John K. Mahon, *History of the Second Seminole War, 1835-1842* (Gainesville, 1967).

lish, as we are about thirty miles distant. I shall, however, occasionally send the Launch with a twelve pound Howitzer accompanied by one of the other boats, for their protection.<sup>57</sup>

A similar letter, from Dallas to Mahlon Dickerson, secretary of the navy, further reveals the pervading fear. He told of "roiled Indians" wantonly engaging in murder and arson. He had heard that even Tallahassee was threatened. He was sending the revenue cutter *Washington* from Pensacola to Tampa Bay to join the *Concord*, while the *Dexter* was cruising between Charlotte Harbor and the Florida keys.<sup>58</sup> Military correspondence of April 1836 and succeeding months discloses anxiety even among the ranking officers, and there was much scurrying about among the bays and inlets in search of Indian encampments.

On April 1, Lieutenant Levin M. Powell of the U.S.S. *Vandalia* received orders to make a reconnaissance expedition to Charlotte Harbor. Upon his arrival inside Boca Grande the following day he found the inhabitants of the area "flying in every direction to escape the fury of the Indians."<sup>59</sup> When, after about ten days, Commander Thomas T. Webb of the *Vandalia* had received no word from Powell, he ordered the *Washington* "to bring back my boats and men from Charlotte Harbor and the River Amoxura."<sup>60</sup> Almost simultaneously Colonel Persifor F. Smith, commanding officer of the Louisiana Volunteer Regiment, was ordered to proceed with his regiment of some 500 men to Charlotte Harbor for additional searches along the rivers flowing into the harbor.<sup>61</sup> Since the small boats then in use by Powell were needed for exploring the shallow waters of Charlotte Harbor and its environs, Commander Webb issued additional instructions to Powell, to be delivered by Colonel Smith, demanding full cooperation with the army contingent. Smith arrived in Charlotte Harbor on April 12, and for approximately two weeks the two men directed the investigation. The going was difficult. The heat was oppressive, while the lands bordering the Myacca

57. M. P. Mix to Alex J. Dallas, "Records Relating to the Service of the Navy and Marine Corps on the Coast of Florida, 1835-1842," National Archives. Microfilm copy, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History. Hereinafter cited as RRSNMC.

58. Dallas to Mahlon Dickerson, dated at Pensacola, May 20, 1836, *ibid.*

59. *Army and Navy Chronicle*, II (May 12, 1836), 294-95. Thomas T. Webb to Dallas, April 12, 1836, RRSNMC.

60. This river appears as the Withlacoochee on later maps.

61. *Senate Documents*, 24th Cong., 2nd sess., No. 224, 335.

River, the only stream they tried to penetrate, were so marshy as to make it impossible for the soldiers searching for signs of Indians to walk sufficiently close to the river to keep sight of the boats. The search was abandoned.

The reports of Smith and Powell to their respective commanders shed some light on the impact of the Indian attacks upon the Spanish inhabitants of the fisheries. Smith, writing from Fort Brooke noted:

We did not get into the harbor until the 12th when I sent for the boats of the Spaniards, and engaged them, and a man for each to manage it . . . [On] the 18th, we started up the river. The boats, with the Spaniards and part of the crew of the *Vandalia's* boats . . . took the channel of the river while my regiment and the remainder of the men under Lieutenant Powell, took the route by land, intending to keep to the bank of the river in company with the boats . . . As I saw it impossible . . . I ordered the whole to return under Major Marks from this place . . . except what could embark in the boats; for this purpose I sent back all the Spaniards, and deposited the surplus provisions in the bushes, and thus made room in the boats for 152 men and officers.<sup>62</sup>

It seems clear that such Spaniards as remained at the fisheries did tender their equipment and their services to the reconnaissance troops. Whether out of hostility toward the Indians—some of whom remained among them— it is impossible to say. Nevertheless, Colonel Thomas Lawson, with a reduced force, continued the exploration of the Myacca in search of the Indians. But only traces were to be found: an abandoned camp, which had been briefly occupied, Smith speculated, by those who had burned Dr. Crain's [obviously Crews was intended] house. Smith reported that:

The Spanish fishermen have, I believe, left Charlotte Harbor, but without good cause, for they have never been troubled by a [raiding] party of more than 6 or 7, and they are 30 strong.<sup>63</sup>

Lieutenant Powell's report incorporated information obtained before the arrival of Colonel Smith:

62. Smith to Winfield Scott, April 26, 1836, *ibid.*, 335ff.

63. *Ibid.* 358.

At the entrance of the Bay [Charlotte], we fell in with two periouges [*sic*] filled with fugitives from the village on Josefa Island and who reported that the night before they had been assaulted by a band of twenty-five Indians under the chief Wy-ho-kee, the collector's establishment destroyed, himself murdered and the village plundered. I hastened forthwith to the spot, picked up on my way another boat of fugitives, and sent them to collect the women and children secreted in the wood, and had soon the satisfaction of restoring them to their homes. As some of the marauders were said to be on an island a few miles distant, guides were procured and in half an hour after our arrival Sailing Master Rowan was dispatched in the light boat in pursuit; he came up with a small party of them just at daylight, killed two and secured prisoners— Punai and another, who were sent to you in Tampa. Mr. Rowan then proceeded to Cinnabel [Sanibel], in search of another party who had gone on, but returned without discovering any trace of them.<sup>64</sup>

On May 21 the *Pensacola Gazette* published information received from officers of the *Washington*, just arrived from Tampa Bay, confirming the rumor that all American citizens at Charlotte Harbor and its vicinity had fled to Passage Island at the entrance to Tampa Bay. It further stated that these refugees had associated themselves with the fisheries of Captain William Bunce, "making an aggregate number, including women and children of about 200 souls." Since it has been established that Bunce employed Spaniards and Indians at his Tampa Bay fisheries, it seems probable that the term, "American citizens," was here employed loosely.<sup>65</sup> It may have included Spaniards, friendly Indians, and any others who regularly fished in the Charlotte Harbor area. The *Gazette* item also reported the discovery of the badly mutilated bodies of Dr. Crews and his boat hands near the mouth of the Sanibel [Caloosahatchee] River.

The summer of 1836 found Charlotte Harbor lonely and deserted. Whitehead went north to his summer home in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, leaving his deputy collector in Key West, Adam Gordon, in charge of the customs office. In a report to the secretary of the treasury, Gordon noted that Inspector Alexander Patterson had been provided with another boat for the Charlotte Harbor inspection, the stolen craft never having been

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64. Levin M. Powell to Webb, April 27, 1836, RRSNMC.

65. Dodd, "Captain Bunce," 249.



recovered. He added dolefully: "The Indian hostilities, however, have caused the fishing establishment to be removed to Tampa Bay, and there is not only no commerce, but no living person in Charlotte Harbor." Even Patterson had abandoned the harbor for the safer environs of Key West.<sup>66</sup>

On December 8, 1836, Lieutenant Powell of the *Vandalia* returned to Key West from a cruise which had explored the Florida waters from New River to Charlotte Harbor. Its avowed purpose had been to "attempt a surprise of the Indians at or near Cape Florida [on Key Biscayne], or on the New River, and cooperate with the army in protecting our people, and capturing and destroying the enemy." Powell's report, written at Key West December 8, included the following:

On the 28th [November], we sailed [from the Caximbo River] for Synabell, touching the intermediate coast and at Estera [Estero], and early the next morning anchored at the island of Synabell. Captain Day, of the *Washington*, and Lieutenant McNeill went into the mouth of the Synabell river, and landed at Punta Rassa and Estera. After suffering a short detention here from bad weather, we took the interior channel amongst the keys to Charlotte Harbor. The boats were spread over the bay among the keys. All the old "Ranchos" were visited, but they had been abandoned, and for the most part, destroyed during the last season. We made our camp on the island of Josefa, in Charlotte Harbor, the evening of the 30th of November, and secured shelter against a gale from the north, which we had just escaped being exposed to.<sup>67</sup>

The occupation of Charlotte Harbor by Spanish fishermen was thus ended, but the vexatious struggle to contain the Indian was only beginning. The ultimate fate of the erstwhile "rancho" dwellers remains virtually unknown. Having lived and worked on the very fringe of the American dominion, their names are seldom matters of record. Only a few, such as Caldez and his sons, even appear. A half dozen or so made unsuccessful attempts to have their land claims in Charlotte Harbor, Sarasota Bay, and Tampa Bay validated,<sup>68</sup> but the officials of territorial land offices were not disposed to honor such claims. Even William

66. Adam Gordon to Woodbury, August 1, 1836, LRCC.

67. *The Army and Navy Chronicle*, IV (May 11, 1837), 299.

68. Several claims were processed in 1828. For what appears to have been in some instances trivial reasons, however, most were found to have been defective. See *Spanish Land Grants in Florida*, 5 vols. (Tallahassee,

Bunce came under attack for allegedly making friendly overtures toward Indians, and in 1840, under orders from General W. K. Armstead, an army detail destroyed his fishing establishment.<sup>69</sup> One may only surmise that some of the fishermen made their way back to Cuba, while others were absorbed into the population of Tampa Bay.

The shocking events of the winter and spring of 1835-1836 prompted the government of the United States to attempt a military occupation of all of southern Florida. By 1841 the area was dotted with makeshift fortifications, some of which were garrisoned only briefly. Except for the beleaguered Indians of the interior of the peninsula, the population of the southwest was almost totally military in character. Federal census-takers for Monroe County in 1840 found no reason even to approach Charlotte Harbor, while their schedules for 1850 show a preponderance of military personnel in the populations of the two localities surveyed, Caloosahatchee and Charlotte Harbor.

In the summer of 1844, when it came to the attention of General William J. Worth that a new inspector of revenue had been appointed for the Charlotte Harbor district, he wrote in astonishment to the adjutant general:

There is not a settlement or habitation South of *Manatee*, a small stream emptying into Tampa Bay at least seventy miles Westerly [?] from Charlotte Harbor— with the latter [i.e., Charlotte Harbor] there is not the slightest intercourse except by an occasional fishing canoe from Tampa or vessel dispatched there on Indian matters— At *Manatee* there is a thrifty settlement to which vessels resort with supplies, but very rarely . . . If this appointment & location has been deemed necessary to prevent smuggling, the precaution can only result in useless waste of public money . . . The presence of a revenue officer, with his attendants, at this point, will be misunderstood by the Indians.<sup>70</sup>

General Worth then asked that the appointment be reviewed and that the appointee be provided with another post. He added, however, that in recent months several white men had taken up residence on one of the keys lying between Peace River and the

1940-1941), I, 43, 44, 147, 151-53, 211, 249, 254. See also *House Documents*, 21st Cong., 1st sess., No. 51, 9-22.

69. Dodd, "Captain Bunce," 255-56.

70. William J. Worth to the Adjutant General. Carter, *Territorial Papers*, XXVI, 948-49. This letter bears the date, August 19, 1844, and mentions the appointee's name merely as "Russel from North Carolina."

Carlosohatchee [*sic*], and opened an active whiskey traffic with the Indians. It was Worth's opinion that these intruders must be removed, but not until an inquiry had been made at the general land office to ascertain whether any authority had been granted for said occupancy.

The response to Worth's letter was immediate. Assistant Adjutant General Captain Lorenzo Thomas, upon endorsing Worth's letter to the departments of the treasury and war, offered this opinion:

It is highly important that no person should be permitted to settle on the Islands forming "Charlotte Harbor" which are immediately contiguous to the present Indian boundary line and which are of no value for the purpose of agriculture, being in general formed of sand and shells. Locations on these Islands would be for the purpose of traffic [*sic*] with the Indians which should be prevented. An Inspector of the Revenue is certainly not necessary at this place where there is no trade and smuggling could not well be carried on . . . Give orders that the inspector's office be removed from Charlotte harbor, & established at Indian river.<sup>71</sup>

The re-entry of Charlotte Harbor into the stream of American commerce was slow and unspectacular. Except for military personnel assigned to the various forts the area remained virtually unpopulated during the decades of the 1840s and 1850s. Even Sanibel Island, whose settlement had been launched with great hope and some promise in 1833, was once more abandoned to the native fauna. Although Fort Casey was established on Useppa Island early in 1850, within the year it had ceased to exist.<sup>72</sup> One must look into the post-Civil War years to discover the beginnings of repopulation and economic development. Even then, it was agricultural pursuits, not commercial fishing, which provided the economic base of the area.<sup>73</sup>

71. *Ibid.*, 949-50. See also Carter, *Territorial Papers*, XXVI, 951n.

72. This fort was presumably named for Captain John C. Casey, army officer employed in the Indian service. Its location may be seen on a map of the United States Coast Survey, A. D. Bache, cartographer, Sketch F, Western Coast of Florida, 1845-1851.

73. Census data for the Charlotte Harbor for 1850 are perhaps not trustworthy, but they indicate that the population was still sparse eight years after the cessation of the Indian wars. The total figures were as follows: military personnel: 178; civilian personnel: 21 (of whom five were children under six years of age, and seven were women) "Population Schedules" for Monroe Souty. Seventh United States Census, 1850, Microfilm copy, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History.