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JOHN ELLIS, ROYAL AGENT FOR WEST FLORIDA

by ROY A. RAUSCHENBERG

WHEN Britain acquired West Florida in 1763, John Ellis was appointed royal agent for West Florida. Found only in Nova Scotia, Georgia, and East and West Florida, royal or crown agents were used in underdeveloped but strategically important colonies that lacked the revenue to finance their own government. In these cases the crown assumed the financial load, and the agent was the London-based fiscal officer—the comptroller—supervising the crown’s allocations to the colony. Though easily confused with the better known and more widely used colonial agent, the royal agent was an entirely different kind of office. The royal agent was the crown’s watchdog; the colonial agent stood sentry in London for the colony, its governor, its council, and its assembly.¹

In John Ellis, the crown, and West Florida, had a very capable multi-talented civil servant. He sought to strengthen the British Empire by promoting the economic development of the colony and the mother country. However this is only part of Ellis’s story. To get the full range of his abilities and partially to reconstruct his personality, one also has to sift through the remains of Ellis’s distinguished scientific career. When this is done Ellis comes through not only as a conscientious and efficient civil servant who promoted economic development, but he is also revealed as a clear-thinking, pioneering, imaginative scientist and a quiet, socially and politically conservative family man.

Although most of John Ellis’s origins are obscure, it is known that he was born in 1714, probably in Ireland. He was a London merchant in the Irish linen trade. On his mother’s side his family was from Dublin. His sister, Martha Ellis, and her sons, John and Roger, resided in Ireland. Furthermore during the 1750s, Ellis lobbied for the Irish Linen Board at the Parliament at Westminster. Lobbying, however, did not guarantee him economic success, and in 1760 the firm of “John Ellis and James Fivey of

Roy A. Rauschenberg is associate professor of history, Ohio University. He wishes to thank the Linnean Society of London, the Royal Society, the Marrab Library, and the Royal Society of Arts for making their libraries and archives available to him.

1. Ella Lonn, *The Colonial Agents of the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill, 1945), 3-41; Cecil Johnson, *British West Florida: 1763-1783* (New Haven, 1943), 225.

Lawrence Lane London Co-partners Merchants and Irish Factors" declared bankruptcy.²

Ellis's position in 1760 seemed bleak. Not only was his business bankrupt, but his family life in the late 1750s had become very tragic. Ellis had married in the first half of 1754. Friends spoke of the wedding as early as March 1, but the marriage license is dated June 29. There seems to have been some opposition to the marriage, but the reasons are not clear. Carolina Elizabeth Peers Ellis was the twenty-one-year-old heiress of Sir Charles Peers, a London alderman, lord mayor of London, collector of the customs, and a director of the Bank of England. Ellis at the time was a forty-year-old Irish linen merchant, so he apparently was bettering himself through the marriage. The fact that Carolina Elizabeth had a £1,500 legacy was another possible reason for concern for her family. Despite the initial opposition, the marriage seems to have been a happy one. The first daughter, Martha Ellis, named for his sister, was born on December 27, 1754. Twin daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, were born on May 6, 1758. Mary lived just a few days and was buried at St. Lawrence Jewry on May 19. Elizabeth died shortly afterwards and was buried in the same church in October. Even earlier, in June 1754, Ellis had suffered the heaviest blow of all when Carolina Elizabeth died.³ In a matter of a few weeks he had lost his wife and two infant daughters.

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2. P. Beryl Eustace, ed., *Registry of Deeds, Dublin. Abstract of Wills. Vol. I, 1708-1745* (Dublin, 1956), 120, n. 284; St. Lawrence Jewry: Poor Rate Books, 1733-1743, M.S. 2518, 14-18, 20, 245; Michaelmass to Marymass, 1733, 5, Guildhall Library, London; Conrad Gill, *The Rise of the Irish Linen Industry* (Oxford, 1925), 95-96 (Notes of Ellis's services to the Linen Board); William Brownrigg to John Ellis, May 18, 1756, Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of John Ellis in the Linnean Society of London (hereinafter cited as J.E.P.); *Gentleman's Magazine*, XXX (January 1760), 47; Bankruptcy Records, B 4, Index 22649, Docket Books 1759-1763; Colonial Office Papers 5/580, 347, Public Records Office (hereinafter cited as C.O.); *Annual Register*, 1786, "Appendix to the Chronicle," 250; C.O. 74/5, April 9, 1777.
3. Bishop of London's Registry, 185, June 29, 1754, St. Lawrence Jewry; Brownrigg to Ellis, March 1, 1754; Henry Quin to Ellis, April 4, 19, 1754, 1, 2; William Borlase to Ellis, May 25, 1754; Ellis to Alexander Garden, September 11, 1758, J.E.P.; "Bulletin no. 29," *Guildhall Library, Museum and Art Gallery Bulletin* (March 1759), 3; William A. Shaw, *The Knights of England: . . . Scotland, and Ireland*, 2 vols. (London, 1906), II, 275; Alfred B. Beaven, *The Aldermen of the City of London Temp. Henry III-1908*, 2 vols. (London, 1908), I, 14, 68, 203, 252, 258, 291-92, 347, 411, II, xlix, li, 121 223; *The Book of Dignities*, (London, 1890), 274-75, 491; Sir Charles Peers, "Last Will and Testament," February 8, 1736 (Mss. in the

Despite the tragedies of his personal and business life, which had to weigh heavily on a bankrupt widower with a five-year-old daughter, Ellis made a rapid recovery in the 1760s. He continued to be the Irish Linen Board's lobbyist, and his family also contributed to an annuity. Furthermore, Ellis helped Philip Cartaret Webb develop his Busbridge garden.⁴ Then in 1764, Ellis received a further demonstration of confidence when he was appointed royal agent for West Florida.⁵

Ellis had first tried to secure the post of colonial agent for West Florida. However, Samuel Hanney gained that, and Ellis then sought the royal agency. With the help of Lord Northington, for whom he had built a conservatory, he obtained his goal.⁶ Ellis was pleased with what was considered second best. He told William Brownrigg, "I thank God for the Agency for West Florida, which . . . makes me easy and happy, and I hope will prove of use to natural history. I hear many curious things are to be had. My business does not oblige me to leave London."⁷

Ellis indeed worked in London, first at Grays Inn and then later at Hempstead. His records indicate that funds appropriated to him were used to pay schoolmasters and ministers, to underwrite gifts for Indians, and to pay the salaries of the governor and other administrators. Ellis saw to it that colonial officials lived within their budgets, presented documentation to support their requests for payment, and turned in their reports.

Principal Probate Registry, Somerset House, London); J. Steven Watson, *The Reign of George III: 1760-1815* (Oxford, 1960), 336; *The Register of St. Lawrence Jewry and St. Mary Magdalen Milk Street London, 1677-1812*, pt. II, A. W. H. Clark, ed. *The Publications of the Harleian Society*, LXXI (London, 1941), 63, 64, 238.

4. "Philip Cartaret Webb", Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography*, 22 vols. (London, 1917-1922), LX, 102.
5. J. Ellis to Henry Ellis, June 30, 1760, "Notebook #2," 34r&v; Philip Webb to Ellis, December 10, 1759, J.E.P.; Ellis to Daniel Solander, July 26, August 1, 8, 24, 1760, Ellis-Franchillon Letters, British Museum Add Ms 29, 533.
6. "Robert Henley", Earl of Northington, Stephen and Lee, eds. *Dictionary of National Biography*, XXV, 417.
7. Ellis to Brownrigg, February 11, 1764 [quote], Ellis to William Tryon, January 2, 1771, "Notebook #2," 42r, 102r, J.E.P.; Alexander Garden to Ellis, November 19, 1764, Northington to Ellis, October 30, 1764, May 30, July 25, October 30, 1765, Sir James E. Smith, *A Selection of the Correspondence of Linnaeus and Other Naturalist*, 2 vols. (London, 1821) I, 522, II, 66-69; Robert Rea, "The King's Agent for British West Florida, Notes and Documents," *Alabama Review* (April 1963), 143, 145-46.

He also tried to get information about the colony and to promote a colonial public research garden for agricultural experimentation.

Although the agent's powers were prescribed— expenditures over \$100 for example had to receive approval from the Board of Trade— he did have influence through his personal contacts, his friends, and because of his general good reputation. Working directly under the board of trade and the treasury, he reported to the colonial secretaries— successively Lord Hillsborough and Lord Dartmouth, their secretary John Pownall, and John Robinson, the secretary of the lords of the treasury. As these officers worked with a great deal of independence, Ellis really was just one person or one step away from where important decisions were made.

Ellis's June 1763-1764 allocation was extremely small. The budget totaled £5,700: £1,500 was for gifts to the Indians; £1,000, for contingencies; £1,200, the governor's salary; £500, the salary of the chief justice; £500 for bounties to encourage the production of silk and other useful commodities; £200, the royal agent's salary; £150 each for the salaries of the attorney general and the secretary-clerk of the council; £120, the surveyor of lands; £100 each for the register, a minister at Pensacola, and a minister at Mobile; £30, the salary for an assistant to the surveyor; and £25 each for a schoolmaster in Pensacola and one in Mobile. As the year continued, Ellis's contingency fund payments included service charges to the exchequer, supplies for the churches in Mobile and Pensacola, and the largest item in the budget— expenditures by the governor. For the budget June 1764-1765, the amount was reduced £500 as there was a cut in the amount for Indian gifts.⁸

The job was more demanding in 1765. In January Ellis asked the board of trade's permission to pay £100 for Indian gifts purchased by Governor George Johnstone, and by June Ellis had spent £1180/12/6 for Indian presents. Also in June 1765, Ellis had to get the board's opinion on one of the colony's clergymen. The minister, who went to Dundee, Scotland, rather than Pensacola, had been paid £100 for the period ending June 1764, and

8. C.O. 5/599, 161, 195; *Journal of Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, from January 1764 to December 1767* (London, 1936), 7-8, 12; Budgets (1763-1765), C.O. 5/547, 426-29.

£60 for the year June 1764-1765. He then asked for the remaining £40 of his 1764-1765 salary and an advance of £50. Ellis refused to pay this amount, and he requested the board's advice on the matter. In July Ellis worked out an agreement with Lieutenant Governor Montfort Browne to provide funds for freight, food, and a £7/7 per person bounty for sixty French Huguenot settlers for West Florida.⁹ In August 1765, Ellis requested the board's instructions on three items. He had granted Chief Justice William Clifton's request for half his salary in late 1764. However Ellis rejected a request for the other half of the salary because it was not documented. By August 1765, after exchanges with West Florida officials, it was clear that the proper documents had been lost at sea, and to pay the request he had to ask the board for instructions. Ellis also needed approval to pay the provincial secretary £112/10/0 without certification. Lastly, the clergyman assigned to Mobile had received the West Florida governor's approval to live in Charleston, South Carolina. Ellis, without instructions on the matter, and aware of the potential for fraud, asked the board's approval to pay the cleric's salary and advice on how to deal with similar occurrences in the future.¹⁰

1766 was a busy year. The budget increased to £5,300: £100 was added to pay a provost marshal, £1,000 for Indian gifts, £1,000 for contingencies, £1,200 to pay the governor, £500 for the chief justice, £500 for silk and wine bounties, £200 for the royal agent, £150 each for the attorney general and secretary-clerk of the council, £120 for the surveyor, £100 each for the register, a minister in Pensacola, and a minister in Mobile, £30 for a surveyor's assistant, and £25 each for school masters in Pensacola and Mobile. In July and early August 1766, Ellis made a list of the items Lieutenant Governor Brown had agreed to give the Huguenot settlers, the first sign something was amiss. In October Ellis presented the case of the Reverend Mr. Levier

9. Johnson, *British West Florida*, 61-62, n. 1.

10. Ellis to the Lord Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, December 14, 1764, January 14, June 16, August 20, 1765; George Johnstone to the secretary, September 3, 24, 25, 1764; John Ellis Agreement with Montfort Browne, July 2, 1765; Ellis to John Pownall, October 3, 15, 1765; Account for Indian Presents, June 24, 1763 to June 24, 1764; Contingent Fund, June 24, 1764 to June 24, 1765; Ellis Account for Money received, 1764-1765, C.O. 5/574, 91-93, 95, 99-107, 213, 221-22, 401, 411, 413; C.O. 5/585, 208-09; *Journal of Commissioners . . . January 1764-December 1767*, 213, 316.

to the Earl of Shelburne, the secretary of state.¹¹ Levier was already £300 in debt when he became the Huguenots's schoolmaster and minister, and he had assigned his whole salary to his creditors. In turn the creditors agreed that Levier would get one year's salary to get started in Pensacola. Levier's problems carried over into the following year, 1767. In January, he drew £75, with the remaining £25 to be paid later. Then in April Levier assigned £50, twenty-five more than was still due him, to the Reverend Thomas Wilkinson. Ellis refused to pay it, but before he could straighten the matter out, Levier asked that Ellis give £25 to still another person. Then, several months later, Levier requested that Ellis pay £17 for his moving expenses. Subsequently the governor in Pensacola questioned Levier about complaints that he neither lived with, nor served the needs of, the French immigrants.¹²

Although Ellis never received all the information he wanted about West Florida's natural history and economic potential, Thomas Miller, a Mobile resident, in 1766, did provide him with a description of the region's geography. The climate, flora, and fauna were similar to Georgia's and South Carolina's. The landscape included pine barren, swamp, and grassland. The barren resembled South Carolina and Georgia, but it produced larger pines with a clearer pitch. The swamp yielded various oak, cypress, white cedar, copalm, and magnolia trees. Game was abundant in the forests, fish in the waters, and cattle and mules in the grasslands. Furthermore, when drained the swamplands would have good potential for flax, indigo, or cotton. West Florida's interior, according to Indian traders, had rich lands, and the rivers were navigable for vessels drawing as much as six feet for hundreds of miles upstream. Mobile Bay abounded with aquatic life and was surrounded by fertile acreage. Mobile itself was located on an unhealthy site, selected because the French had feared the Creek Indians upon the opposite shore. The town was

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11. "Sir William Petty", first Marquis of Landsdowne and second Earl of Shelburne, Stephen and Lee, eds., *Dictionary of National Biography*, XLV, 19.
 12. Miscellaneous accounts June 24, 1763 to June 24, 1764, and June 24, 1764 to June 24, 1765; Ellis Money granted account, June 1763 to 1765; Ellis to board, July 17, 1766, C.O. 5/574, 424, 429; West Florida estimates, June 24, 1765 to June 24, 1766, C.O. 5/599, 212; *Journal of Commissioners . . . January 1764-December 1767*, 304, 314-15; Ellis report on Peter Levier, C.O. 5/583, 661-62.

poor, weak, dreary, and needed additional population as well as money to prosper.¹³

In 1767 Ellis had to produce an account of the governor's expenditures as well as his own budget. Governor Johnstone, generally high-handed in his administration, clashed with the army over control of military bases. The crown directed Ellis to make a balance sheet of the governor's expenditures, and then, after examining the sheet, the king removed Johnstone. Ellis's budget for the year was £4,800, a decrease of £500 from the previous year because silk and wine bounties were being dropped.¹⁴

Throughout 1768 Ellis was busy with problems centering on the Huguenots. He discovered that names on the original list compiled by Brown and Levier differed from those immigrants actually in the colony. When asked about it, Lieutenant Governor Browne, now acting as governor, set up a West Florida council committee to check into the matter. The committee found a discrepancy had developed when people withdrew as potential settlers and had been replaced. However, fifty-six French Protestants left London; four more came aboard at Cork; one died in Cork; thirteen others died en route or jumped ship in Dominica, and forty-eight, including seven children under the age of fourteen, had landed at Pensacola. Subsequent reports indicated that only four or five people on the original list had reached West Florida, that all those who arrived were unequipped for colonial life, and that they survived only with aid in the form of food and supplies from the colonial government. When Levier decided to move to Charleston, South Carolina, half of his French flock joined him.

Ellis's problems with Lieutenant Governor Browne, however, went beyond the Huguenot settlers. Late in 1768, fifty-two colonists reported that Browne had submitted false vouchers for contingent fund purchases. Ellis then informed Lord Hillsborough, secretary of state for the colonies, who ordered the newly-appointed governor to look into the charges. While the investigation continued, Browne's financial accounts continued troublesome for Ellis. As early as December 1767, Ellis warned Browne both his civil and Indian funds were down to about

13. Thomas Miller to Ellis, February 21, 1766, J.E.P.

14. Ellis to David Skene, July 11, 1767, "Notebook #2," 51r, J.E.P.: C.O. 5/599, 222; C.O. 5/619, 26-28; C.O. 5/585, 184-201.

£150 of the budgeted £1,000. In addition, Ellis indicated that Governor Johnstone had reported leaving behind a large supply of Indian gifts; that the agent, limited to his budget, could not pay Browne's vouchers and get reimbursed by the treasury; and that no more of Browne's requests would be honored, although he could, if he desired, request additional money from the crown. In February 1768, Ellis indicated that the budgeted Indian fund had not changed, and he questioned Browne's use of the contingent fund. The following month Ellis warned that the Indian fund was now down to £118/18/4, and he informed Browne that his unauthorized payment to the provost marshal of Mobile had to be refunded. Browne for his part had twice questioned Ellis's administration of the funds, and complained to the board that the agent for no reason was contravening instructions and was meddling with payments, including some due Browne.

Although Browne's affairs took a lot of his time, Ellis still was able to pursue his own interest in natural history. On July 14, 1768, to entice John Blommart, Ellis offered to do all he could to secure a colonial government post for him. He praised the plants Blommart had already sent to Kew Gardens, asked for more, and encouraged him to send a small quantity of plants clearly labelled with the names and blossom time.¹⁵

This excursion into natural history was a secondary responsibility for Ellis; Lieutenant Governor Browne's finances remained most important. In August 1769, after reviewing the charges and the findings of a committee of the West Florida Council, forwarded through Ellis and Lord Hillsborough, the king replaced Browne. Ellis in turn had to explain West Florida's account to Elias Durnford, the newly-appointed lieutenant governor.¹⁶ At the same time Browne's accounts still

15 Montfort Browne to the secretary of state, January 28, 1768; Council at Pensacola and examination of Mr. Levier February 25, 1768; Lord Hillsborough to the governor [of West Florida], January 15, 1768; Ellis to Browne, December 10, 1767, February 11, March 10, 1768; Browne to 09, 221-22, 225-28; Browne to My Lord, July 6, 1768, C.O. 5/577, 27-29; Hillsborough, July 1, 1768, C.O. 5/585, 53-54, 57-58, 61-63, 125-28, 208-Browne to Hillsborough, August 10, 1768; Hillsborough to Browne, February 14, 1768, C.O. 5/619, 2-6; *Journal of Commissioners . . . January 1768-December 1775*, 28, 137; Ellis to John Blommart, July 14, 1768, "Notebook #2," 64v, J.E.P.

16. Johnson, *British West Florida*, 72, n. 32.

needed to be arranged and balanced, and Ellis warned Browne again that his claims would not be met without proper vouchers. Browne's mismanagement became even more apparent in the fall of 1769, when former Governor Johnstone sought reimbursement for £113/11/11 that he had personally spent for Indian gifts. Johnstone indicated that Browne had been left with £1,200 worth of Indian gifts. These had never been reported. To make West Florida's finances even worse, John Stuart, superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern Department, had hired an interpreter at £91/0/5 per year, and the assistant superintendent had committed £127/7/0 for gifts and an armorer to repair Indian guns. Both these amounts were also charged against the beleaguered Indian gifts account. Then in December 1769, having already asked for additional funds to cover these items, and with his contingency fund overdrawn, Ellis had to ask the lords of the treasury what to do with claims for payments approved by the colonial council but rejected by Browne. This particular issue carried on for several years after the board of trade began to discuss it in 1770. Still later Ellis again asked for more money for the Indian account to make up for the £150/10/0 that Browne had used to pay an unbudgeted deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern District.¹⁷

Browne's affairs continued to be Ellis's major concern in 1770. When the lords of the treasury could not decide on Browne's Indian expenses, they asked advice from the board of trade. The board reported it had not approved the expenses and had never even been told about them. On March 1, Ellis testified on the matter before the board which then tabled the matter. Lieutenant Governor Durnford further tarnished his predecessor's reputation when he reported that Browne had not followed the West Florida Council's advice on fiscal affairs, had attempted to pack the council with favorites, and had collected crown money for repairs never made. Browne, however, claimed his secretary had prepared the fraudulent vouchers for the re-

17. C.O. 326, Ind. 8361.61, 262-64; Pownall to Ellis, November 16, 1769, C.O. 5/619, 26; Petition of West Florida Inhabitants, May 12, 1769; Hillsborough to Browne, August 4, 1769; Ellis to Pownall, January 22, 1769; Ellis Memorial to the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury, December 21, 1769, C.O. 5/586, 203-04, 319-29, 341-42; Ellis to lords [of treasury], December 4, 1769, C.O. 5/577, 181; *Journal of Commissioners . . . January 1768-December 1775*, 173-74.

pairs and that they had been innocently submitted. Subsequently Durnford reported that even though there was an official storekeeper, Browne had kept all the Indian gifts with his personal stores and had "indiscriminantly issued them out to his Family and Negroes for their subsistence without once considering that Public and Private property are different things."¹⁸

Ellis's West Florida duties were routine in the years 1771 and 1772. In January 1771, he submitted five of Browne's vouchers to the West Florida Council for approval. Two were approved in full, two were approved for partial payment, and one was postponed to await further testimony. Ellis's budget for 1771 was £6,100, over twenty-five per cent higher than the previous year's £4,800. The increase included £850 for a planned £2,500 governor's residence and £450 for a West Florida survey. In 1772 the budget was £5,650 with nothing for surveying included. In April the board of trade, after repeated requests from Attorney General Wegg and Ellis, authorized Ellis to pay Wegg £93/15/5 of a £108/10/0 voucher submitted by Browne. The June 1772-June 1773 budget was £7,274/13/6, Ellis's largest yet. It added £580 for the governor's residence, £50 for a garden, and £1,574/13/6 for obligations Browne had contracted. The remaining £4,800 included £1,000 for Indian gifts, £1,000 for contingencies, £1,200 for the governor's salary, £500 for the chief justice's salary, £200 for the agent's salary, £150 each for attorney-general's and secretary-clerk of the council's salaries, £120 to pay the surveyor, £100 each for salaries for the register, provost marshal, and ministers in Pensacola and Mobile, £30 for wages for the surveyor's assistant, and £25 each for schoolmasters for Mobile and Pensacola.¹⁹

The £50 for a garden was Ellis's contribution towards starting a West Florida research garden. In 1772, Bernard Romans proposed organizing a garden of swampy, dry, and oak land plots set out in northern and southern exposure at a cost of £125.²⁰ Ellis, however, consulted Dr. Alexander Garden, the Charleston

18. C.O. 326, Ind. 8362.62, 217-18; C.O. 5/620, 204-13 [quote]; CO. 5/577, 177.

19. C.O. 5/629, 46-50, 165; C.O. 326, Ind. 8363.63, 201, 203; C.O. 326, Ind. 8364.64, 173, 175; C.O. 5/600, 224, 234, 249; C.O. 5/589, 389-91; C.O. 5/590, 111, 211-12.

20. "Bernard Romans," Stephen and Lee, eds., *Dictionary of National Biography*, XLIX, 180.

physician and naturalist, on the plan. Although Romans maintained that any plant found between Canada and West Florida, as well as some West Indian plants, could be grown in the plots, Dr. Garden was dubious. Romans was originally a surveyor, and he had only a limited knowledge of botany. Moreover, Garden estimated that the garden would cost £500-£750, four to six times more than Romans had estimated. Furthermore, Garden advised waiting until political tensions eased; then perhaps colonial assemblies might fund the provincial gardens. Ellis, however, went ahead with the project, and for the next several years, a £50 garden item appeared annually in the budgets.²¹

West Florida matters were generally routine in 1773, 1774, and 1775. Early in January 1773, Ellis appeared before the board to report the fiscal balances carried over from previous years. On January 21, the treasury directed Ellis to pay Browne's estate £988/8/11. The following year's budget had the usual £4,800, and included the £50 item to continue the provincial garden. For 1775, Ellis submitted the £4,800 core budget, plus £600 for surveys of West Florida and £50 for the garden. Furthermore, as the year developed, £800 was transferred from surpluses in the Indian and contingent accounts to pay cost overruns on the governor's residence.²²

In 1774 the Reverend Mr. William Gordon of Mobile sent in a long report on the colony's economic development. Land was a major inducement to attract settlers to the underdeveloped area. The colony had a residual Spanish and French population, which the British government wanted to maintain, whose land titles had to be protected to prevent their emigration. Land tenure thus was a major question. Spanish grants were inconsequential, there were only two or three. However, the more numerous French grants created problems. Some titles, beyond dispute, were direct grants from the French governors, others were only permits to settle, and still others were merely certificates to settle. There were also "ax in the wood," *hache en bois*, titles. According to French practice, these cornfield clearings, also called "deserts," were usually across the river from a man's home,

21. Romans to Ellis, August 13, 1772, J.E.P., Garden to Ellis, May 15, 1773, Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 595-98.

22. C.O. S/600, 248-50, 256; C.O. 5/591, 127; C.O. 326. Ind. 8365.65, 181; C.O. 5/579, 191; C.O. 5/580, 13-16.

though they might be downstream. Anyone who cleared an area possessed it, could rent it, and even sell it, at which time a legal title was granted. However, if abandoned for as long as a year and a day, the land reverted to the French crown. But occupancy rights for land left idle after an extended period of use was unclear. Unfortunately, the French archives were lost, and when the English had registered the French lands, the work had been mishandled and matters were even more confused. Although English colonists claimed large French and Spanish landowners possessed too much land in the West Florida colony, there were really very few such owners. Where they existed, despite vague boundaries and underdevelopment, these holdings usually had a clear title. Furthermore their boundaries were defined by experience and by a general belief— explicit in some titles— that the land extended inland forty or fifty acres from the river. To pacify the French colonists, Gordon had recommended confirming their titles. This could be done by surveying the land at the crown's expense, asking landowners to give proof of ownership and the boundaries to justices of the peace, registering confirmed titles, and exempting all French property from quit rents.

Gordon went on to provide Ellis with an economic and demographic description of the colony. Major imports were wool, cotton, linen, and a little silk; hardware and Negro cloth for planters; and blankets, arms, and ammunition for the Indians. The exports were furs, silver bullion, logwood, and some indigo. Forest resources included pitch pine in the upland area, thickets of aquatic trees in the river valleys, and large cypress, oak, cedar, hickory, chestnut, and many unwanted species in the Mobile River valley. Although manufacturing did not exist and no staple had yet emerged, indigo, cotton, rice, maize, and other commodities could be grown. No metal ores had been found, but silver reportedly was abundant in the Mississippi valley. This valley was also notorious as the center of smuggling with Spanish New Orleans. Mobile's population included 330 whites and 416 blacks living in ninety houses. The white residents included fifty married couples, seventy-one single men, twenty-four single women, fifty-five boys, and seventy-one girls, twenty to thirty men strangers, eighty single Indian traders, 122 Protestants, and 208 Papists. The black residents included twenty-three free blacks and mulattoes. Indians in the area included the Chickasaw,

Choctaw, and Creek. The Chickasaws had an estimated 500 warriors; the Choctaws about 3,000 warriors, and the Creeks around 4,500 men. Though the Creeks were not considered to be trustworthy and were opposed to European settlement, they were counter-balanced by the Choctaws, who viewed the Europeans as allies, and by the fort manned by a small permanent force in Mobile. It was realized that if Mobile fell to the Indians, Pensacola would be threatened.²³

The American Revolution increased Ellis's work load in 1776. The budget he submitted that year included £50 for the garden and £100 for the receiver general of the quitrent, in addition to the usual £4,800 core. The Revolution first touched Ellis's affairs when news arrived that Bernard Romans had joined the rebels. He was replaced as gardener by Dr. John Lorimer who had studied natural history and had lived in the colony ten years. Then, after Governor Peter Chester's request in July 1776, for additional defense funds, £138/15/0 was added to prepare for the arrival of the royal American regiment, and £700 was added to up-grade the fortifications.²⁴ Unfortunately Ellis did not see the results of these fortifications; he died on October 18, 1776.²⁵

Ellis's efforts for West Florida were not forgotten after his death. West Florida remained loyal to the king in the American Revolution, at least in part because of the efforts of men like John Ellis. Furthermore on June 16, 1781, several merchants in West Florida complained to the board of trade that Ellis's successor was not as quick or as accurate in paying bills as Ellis had been. Later, in 1786, Westminster recognized Ellis's contribution when Parliament voted £1,816/15/7½ to pay his estate the money he had advanced to the West Florida account.²⁶

Ellis's scientific career had contributed to his securing the royal agency in West Florida in the first place. As early as the 1740s, he was collecting fossils and seeking to introduce exotic plants into England and Ireland. Ellis became better known when a seascape he had prepared impressed the Reverend Mr. Stephen Hales, F.R.S., a leading figure in the development of

23. William Gordon to Ellis, 1774, J.E.P.

24. C.O. 5/600, 257; C.O. 5/619, 140, 147; C.O. 5/621, 354-56; C.O. 326, Ind. 8368.68, 141; C.O. 5/592, 299-300.

25. *Annual Register*, [1776], "Chronicle, Died October 18," 189.

26. Rea, "King's Agent," 146-47; C.O. 5/580, 347; *Annual Register*, [1786], "Appendix, Chronicle," 250.

physiology and the first plant physiologist and clerk of the closet for George III's mother, the Princess of Wales. Hales in turn asked Ellis to do a seascape for the princess. To insure accuracy, Ellis made microscopic examinations and decided corallines were animals. Even though Jean Andre Peyssonnel had described the animal nature of corallines in a 1751 *Philosophical Transactions* article, Ellis did a larger more complete study. It was finished in 1752, submitted to the Royal Society, but withdrawn when Ellis decided it needed still more research. In 1752 and 1754, Ellis took field trips to the south and east coast of England. In 1754 he published a *Philosophical Transactions* article, and in 1755, his *Essay Towards a Natural History of Corallines* came out. These were the first of several publications in which Ellis definitively showed that zoophytes were animals, not the intermediate links between animals and plants. With this success, Ellis began to get material from William Borlase, John Greg, William Brownrigg, and others.²⁷

About this same time, Ellis became a member of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts. It was known also as the Premium Society or the Royal Society of Arts, its current name. For six years Ellis participated on several standing committees and attended meetings. Then, in 1761, he dropped his membership, probably because his finances and employment had been curtailed because of his bankruptcy. Ellis's leading accomplishment with the society came in 1758 when he promoted a premium for introducing useful exotic plants into Georgia and South Carolina, compiled a list of ninety-four plants which could qualify for the premium, and advocated building provincial research gardens in both colonies. By June 1760, the society had established a premium for a provincial garden in the Carolinas. Later, of course, as royal agent for West Florida, Ellis promoted a garden there.²⁸

27. John Ellis, *An Essay Towards A Natural History of the Corallines, and Other Marine Productions of the Like Kind Commonly Found on the Coasts of Britain and Ireland* (London, 1755); Ellis to Borlase, April 3, 1744, William Borlase Letters in the Marrab Library, Penzance, Cornwall, England (hereinafter cited as Borlase Letters.)

28. MS. Subscription Book: 1754-1763, MSS in the Royal Society of Arts Library, London; Minute Books, 1-4, MSS in the Royal Society of Arts Library, London; Ellis to Sir, November 2, 1758, Royal Society of Arts Guard Book, v. 4, n. 11, doc. 1-5; Ellis to Garden, June 13, 1760, J.E.P.

Ellis's attempts to get tea and rhubarb started in British America also involved his work in the Premium Society. The society gave Ellis forty capsules of tea seeds for America in December 1760. He diverted two of the capsules to Carl Linnaeus in Sweden, the first tea seed ever seen there, and the rest was sent to Governor John Ellis of Jamaica. The seeds unfortunately did not survive the voyage. Ellis's attempt to start rhubarb in America was more successful. In January 1761, a premium was offered for "the cultivation and curing of Rhubarb in the British Dominions." Ellis secured seed from Carl Linnaeus in the spring of 1761, and more later. In December 1761, Ellis, through the society, gave Benjamin Franklin rhubarb seeds for American gardeners. This was almost a decade before rhubarb was supposedly introduced on the continent. In fact, by 1770, Governor Samuel Martin in New York and Governor Guy Carleton in Quebec had thanked Ellis for the rhubarb seed he had sent those colonies.²⁹

During the 1750s Ellis was active both in the Royal Society and the Premium Society. Ellis attended his first Royal Society meeting as a guest of Philip Cartaret Webb on April 16, 1752. His first paper on his marine flora and fauna studies was read June 17, 1752. It was followed on March 15, 1753, by a paper on coralline growth. In August he read still another paper. His efforts were recognized, and on February 14, 1754, he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society. Over the next twenty-two years Ellis contributed twenty-seven papers to the society. They were a blend of zoophyte studies, miscellaneous topics, and more importantly for British America, economic biology. In 1768 Ellis won the Copley Prize, the Royal Society's highest award. At the time Sir John Pringle indicated Ellis had made, "many Judicious Experiments . . . accurate Drawings . . . acute reasonings, Ingenious Observations . . . many valuable Improvements in natural knowledge . . .; [had] opened . . . a wonderful view of

29. Solander to Linnaeus, December 19, 1760, 1; November 16, 1761, 4, Solander Manuscripts in the Linnean Society of London; Ellis to Solander, August 30, September 4, November 22, 1761, March 28, 1762, Ellis-Franchillon Letters; Samuel Martin to Ellis, April 29, 1769, Guy Carleton to Ellis, July 17, 1760, J.E.P.; Ellis to My Lord, Royal Society of Arts Guard Book, IV, n. 103; Royal Society of Arts Minute Books, VI, 61, 73, 74; B. Brouk, *Plants Consumed by Man* (New York, 1950), 136; Ulysses P. Hedrick, *A History of Horticulture in America to 1860* (New York, 1950), 83.

some of the extraordinary productions of Nature . . . ; [and had] pursued . . . Discoveries with . . . much Sagacity and Judgment." After much difficulty picking out a single item for the award, the Royal Society's council chose his 1767 papers on the "Animal Nature of the Genus called *Corallina*" and the "*Actinia sociata* or clustered animal flower." In 1769 Ellis won election to the society's council.³⁰

In the 1760s Ellis worked on an enlarged study of zoophytes and on acquiring useful exotic plants for the British empire. These two interests were epitomized in a field trip that he, Daniel Solander (Carl Linnaeus's student, a curator at the British Museum, the naturalist on Captain James Cook's first voyage, and later Sir Joseph Banks's secretary), and John Chandler, a London apothecary, naturalist, and artist, made to the south coast of England in 1761. They examined sponges along the shore and out of the research came Ellis's "On the Nature and Formation of Sponges." However they also stopped, both going and coming, at gardens along the way and examined the collections. In 1762 and 1763 Ellis produced descriptions of an *Encrinus*, the gardenia, and the male and female cochineal. The cochineal paper illustrated Ellis's interests in biology and economic development in the colonies as the North American insect was used for dye.³¹

Ellis's biological interests continued even after he took the Florida post. On December 23, 1763, he presented a Royal Society paper describing pennatulids taken near Brests, France, and Charleston, South Carolina. In 1764 Ellis went to the Sussex shore to complete research for "On the Nature and Formation of Sponges." In 1765 and 1766 Ellis studied sirens and the Egyptian horned viper. He had originally dismissed the two-legged gilled eel-like sirens sent from South Carolina by Dr.

30. Journal Book of the Royal Society, 1751-54, XXI, 105, 172, 173, 292, 392, 396, 397; XXVI, 555-57, 683; Certificates, 1751-66, n. 20. MSS in the Royal Society Library, London: Royal Society Letters and Papers, 1741-1806 (longhand list calendar in the Royal Society Library, London.)

31. Solander to Linnaeus, December 19, 1760, 1-2; August 11, 1761 [quote] Solander Manuscripts; Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 137-38, 142-43; Ellis to Solander, September 3, 19, 1762, Ellis-Franchillon Letters; Ellis, "An Account of an Encrinus," Royal Society, *Philosophical Transactions*, LII (1762), 357-65; Solander, "An Account of the Gardenia: . . ." *Philosophical Transactions* LII (1762), 654-61; Ellis, "An Account of the Male and Female Cochineal Insects. . .," *Philosophical Transactions* LII (1762), 661-67.

Alexander Garden as lizard larvae. Linnaeus, however, thought differently. Ellis then became very interested, and he presented a paper on the subject to the Royal Society.

In 1767 Ellis presented the Copley Prize-winning essays about the *Actinia sociata* and the "Animal Nature of . . . *Corallina*." In the *Actinia* study he demonstrated that the organisms were animals and that previous authors had confused matters by using words like stem, flower, and petals to describe the *Actinia sociata*. In the *Corallina* paper Ellis described the animals, and how he dissected, microscopically examined, and chemically analyzed them. Beginning in October and November 1767, he made observations of fungi spores and reported spores were plant seeds. He also became interested in microbiology. Through his microscope, Ellis was able to see both microscopic animals and plants. Ellis also experimented with preserving seeds for transport. In February 1767, he selected thirty-six acorns, carefully cleaned them, covered them with soft beeswax, encased them in tepid, molten beeswax, and stored them in a closet until the following August. The seeds were then sent to the Royal Society for examination. They were given to Kew Gardens where they germinated the following spring.³²

Ellis's interest in marine biology and plant collection continued. In 1770 he presented two papers to the Royal Society on the loblolly bay and American star anise—two plants found growing in the southern colonies and in East Florida. In the same year he also published his first edition of *Directions for Bringing over Seeds and Plants* with an appendix describing the Venus's fly-trap, an insectivorous Carolinian tidewater plant previously unknown in Europe. Ellis's guidelines for preserving seeds and

32. Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 186-87, 216-17, 223-24; Ellis, "Notebook #2," 62r to 64r, 66 r&v, J.E.P.; Ellis, "An Account of an Amphibious Bipes. . ." *Philosophical Transactions*, LVI (1766), 189-92; Ellis, "On the Animal Nature of the Genus of Zoophytes Called Corallina," *Philosophical Transactions*, LVII (1767), 404-38; Ellis, "An Account of the Sea Pen. . ." *Philosophical Transactions* LIII (1763), 419-35; Ellis, "The Nature and Formation of Sponges. . ." *Philosophical Transactions* LV (1765), 280-87; Ellis, "The Coluber Cerastes, or the Horned Viper. . ." *Philosophical Transactions* LVI (1766), 287-91; Ellis, "Account of the Actinia Sociata. . ." *Philosophical Transactions* LVII (1767) 428-37 [quote 434-35]; Ellis, ". . . Preserving Acorns for a Year," *Philosophical Transactions*, LVII (1768), 75-79; Ellis, "Observations of . . . Animalcula of Vegetable Infusions. . ." *Philosophical Transactions*, LIX (1769), 138-52.

plants in transit— a major problem on the long journey from China, Japan, and India, and even on the relatively shorter run from North America— were adopted by others, including Dr. John Fothergill the eminent London Quaker physician. Ellis's methods remained in use for fifty years until the advent of Wardian cases. A second edition of his *Directions* was published in 1771, but with a different appendix (*The Method of Catching and Preserving Insects for Collections*). In 1772, largely to encourage more favorable tariff schedules for Dominican coffee (Ellis was also colonial agent for Dominica 1770-1776), he published *The Historical Account of Coffee*. Later that year, Ellis and Solander worked on, but did not complete, a study of chocolate. In the summer of 1775, the two men cooperated on a study of the jalap plant.³³

Throughout this period, Ellis maintained his interests in zoophytes. In 1775 he published a description of the *Gorgonia*, in which he again used a combination of dissection, chemical analysis, and microscopic examination. He also compared the morphology of trees and gorgonias. Ellis's final publication was *The Natural History of Zoophytes*. It was not completed when he died, but with taxonomic help from Daniel Solander, and financial support from Dr. John Fothergill and Sir Joseph Banks, Ellis's daughter was able to get the book into print in 1786.

There is no known likeness of Ellis, and his personality is revealed only partially in scattered bits and pieces within his and other scientific literature. From these sources a limited reconstruction of Ellis's person can be made. He had a winsome personality. Physically, "his person was tall, his features expressive and strongly marked." Furthermore, Ellis had "taste, charac-

33. B. J. Healy, *The Plant Hunters* (New York, 1975), 94; Tyler Whittle, *The Plant Hunters: Being an Examination of Collecting with an Account of the Careers & the Methods of a Number of Those Who Have Searched the World for Wild Plants* (Philadelphia, 1970), 112-15, 121-24; Smith *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, II, 20; Ellis, "The Figure and Characters of the Loblolly Bay Stary Aniseed," *Philosophical Transactions*, LX (1770), 518-31; John Ellis, *Directions for Bringing over Seeds and Plants from the East Indies and Other Distant Countries . . . to which Is Added the Figure and Description of a . . . Dionaea Muscipula: Or Venus's Fly-trap* (London, 1770). Solander to Ellis, August 28, 1775, Solander Manuscripts; John Ellis, *Directions for Bringing Over Seeds . . . the Methods of Catching and Preserving Insects for Collections* (London, 1771), John Ellis, *An Historical Account of Coffee . . .* (London, 1774).

ter, piety and sensibility of mind." Ellis's correspondence with Israel Jalabert, an early friend, reveals that he was a good companion who enjoyed festivity. Later, in 1769, Dr. Fothergill's niece described Ellis as "a very humorous comical old gentleman." However, earlier, Dr. Coote Molesworth bluntly told Ellis, "You are so laconic." Perhaps this was so when one remembers that Ellis had criticized the Premium Society for spending too much time haggling over procedural matters and that he never participated in the fellowship of the Royal Society Dining Club. The trait also showed at the time of George III's coronation when Ellis told Solander: "Mr. Webb's family are all in London to see the coronation. I am contented with the corallization of Flowers here quietly in the country." Though laconic, Ellis was capable of expressing the deeper currents of his feelings and did so at the time of the deaths of his wife and children.³⁴ Throughout his life, Ellis showed concern for his family, particularly for his sister Mary Ford's children. He was at times the family's patriarch, concerned with the needs of its members; at other times he was a friend and confidant.

Ellis shared the political and social views of the aristocracy and merchants he served. He had a rather low opinion of other European nationalities. The French were vain, the Dutch heavy, and the Germans impudent. He believed Englishmen were superior to their colonial offspring. Ellis was a proud man. On one occasion, he informed Linnaeus that he was honored to have a plant named after him, but, "You will pardon me when I tell

34. Solander to Ellis, 1774 Solander Manuscripts; Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, II, 14, 20-22, 27; Ellis, "The Nature of the Gorgonia. . .," *Philosophical Transactions* LXVI (1776), 1-17; Ellis, *The Natural History of Many Curious and Uncommon Zoophytes* (London: 1786), v-viii. Abraham Rees, *The Cyclopaedia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Literature* (London, 1819), XII, James J. Abraham, *Lettsom: His Life, Times, Friends and Descendants* (London, 1933), 133, Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 81; Ellis to Garden, September 11, 1758, 1; J. Ellis to Henry Ellis, September 12, 20, November 20, 1758, "Notebook #1, "13v, 14v, 17v; Coote Molesworth to Ellis, November 29, 1761; Israel Jalabert to Ellis, July 25, August 6, 1749, J.E.P.; *Calendar of the Ellis Manuscripts: The Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of John Ellis F.R.S.*, Spencer Savage, ed. (Part IV of the Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of the Linnean Society of London [London, 1948] 86-87; Sir Archibald Geike, *Annals of the Royal Society Club: The Record of a London Dining-Club in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1917); John Ellis, "A Note of John Ellis, 'Natural History of the Corallines'," F. G. Sawyer, ed. *Journal of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History*, LXIV, n. 4 (September 1964), 226.

you that people here look on a little mean-looking plant as reflecting no honour on the person whose name is given to it; though I am convinced, as it is a distinct genus, the compliment is equally great with the largest tree."³⁵

Ellis himself indicated that he had no academic training in natural history, but for his time, he had better than average schooling. He wrote English well, and could read Latin, though he preferred to communicate in English. His notebook shows that he was doing quadratic equations at age nine.³⁶ Ellis's motivation for studying nature, expressed several times, was a blend of religious piety, curiosity, personal satisfaction, and utility. He believed that studying nature demonstrated the order, design, and workmanship of an almighty power. He always was personally fascinated by the study of nature. This curiosity was one of the things that led him to apply for the West Florida post. Although Ellis never wrote a systematic treatise on the constellation of ideas that made up his scientific view, it can be reconstructed partially from the statements in his work. He believed all living organisms were part of a continuum from the simplest to the most complex. Furthermore, he maintained polyps were adapted by nature for their environment. In his writings he advanced the survival of the physically fit: "The Polypes inhabiting the Corallines, Corals, Star-Stones, Brain-Stones, and the like, are capable of defending themselves from . . . Invasions, whilst they continue in full Vigour; which is farther demonstrated by what happens to them in common with every other life-less Being in the Ocean; when, through Accident or Age, the Vigour of the Republic fails; they then yield to superior Force, and become the Basis of some more powerful, fortunate Successors." Ellis generally accepted the Aristotelian view that living things were differentiated into plants as living organisms without sensitivity, animals as living organisms with sensitivity, and humans as thinking animals. However Ellis was aware that there were sensitive plants. The Venus's fly-trap, for example, was a sensitive plant that trapped and digested its victim.³⁷

35. Ellis to Linnaeus, December 21, 1762, December 5, 1766, December 28, 1770, Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 159-60, 193, 256.

36. Ellis to Borlase, March 3, 1764, "Notebook #2," 44r; Ellis to Linnaeus, c. 1756-57, Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 83; Savage, *Calendar Ellis MSS*, 54; Rees, *Cyclopaedia*, XII.

37. Ellis, *Natural History of the Corallines*, iii, 32, 53, 100, 102, 103; Ellis, *Zoophytes*, 23-24, 75, 77-78, 104; Ellis, *Bringing Seeds* (1770), 20, 37-39, vi.

Beyond this, Ellis had an almost, perhaps an actual, religious belief in rigorously enforced experimentation with the elimination of all preconceptions. In his experiments Ellis used dissection to compare the morphology of organisms, chemical analysis to determine the animal or plant nature of organisms, and the microscope with a skill which impressed his contemporaries. He made contributions to microscopy by his studies in microbiology and by giving Cuff, a Fleet Street optician, the specifications for an improved aquatic microscope. Ellis used this improved instrument with good effect on a field trip to the island of Sheppey on the Kent coast in August 1752.³⁸

Ellis's scientific contributions and skills impressed his contemporaries. Although not the first to investigate polyps, he was among the first, and certainly the first Englishman, to explore them extensively. Ellis's peers knew it. Alexander Garden, in the fall of 1755, told Cadwallader Colden that Ellis was the most complete naturalist in England and that his work was opening a whole new field. On June 20, 1771, Garden indicated Ellis's careful accurate observations on the theobroma were a model for all botanists. Garden was not alone in this praise. On November 3, 1755, Dr. J. A. Schlosser, a Dutch physician, noted Ellis's great learning, taste, candour, and diligence. In 1757, Stephen Hales, who himself has a good claim to being England's greatest eighteenth-century naturalist, said Ellis was "the great promoter of vegetable researchers." The Reverend William Borlase, Cornish antiquarian and naturalist, in 1759, commented that Ellis was renowned for his diligence and penetration. Seven years later, Dr. David Skene, a Scottish physician and naturalist, noted that while Ellis had predecessors in his coralline study, he had brought out more facts and had put the study in a brighter light. James Badenach, in 1769 from France, said the king's cabinet in Paris was excellent, but its zoophytes and mullusca were confused, as they were everywhere else except in Ellis's house. Even

38. Ellis to Skene, July 11, 1767; "When men of **eminance**. . .," "Notebook #2," 51r, 104v. J.E.P.; Ellis to Linnaeus, January 15, 1768, Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 223-24 Ellis, *Natural History of the Corallines*, vii-viii, 45; Ellis, "A Summary of the last Number of the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society, being Part I of Vol. L, for the Year 1757 . . . An answer to the preceeding article. . . ." *Gentleman's Magazine*, XXVIII (October 1758), 474; John Ellis, *A Description of the Mangostan and the Breadfruit*, (London, 1775), 9.

Benjamin Franklin indicated Ellis and Dr. John Fothergill were the leading students of the subject of zoophytes. The Royal Society recognized Ellis's ability, and elected him a fellow in 1754. He received the Copley Prize in 1767, and served on the Society's council in 1769.³⁹

Perhaps the most prestigious accolades Ellis received were from Carl Linnaeus, the great eighteenth-century naturalist and the most renowned modern naturalist before Darwin. On December 8, 1758, Linnaeus thanked Ellis for his latest letter, "abounding as usual with valuable information . . . which you are favoured, more than any other persons of the present day, with the means of explaining." In 1760, Linnaeus predicted that Ellis's success in seed preservation would enrich gardens all over the earth and place the whole world in debt to him. In October 1767, Ellis, utilizing his skill with a microscope, opened up the study of micro-organisms as he had zoophytes. The following year, Linnaeus wrote that Ellis's history and description of the Venus's fly-trap was so complete nothing could be added. Later on January 20, 1772, Linnaeus informed Ellis: "You are still the main support of Natural History in England, for your attention is ever given to all that serves to increase or promote this study. Without your aid, the rest of the world would know little of the acquisitions made by your intelligent countryman, in all parts of the world. You are the portal through which the lovers of Nature are conducted to these discoveries. For my own part, I acknowledge myself to have derived more information, through your various assistance than from any other person." With his own belief that reason had to be used to triumph over ignorance, Ellis had to be pleased with Linnaeus's September 29, 1758, compliment: "You in these minute and almost invisible beings, have acquired a more lasting name than any heroes and kings by their cruel murders and bloody battles. I congratulate you on this, your own stupendous victory, over the barbarous ignorance

39. L. C. Miall, *The Early Naturalist: Their Lives and Work (1530-1789)* (London, 1912) 275-77; Garden to Cadwallader Colden, November 22, 1755, *The Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden* (vols. 50-56, 67, 68, "Collections of the New York Historical Society" [New York, 1917-37]), V. 42-43; Stephen Hales to Ellis, 1757, *Smith Correspondence of Linnaeus*, II, 38; J. A. Schlosser to Ellis, November 3, 1755; Borlase to Ellis, March 19, 1759; Skene to Ellis, May 10, 1759; Benjamin Franklin to Ellis, December 26, 1773, J.E.P. Journal Book of the Royal Society, XX, 322; XXVI, 555-57; Certificates, 1751-66, Royal Society, n. 68.

which hitherto has held the philosophic world in subjection.”⁴⁰

Subsequent writers have not been so laudatory, but they still give Ellis credit for some impressive accomplishments. James Edward Smith, writing an introduction to Ellis's letters in *A Selection of the Correspondence of Linnaeus and Other Naturalists*, described him as an active correspondent with naturalists in the West Indies, North America, and China who promoted economic botany in the colonies and the home country, identified several new genera including *Halesia*, *Gardenia*, *Gordonia*, and *Dionaea*, explored plant anatomy and physiology, and established the animal nature of corallines even when Linnaeus was hesitant. Subsequently Smith noted Ellis possessed “great physiological acuteness and ardent philanthropy.” John Nichols, in his *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, described Ellis as “a man of great modesty, pious affections, and grateful sensibility.” Thomas Thomson, in his *History of the Royal Society*, wrote that “Ellis [was] one of the greatest naturalists who adorned the last century, so prolific in discoveries concerning . . . natural history.” More recently Raymond P. Stearns and Brooks Hindle, in their studies of colonial American science, indicated John Ellis was one of the most important links between the Royal Society and the North American colonies.⁴¹

Although illness did curtail his activity somewhat in 1756 and 1757, Ellis's health seems to have been good until about 1767 and 1768. In 1768 Ellis had problems with “an unform'd gout,” but his health did not really deter him until 1771. In May of that year Ellis wrote to Linnaeus: “I have had so severe a fit of sickness in March last, that I expected never to have lived to have finished my account of zoophytes.” Ellis's health continued to deteriorate. He suffered another major illness in the latter part of 1772, and by the following year he realized that he was losing his eyesight. John Ford, a physician himself, in 1775 described

40. Linnaeus to Ellis, September 29, December 8, 1758, [September or October 1760], October, 1767, October 16, 1768, January 20, 1772, Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 102-03, 104, 108, 136, 214-15, 235, 279-80.

41. Smith *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 79-80; II, 84; John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, 9 vols. (London, 1812-15), 111, 196; IX, 533; Thomas Thomson, *History of the Royal Society* (London, 1812), 84; Brooke Hindle, *The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America: 1735-1789* (Williamsburg, VA, 1956), 31, 196-97; Raymond P. Stearns, *Science in the British Colonies of America* (Urbana, Ill., 1970), 517.

Ellis as having "tolerable health . . . except the complaint in [his] eyes for which . . . there is no remedy but patience. It is however no small consolation . . . to have . . . intellectual faculties so improved and acute that the infirmities of age become less sensible, by . . . constant occupation."⁴² By 1776, in addition to his failing eyesight, Ellis's hand could no longer write steady. Then sometime in midyear Ellis's health underwent a further decline preventing study and correspondence. On October 4, James Lee, the Hammersmith gardener, informed Linnaeus, "Your old Friend Ellis is much decayed and seems tottering on the brink of the grave." On October 18, John Ellis died.⁴³

The crown had made a wise choice in the appointment of John Ellis royal agent for West Florida. His obituary stated, "John Ellis, Esq. F.R.S., Agent for . . . West Florida, . . . was a most excellent naturalist, . . . a real friend to his county, and indefatigable in promoting its true interest."⁴⁴

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42. Northington to Ellis, October 20, 1765; Ellis to Linnaeus, July 3, 1767; May 10, November 19, 1771; Garden to Ellis, May 15, 1773; March 21, 1774; Joseph Banks to Ellis, November 1, 1773; John Ford to Ellis, July 8, 1775, Smith, *Correspondence of Linnaeus*, I, 207, 260, 273, 594, 599, 602-03; II, 60-61, 68-69, 81; Ellis to Northington, November 7, 1769, "Notebook #2," 90v; Skene to Ellis, November 13, 1765, John Fothergill to Ellis, 16th inst., J.E.P.; Ellis to Borlase, April 22, 1757, Borlase Letters.
43. James Lee, James Britten, and George S. Boulger, eds., *A Biographical Index of Deceased British and Irish to Botanists*, 2nd ed., rev. by A. B. Rendle (London, 1931), 184. Eleanor Jane Willson, *James Lee and the Vineyard Nursery Hammersmith* (London, 1961), 215, "Deaths in October, . . ." *Gentleman's Magazine*, XLVI (October 1776), 483; *The Annual Register*, 1776; "Chronicle," Died October 18, 1776; Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes*, III, 196-96.
44. "Deaths in October, . . ." *Gentleman's Magazine*, XLVI (October 1776), 483 [quote].