

# Florida Historical Quarterly

---

Volume 63  
Number 3 *Florida Historical Quarterly, Volume  
63, Number 3*

---

Article 4

1984

## Master James Cook and Gulf Coast Cartography

Robert R. Rea



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

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

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

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

---

### Recommended Citation

Rea, Robert R. (1984) "Master James Cook and Gulf Coast Cartography," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 63: No. 3, Article 4.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol63/iss3/4>

## MASTER JAMES COOK AND GULF COAST CARTOGRAPHY

by ROBERT R. REA

**T**HE acquisition by Great Britain of Florida and cis-Mississippi Louisiana in 1763 brought with it both the need and the opportunity for a significant expansion of cartographic knowledge of the shores of the newly-created colonies of East and West Florida. Spanish and French charts of the northern coast of the Gulf of Mexico were rather more artistic than scientific; indeed, the tools for exact surveying had yet to be developed when the Union Jack was raised at St. Augustine, Pensacola, and Mobile. Fishermen from Havana and the occasional merchant engaged in the coasting trade might know the safe anchorages and the entrances to the great bays, but no European navy possessed dependable charts of those waters. In 1763, the British Admiralty set out to rectify that situation as part of a general survey of the coasts and harbors of North America.<sup>1</sup>

Officially, the task of charting the Gulf coast fell to George Gauld, who devoted the years 1764-1781 to that assignment; but the self-appointed cartographers of the Floridas were as numerous as their contributions were varying in extent and accuracy. The list would include such well-known names as Elias Durnford, Philip Pittman, Bernard Romans, and Thomas Hutchins, each of whom has received some degree of scholarly attention and appreciation. Less familiar is the work of several Royal Navy men who were often the first to establish the sightings and soundings necessary for safe operations along the Gulf coast. Their observations were frequently incorporated into those of the professional cartographers— hence Reid's Tree, the seamark chosen by Master Robert Reid of H.M.S. *Tartar*, became a part of every chart of

---

Robert R. Rea is professor of history, Auburn University, Auburn, Alabama. He wishes to express his appreciation to the late Jeannette Black, Dr. Robin F. A. Fabel, and Lieutenant Commander Andrew David, R.N. (Ret.).

1. John D. Ware and Robert R. Rea, *George Gauld: Surveyor and Cartographer of the Gulf Coast* (Gainesville, 1982), xv-xx.

Pensacola Bay. But ships' masters served captains, and Captain John Lindsay's name is most prominent upon the chart for which Reid provided sailing instructions. Indeed, Lindsay's superior, Admiral Sir William Burnaby, would take it amiss that a mere captain should seem to steal credit from the commander in chief of the Jamaica Station under whose orders he sailed. Rank had its powers as well as its privileges; when George Gauld surveyed Tampa Bay, he was careful to see that one of his manuscript charts carried the admiral's name back to England.<sup>2</sup>

Among those lesser lights who contributed to the charting of the Gulf coast was James Cook, sometime master in the Royal Navy. In spite of the fact that his was one of the earliest British charts of Pensacola Bay to be published and that he was a member of the first Tampa Bay surveying team, Cook has received as little attention from historians as he did from contemporaries. The reasons are sufficiently evident. Scholars have had considerable difficulty identifying Master James Cook and, from the sparse documentation available, coaxing him out from under the broad shadow of the great cartographer and explorer, Captain James Cook, an exact contemporary.<sup>3</sup> Cook's naval companions, on the other hand, knew him all too well and, with a few exceptions, were content to let him slip into the darkness imposed by the court-martial which directed that he be "dismissed from his employment as Master in His Majesty's Navy, and render'd incapable of ever serving as an Officer in any of His Majesty's Ships or Vessels of War." That verdict cannot be reversed, but it is possible to trace a part of Cook's career in detail and to let him speak in his own defense. His story illustrates something of the manner of eighteenth-century British chartmaking, most particularly the tribulations of a cartographer on the Gulf coast.

Master James Cook first appears in British naval records on April 23, 1762, when he went aboard H.M.S. *Mars*, Captain Richard Spry, at Plymouth, England.<sup>4</sup> It may be assumed that Cook was no newcomer to his trade. A ship's master bore responsibility for sailing and navigating the vessel, and Spry, an

2. Ibid., 29, 43ff.

3. There was at least a third James Cook, lieutenant, R.N., identified by Jeannette D. Black in her unpublished paper, "Too Many Cooks" (1974).

4. Master's log, *Mars*, ADM 52/1349; muster book, *Mars*, ADM 36/6146; all manuscripts cited are located in the Public Record Office, Kew, England, unless otherwise indicated.

experienced senior captain, must have satisfied himself as to the competence of his new master between April 26 and August 18, during a cruise to Belle Isle off the coast of France. Shortly after returning to Spithead, Spry was named commodore of a squadron ordered to North American waters; he remained aboard *Mars* and was succeeded in command of Cook's ship by Captain John Luttrell. In September they sailed west, anchoring at Halifax, Nova Scotia, on October 28.<sup>5</sup> There they would remain until the following June, a period brightened by the news received on February 19, that hostilities with France had been brought to an end.

The inactivity of the long winter enabled Master James Cook to undertake the first of his known cartographic projects. He did so by order of Commodore Spry, for Sir Richard had spent much time and seen much action in Canadian waters. Having served in the recent expeditions against Louisburg and Quebec, he would appreciate the value of a careful survey of Halifax harbor. On December 9, 1762, Master James Cook was suspended from his duties aboard *Mars* and did not return to the ship until April 29, 1763.<sup>6</sup> Although that was hardly the ideal season for surveying, it was sufficient time for Cook to make those observations and sketches that were published as *A Draught of the Harbour of Hallifax and the adjacent coast in Nova Scotia in 1766*.

In June 1763, *Mars* sailed from Halifax, by way of Bermuda, to Jamaica, thence, back to England. On August 25, at Portsmouth, the ship was paid off, and Master James Cook was discharged.<sup>7</sup> Three months later, on November 23, Cook was entered upon the muster book of H.M.S. *Alarm*, to act as master for Captain George Watson. He came aboard two days later, while *Alarm* was anchored in the Nore.<sup>8</sup> Cook's new ship was a thirty-two-gun fifth rater with a reduced complement of 130 men. She sailed in early December, stopped at Portsmouth and Falmouth on her way west, and reached Port Royal, Jamaica, March 18, 1764. There she remained until May. On the sixth of that month,

5. Captain's log, *Mars*, ADM 51/3899; master's log, *Mars*, ADM 52/1349.

6. Muster book, *Mars*, ADM 36/6146.

7. Ibid.; captain's log, *Mars*, ADM 51/3899; master's log, *Mars*, ADM 52/1349.

8. Muster book, *Alarm*, ADM 36/4950; master's log, *Alarm*, ADM 52/1127; captain's log, *Alarm*, ADM 51/3757.

H.M.S. *Druid* joined the ships of the Jamaica squadron anchored in the spacious harbor below Kingston, and on May 10, her captain, Rowland Cotton, superseded George Watson aboard *Alarm*. Rowland Cotton was a rising young man who had only begun his career as a scholar at the Naval Academy in 1753, and whose first commissioned appointment was as sixth lieutenant in H.M.S. *St. George* in 1762. As captain of *Druid*, he had visited the Gulf coast and was familiar with Pensacola and Mobile bays. He could not have been overjoyed at being assigned to a new ship, a new set of officers, an untried crew, and being ordered back to Pensacola just two weeks after returning to Port Royal.<sup>9</sup>

On May 22, 1764, *Alarm* set sail for Pensacola, arriving June 9. At the end of the month Captain Cotton left the bay, coasting westward and anchoring off Ship Island on July 4. *Alarm* spent over three weeks in that protected haven, securing wood and water, watching coastal shipping, and sounding the waters of what is now known as Mississippi Sound. On July 24 the ship's logs indicate that the yawl, working off neighboring Cat Island, was driven ashore by a sudden squall. The men were taken off the next day by a passing schooner from New Orleans and returned to *Alarm*, but the boat's gear was lost— a trifle that would loom large in the future.<sup>10</sup>

From Ship Island, *Alarm* struck a course east, then round-about the Florida peninsula and up the Atlantic coast to Port Royal, South Carolina, where she anchored August 16. It may be assumed that Master James Cook was involved in any exploratory operations around Ship and Cat islands. He certainly was busy during the two weeks *Alarm* was anchored at Port Royal, for he subsequently produced a chart of that harbor and sailing instructions for entering it. At the beginning of September, *Alarm* weighed anchor for Jamaica, where she was based until mid-November.<sup>11</sup>

H.M.S. *Alarm* returned to Pensacola on November 22, 1764, and was moored in the bay for almost seven months. Ashore, these were busy times. The arrival of Governor George Johnstone

---

9. ADM 6/18, 6/19; captain's log, *Druid*, ADM 51/270; captain's log, *Alarm*, ADM 51/3757, indicates that Cotton received his new command on May 8, 1764.

10. Captain's log, *Alarm*, ADM 51/3757; master's log, *Alarm*, ADM 52/1127.

11. *Ibid.*

and a number of provincial officials and settlers began to transform the rude settlement, and with civil government, a town was laid out and lots were plotted and assigned to those who sought them. A number of *Alarm's* people were persuaded to invest in Pensacola's first land boom. Lieutenants William Prosser, John Blankett, and William Johnstone, boatswain Joseph Smith, carpenter James Crombye, and gunner Thomas Maistell all secured properties, and on February 7, 1765, Master James Cook was granted 1,000 acres on the coast between Bay St. Louis and Biloxi.<sup>12</sup> Whereas the other officers of *Alarm* sought town lots which could be and were disposed of quite readily, Cook's interest in a distant coastal property may suggest that he was seriously contemplating settlement in the colony and had sighted a likely spot the previous summer.

While some dreamed of prospects and profits in Pensacola and West Florida, all was not well with the men aboard H.M.S. *Alarm*. An inactive crew always bred trouble, and though ship's boats were employed on various duties, boredom was bound to set in and with it displays of insolence that moved Captain Cotton to use the lash frequently in order to maintain discipline. Master James Cook, too, would have had little to do aboard ship. It was doubtless in the early spring of 1765 that he gathered the information that would appear in his chart of the harbor. It may be assumed that he had knowledge of, and probably access to, the charts that naval surveyor George Gauld had already prepared. He would certainly have been aware of Gauld's work and plans for the summer's surveying in which *Alarm* would be employed.<sup>13</sup> Before good weather returned to the Gulf, however, James Cook's relations with Captain Rowland Cotton took a turn for the worse.

In April 1765, the master and the captain of *Alarm* fell into a direct confrontation. The facts are unclear, but it seems that

- 
12. Clinton N. Howard, *The British Development of West Florida 1763-1769* (Berkeley, 1947), 58, *passim*. The documents do not identify Prosser, Blankett, and Johnstone as attached to *Alarm*, as they do with the warrant officers and seamen. My attribution of a grant to Lieutenant Johnstone is based on its proximity to those of his fellow officers. Captain Cotton seems only to have been interested in reserving property for the use of the navy.
  13. Gauld was transferred to *Alarm's* muster book when his previous ship, H.M.S. *Tartar*, left Pensacola in January 1765, Ware and Rea, *George Gauld*, 39. For Gauld's early surveys of Pensacola Bay, see *ibid.*, 29-32, 38-41.

Cook was suffering from a fever and near to being delirious. Captain Cotton observed that Cook had absented himself from his quarters for as much as three hours after the eight o'clock curfew, and he had had words with the master when Cook had refused to surrender his logbook in order that its entries might be utilized by other ship's officers. Cook, apparently delinquent in making his own entries when nothing was happening, claimed that he was "troubled with a delirious complaint in my head," but that could not excuse disrespectful behavior toward his captain.<sup>14</sup> On some particular occasion the master advanced on Captain Cotton, hands on hips, so close as to touch him and, according to Lieutenant Prosser who observed the scene, seemingly intent upon striking the captain. Cotton was able to avoid a violent exchange with the ailing master, and he ordered Prosser to confine him to quarters. Cook, who had no good opinion of Prosser, refused to accept his directions. It took a direct order from Cotton to secure Cook's acquiescence, and Midshipman John Burr thought Cook was even then readying himself to attack the captain.

Below decks, Cook was noisy and troublesome; the gunroom steward swore he was out of his head for two days. That Cook was indeed sick and delirious is strongly suggested by the steward's report that during his confinement he bled himself (a standard medical treatment), made a pudding with his blood, and "called for more Oatmeal to make it thicker." Assuming that Master Cook was not a lover of blood pudding, the old sailor's crude prank on a young man may simply indicate that Cook was recovering his senses. Recover he did, and after some days Lieutenant William Johnstone interceded for the master and effected a reconciliation with the captain. With Johnstone, Prosser, and a sentry as witnesses in Cotton's cabin, Cook made his apologies, and Cotton agreed to forgive and forget the incident, not, however, without certain understandings and conditions. According to Lieutenant Prosser, it was agreed that when *Alarm* returned to Jamaica and Cook could be replaced, the master would leave the ship, as he had already talked of doing because of "some Estate that had fallen in to him." As for Captain Cotton, he laid down

---

14. The court-martial record, ADM 1/5303, Pt. 2, reads "in my hand," but subsequent entries make it clear that that is a copyist's error.

the rules that Cook should stay off the quarterdeck, restrict himself to his cabin after eight o'clock at night, and refrain from messing with the other officers in the gunroom. Such exclusion from his own class aboard ship could only be intended to encourage the master's intention of leaving *Alarm* at the earliest opportunity. Cook outflanked Cotton on the last point, however. When Admiral Sir William Burnaby arrived in Pensacola harbor, the master secured his permission to mess with *Alarm's* other officers, and he did so, much to Lieutenant Prosser's disgust.<sup>15</sup>

Good weather and the admiral's prodding soon provided the officers and crew of *Alarm* with proper employment. On May 29, Captain Cotton received instructions to "proceed to the Bay of Espiritu Santo on the Coast of Florida, and to take a complete Survey of that Bay, and to examine if it is fit to receive Capital Ships."<sup>16</sup> Espiritu Santo—Tampa Bay—had long been noted as the most promising body of water on the western coast of the Florida peninsula, but it had not yet received extensive investigation. The British surveying expedition of 1765, led by George Gauld, included H.M.S. *Alarm* and the chartered schooner *Betsey* whose shallow draft assured her access to the unknown waters within the bay. On June 14, *Alarm* and *Betsey* cleared the bar at Pensacola and began working eastward, near the coast, as far as Cape San Blas, where they set a course southeastward. Soundings were taken every half hour, and when the two ships turned south along the peninsula, they anchored at nightfall as a further precaution. On June 21, they stood off the entrance to Tampa Bay, and Master James Cook went aboard *Betsey* to reconnoitre the bar. At noon he returned to *Alarm*, while the schooner made its way safely into Espiritu Santo Bay. During the next few days, *Alarm* cautiously worked her way across the bar, Cook sounding ahead in the ship's cutter. On June 24, she too was anchored in the great bay. Cook entered the latitude as 27°41', variation 4'38" — a reasonably accurate observation.

The first British survey of Tampa Bay began in the last week of June and continued until the end of August. For over two months *Alarm* was at her moorings while Gauld sounded the

---

15. Ibid.

16. For the Tampa Bay survey, see Ware and Rea, *George Gauld*, 43-57. All references to Cook's activity derive from ADM 1/5303, Pt. 2, unless otherwise noted.



passes, investigated the adjacent coast, and charted Old Tampa Bay and Hillsborough Bay. The expedition enjoyed fair weather, occasional squalls, but generally moderate breezes, an average temperature of 83°. Fresh water was in short supply, and *Alarm* regularly dispatched boat crews to Mullet Key, where casks were sunk in the sand and allowed to fill with brackish but drinkable water. The crew's diet was supplemented by fish and oysters. Spanish fishermen's huts and abandoned Indian dwellings were seen, but no inhabitants or visitors were encountered until August 14, when a Virginia coasting schooner bound for Pensacola sailed into the bay in order to replenish her water. For the crew of *Alarm* the long weeks in Tampa Bay were marked by boredom, occasional hard work in a hot sun, and debilitating fevers. If the drinking water was generally unpalatable, the ship's food was often absolutely inedible. At the end of July, 2,280 pounds of bread, the seaman's dietary staple, was condemned as "being unfit for men to eat," and twenty and one-half bushels of peas went over the side, being "mouldy, musty, & full of varmine."<sup>17</sup> Fourteen men—ten marines and four seamen—died while the ship lay at anchor. With the death toll passing ten per cent of the ship's company, it may be assumed that few escaped illness caused by exposure to a broiling sun and the inevitable fevers from which there was no escape.

For Master James Cook, *Alarm's* inactive role at Tampa Bay offered an opportunity to do some surveying on his own. During the voyage from Pensacola he had carefully noted soundings, bottom characteristics, currents, and bearings, and he had regretted his inability to continue following the coastline when *Alarm* headed southeast after passing Cape San Blas. At the entrance to Espiritu Santo, on June 21-22, he had been able to investigate the islands at the bar and had named one (Egmont) Alarm Island, another (Mullet Key) Muschetto Island, a third (Passage Key) Prosser's Island. On July 14, Rowland Cotton issued written orders to the master "to coast along shore to the Southward of this Bay seven days, and to the Northw<sup>d</sup> six, in order to examine whether or not the Bay of Carlos [Charlotte Harbor] was capable of receiving Capital Ships," to make such other observations as might be appropriate, and to report his

---

17. Master's log, *Alarm*, ADM 52/1127.

findings to the captain. Accordingly, Cook set out in a ship's boat on July 16 and proceeded south along the shore, past half a dozen inlets, until he reached 25°56' (by his calculations). "All this Coast," he noted, "is a low flat Beach." Finding nothing of interest, Cook returned to the ship. On July 22, his instructions from Captain Cotton were re-issued, and on the twenty-fifth he began working north of Espiritu Santo. "All this coast is full of Islands cover'd with mangrove Bushes and the Beach is Low & Sandy," he observed. More significantly he discovered that a mariner approaching Tampa Bay could easily distinguish whether he was north or south of the entrance by the different trenching of the coast.<sup>18</sup>

Cook was back aboard *Alarm*, "drawing Draughts of the Coast he was sent to survey," between July 28 and August 15. On August 15, he supplied the captain with some "observations" which he described as incomplete. He had not had time to sound the two southern channels into Espiritu Santo, and his work had been interrupted because "my Eyes were burnt with the Sun, which made me very unwell and has occasioned a Disorder for which I have been Physick[ed] and bled since." Surgeon Richard Tatlock would verify Cook's excuse, observing that the master was "very ill sometime in August. I bled him & gave him Physick" when he complained of a dizziness which caused him to fall down. Cook later claimed that his disability was "owing to my losing my Hat & being three Days without one."

The captain seems to have been slightly mollified by Cook's assurance that one draught of the chart he was preparing (in lieu of a written report) was intended for him. In any case, the master was sufficiently recovered in health and in the captain's graces that on August 27, as *Alarm* prepared to take her departure from Tampa Bay, Cotton ordered Cook to "proceed tomorrow by day break in the Longboat . . . and Sound the Ship Channel to the Southward of Egmont Island taking care to return to the ship in the Afternoon."<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, on August 28, Cook, Master's Mate James Haley and a boat crew "went from the ship in the morning at daylight[.]

18. *Ibid.*; Remarks Book, *Alarm*, February 1764-February 5, 1766. Miscellaneous Papers. Vol. 2, Hydrographic Dept., Ministry of Defence, Taunton, England.

19. Cotton's orders to Cook appear in ADM 1/5303, Pt. 2.

breeze about ENE[,] and steer'd to the S<sup>o</sup> end of Egmont Island, Flood tide we rowed from there across the Channel to Burnaby Island [Passage Key]. We rowed round it within about 20 yards of it, and across the Channel at the S<sup>o</sup> end of Egmont Island. Then we Sounded on the Bar, 'til about 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and proceeded to the Ship which we reached about half an hour past 5."<sup>20</sup> When Master James Cook came aboard H.M.S. *Alarm* he was confronted by an irate Captain Cotton.

It appears that Cotton had intended Cook to limit his investigation to Egmont Island, then to return to the ship. As all could see, the master had passed on around Burnaby Island and consequently returned to *Alarm* later than his captain expected. When Cook reached the ship's deck, Cotton demanded an explanation, accusing him of having exceeded his orders, whereupon Cook "turned very smartly round to the Captain and told him he had not." Had he proceeded otherwise than he did, he would not have been able to become fully acquainted with the soundings around Egmont Island. As Cotton felt that Cook was already sufficiently familiar with Egmont, he brusquely rejected the master's argument, swore he would see him court-martialed, and ordered Lieutenant William Johnstone to confine him to quarters. During this angry exchange, Cook kept his hat on his head and showed "great contempt" toward the captain—at least in the eyes of Lieutenant Prosser.<sup>21</sup> Young Prosser was, however, no friendly witness. During Cook's subsequent confinement, Prosser took considerable abuse from the master, who refused to obey orders transmitted through him. When the captain sent for Cook's logbook, the master refused to give it up, declaring that, as a prisoner, he need obey no one. Cook referred to Prosser as "a puppy," pointed out that he was only acting lieutenant, merely "rated before the the mast," and referred to the captain as "a pretty fellow[,] a handsome clever Gentleman" who had "rated a tailor as a Carpenter's Mate," Cook vented his spleen on Prosser on many occasions. As Prosser put it, "He frequently . . . let me know I was a shitten fellow."

From Tampa Bay, *Alarm* returned to Pensacola, remaining

20. Ibid., Haley's testimony.

21. Ibid., testimony of Lieutenant Prosser and Captain Cotton. Surgeon's Mate Thomas Stott, however, saw nothing disrespectful in Cook's demeanor.

there until October 5, when she weighed anchor for Port Royal, Jamaica. The return trip was extremely rough, aggravating tempers already badly frayed. No sooner was the harbor entrance in sight than both Cotton and Cook launched letters to Admiral Sir William Burnaby demanding that the other be brought before a court-martial.<sup>22</sup> Action was delayed, however, by Cook's illness and hospitalization ashore from the end of November until January 24, 1766, and Cook claimed that he was not allowed to return to his ship when he recovered his health but was detained in custody at the hospital.<sup>23</sup>

Immediately upon the master's recovery, Admiral Burnaby issued orders for his court-martial to be held on Monday, January 27, aboard H.M.S. *Tartar*, whose captain, Sir John Lindsay, would serve as president. The other members of the court were Captains Thomas Lee, James Bremer, the Honorable William Cornwallis, and William Locker.<sup>24</sup> Cook stood charged with "Contempt and Disobedience of Orders, & having both before, and since his Confinement, been guilty of the like Crimes, which at times were tending to Mutiny."

The charges read, Captain Cotton's witnesses were paraded before the board. Acting Lieutenant Prosser was voluble and predictably hostile, as were Midshipmen Joseph Cotton and John Burr, Marine Sergeant John Clements, and Steward James Vieck. Surgeon Richard Tatlock indicated that Cook was indeed "very ill" while *Alarm* was at Tampa Bay, but rejected the court's suggestion that his feverish delirium might be equated with insanity. "At times he was a little flighty," said Tatlock, "but not anything tending to Insanity." Surgeon's Mate Thomas Stott was a more friendly witness and denied that Cook had been disrespectful toward Cotton on August 28. Lieutenant William Johnstone was Cook's best witness. Having mediated the quarrel between captain and master at Pensacola in April 1765, and achieved a reconciliation, Johnstone described Cook as temperate,

---

22. *Ibid.*, Rowland Cotton to William Burnaby, November 8, 1765; James Cook to Burnaby, November 9, 1765.

23. *Ibid.*, testimony of Cook; captain's log, *Alarm*, ADM 51/3757. Other evidence suggests that Cook returned to the ship on January 22, Admiralty to Navy Board, May 19, 1766, ADM/A/2583, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (hereinafter NMM).

24. Lindsay's orders to Cornwallis in "Prince Edward's Letter Book," LBK/63, NMM.

respectful, and on a good footing with the captain thereafter. Johnstone verified the fact that, on August 28, Cook had surveyed the ship channel as ordered, but he was forced to agree that the master had little excuse for exceeding his instructions, as he had had "every opportunity of gaining a knowledge of the coast." Master's Mate James Haley, who had accompanied Cook on the fateful day, reiterated that the master had surveyed the channel as ordered, traced their course on a chart of the bay which Cook provided, and explained that their indirect route to the ship channel south of Egmont Island was the result of a strong flood tide which made it the most expeditious course to follow.

In his own defense, Master James Cook argued that he thought his first run-in with Cotton had been forgotten and he should not have to defend his actions at that time. Witnesses whom he might have called on that score were since dead; and because of his hospitalization, he had not had an opportunity to prepare his defense—nor permission to talk with any of the witnesses, even his mate James Haley. He insisted that he had indeed provided Cotton with his observations of Tampa Bay, but that he had not had time to sound the southern channels of Espiritu Santo prior to mid-August. There was no question that he had spent some time preparing a chart of the bay, of course. It was presented in evidence and its accuracy accepted by the court. Captain Cotton admitted that one copy of Cook's draught had been intended for him—clear evidence of his tacit approval; but he prejudiced Cook's case by adding that the master had not proposed to submit his chart to the Admiralty.

After all parties had been heard, the court was cleared; the captains deliberated and arrived at their verdict. They found that Captain Cotton's "Charge is proved" and adjudged James Cook "to be dismissed from his employment of Master in His Majesty's Navy, and render'd incapable of ever serving as an Officer in any of His Majesty's Ships or Vessels of War."

Rowland Cotton had won, but James Cook would have a sour revenge. Two days after Cook's trial, Admiral Burnaby ordered Sir John Lindsay to assemble a second court-martial, which sat on February 5. Captains Locker and Cornwallis returned to the task and were joined aboard *Tartar* by captains George Falconer and George Murray. They heard James Cook's lengthy and rambling complaint that Captain Cotton had appropriated naval

stores to his private purposes and profit and had falsified the ship's log.

According to the master, while moored off Cat Island in July 1764, Captain Cotton had transferred 106 fathoms of rope, four dead-eyes, eight blocks, and sundry carpenter's stores from *Alarm* to a schooner which was his own property. In late July or August, he sought to hide the transfer by inventing the loss of a yawl and her gear and recording the incident in the ship's log for July 25. Cotton asked Cook to revise the log accordingly, and when he refused to do so, the captain provided the entry which Cook duly copied into the ship's papers. Returned to Pensacola in November, Cotton sold the schooner's rigging to certain of *Alarm's* seamen and, through his servant, retained the profits for himself. As for the lost yawl, it was, claimed Cook, still aboard the ship.

Cook's charges were serious, and as the trial proceeded, his witnesses demonstrated that Captain Cotton was not above falsifying the log regarding other matters. Cook's staunchest friend, James Haley, swore that the log had been doctored on several occasions by Cotton, and by other officers, with reference to the required reading of the Articles of War and the firing of morning and evening guns at Tampa Bay. Robert Castelaw (who had been displaced by Haley as master's mate but was made master of *Alarm* when Cook was arrested August 28), Midshipman Joseph Cotton, and Gunner Thomas Weston all admitted to their connivance in such business on a fairly regular basis. Captain Cotton ignored that line of attack altogether and directed his evidence and that of the witnesses to the issue of the schooner and the "lost" yawl.

The story that the captain constructed went back to March 16, 1764, when he commanded H.M.S. *Druid*, anchored in Mobile Bay. On that foggy day, *Druid's* boat intercepted a schooner from New Orleans trying to smuggle a cargo of claret into Mobile. Ship and cargo were seized, and the schooner was sent to Pensacola when *Druid* returned to Jamaica, where Cotton was transferred to *Alarm*.<sup>25</sup> When *Alarm* sailed from Pensacola in June, the schooner accompanied her to Ship Island, where repairs became necessary in order to make the smuggling vessel sea-worthy.

---

25. Captain's log, *Druid*, ADM 51/270. The testimony of George Gefferine, captain's clerk aboard both *Druid* and *Alarm*, is verified in ADM 1/5303. Pt. 2.

Boatswain Joseph Smith declared that the schooner was in need of rope to steady her masts, and Master's Mate Haley and four men were sent aboard to deck and fit her out. She was used by the captain to sail across to Cat Island for a few days, but she was not engaged in any surveying operations. The materials transferred on July 24 were indeed those listed as lost aboard the yawl, and on returning to Pensacola in November 1764, the schooner's rigging had been given to quartermaster Henry Edwards and yeoman Edward Beal who sold it for \$30.00, keeping \$10.00 or \$12.00 for themselves and giving the remainder to the captain's steward. Captain Cotton considered this only a fair distribution of spoils, as the stuff was worthless to *Alarm* and was given to the men who had served aboard the schooner as a prize crew. She was left with the customs collector at Pensacola who disposed of her for the crown. As for *Alarm's* yawl, it was never in any danger of being lost and was safely stored on board. On that, all parties— even Captain Cotton— were agreed. The captain simply wrote her off (with commendable elaboration) and had her fictitious fate inserted in the ship's records, with no protest from anyone except Master James Cook. And as Cotton observed, Cook might have voiced his concern to Admiral Burnaby on at least four different occasions before their falling out at Tampa Bay, but he did not.

In his own defense, Rowland Cotton noted that the Gulf coast survey operations ordered by Admiral Burnaby required more boats than could easily be secured, and by a bit of harmless finagling he had been able to acquire a second small craft for H.M.S. *Alarm*. Without it, the *Espiritu Santo* survey could not have been carried out. The extra yawl had been turned in to stores at Port Royal on January 22, 1766, when it became known that *Alarm* would return home to England. The smuggling schooner's profits went entirely to the crew, not to himself, and she had been used to sound the bar at Pensacola, on Sir John Lindsay's orders, thereby saving the expense of hiring a light vessel for that purpose. "Having seized her for the Crown, & delivered her up to the Collector of the Customs," he could only look on her as engaged in the king's service.

It was an unedifying story, and the five captains sitting in judgment on Rowland Cotton found that "the charges is partly proved, but . . . the expence of boat & stores though expended

not agreeable to the instructions of the Navy, yet it was done for His Majesty's service." As "the whole appears to be a litigious, infamous charge & done with an intent to hurt Capt. Cotton's Character," they acquitted him "in the most honourable manner."<sup>26</sup>

No other result could have been expected. Whatever his reasons or excuses, James Cook had challenged his captain's authority, and that was not to be tolerated in the Royal Navy. Nor was it likely that a board of captains, several of whom had sailed the Gulf coast and were acquainted with Rowland Cotton, would condemn him for minor sins of omission, much less for petty irregularities that apparently advanced the mission to which he was assigned.<sup>27</sup>

The trials did display a significant division of opinion among the witnesses. Captain Cotton was supported by men who were either much indebted to him or completely dependent on him for their present and future hopes. Boatswain, gunner, quartermaster, clerk, yeoman, and steward were the captain's men of necessity. Midshipmen Burr and Cotton (a relative?) and Acting Lieutenant William Prosser must secure the captain's future recommendation, and Prosser was obviously a favorite. Robert Castelaw had been displaced as master's mate by Cook, and James Haley set in his place. With Cook under arrest, Castelaw had acted as master of *Alarm* between August 30, 1765, and February 10, 1766. In this instance, however, Captain Cotton's power was limited. When Castelaw returned to England and attempted to secure pay as master, he was rebuffed by the Admiralty because Cook had retained his position on the ship's books until February 10, when he was officially succeeded by James Andrews.<sup>28</sup>

The ship's surgeon and his mate might be considered neutral witnesses, but the one commissioned officer who testified at Cotton's trial, First Lieutenant William Johnstone, was distinctly cordial toward Master James Cook. One might imagine that the captain's advancement of Prosser, a mere able-bodied seaman when he joined the ship, whereas Johnstone had held his com-

---

26. ADM 1/5303, Pt. 2.

27. The former Gulf coast captains were Lindsay, Cornwallis, Locker, and Murray.

28. Admiralty to Navy Board, May 19, 1766, ADM/A/2583; Navy Board to Admiralty, and endorsement, August 22, 1766, ADM/B/178, NMM.



mission for more than a year, irked the senior lieutenant.<sup>29</sup>

James Cook's naval career was at an end. Incapacitated by the decision of January 27, 1766, he was discharged on the twenty-eighth, *Alarm's* muster book noting simply that he was "Broke at a Court Martial."<sup>30</sup> Rather surprisingly, Cook retained the good opinion of Admiral Sir William Burnaby. Together with the court-martial record, the commander in chief on the Jamaica Station forwarded to the Admiralty his recommendation that "Mr. Cook has been of infinite service in Surveying & taking different plans of the Coast & harbours of West Florida, is a good Draughtsman & a good officer, I therefore hope their Lordships will restore him, & appoint him to some ship that comes out to this station, as he knows the Coast of Florida extremely well, & will greatly contribute to the completion of the Survey of the Coast."<sup>31</sup> The Admiralty was not inclined to disturb the findings of the court-martial, however, and on July 28, 1766, accepted the incapacitation of James Cook as an officer in the Royal Navy.<sup>32</sup>

The admiral's interest was perhaps spurred by the sight of various charts that Cook had sketched during the past year and a half, as is the historian's interest in the unfortunate cartographer. Indeed, little more of James Cook than those charts remains to be considered. He evidently returned to London and arranged to have his charts engraved by Emanuel Bowen and distributed by the well-known book and map seller Thomas Jeffreys. Publication costs were met by Cook, who doubtless hoped to recoup his expenses from Jeffreys's sales. It is doubtful that he did so, for Jeffreys had copies in stock when he died a few years later.<sup>33</sup> The charts were published in November and December 1766, and were accompanied by a thin volume of *Directions* for their use.

- 
29. Lieutenant John Blankett did not testify at either trial. Although he was absent and missed the clash between Cotton and Cook at Pensacola, he was apparently present at Tampa Bay. His detachment for duty aboard *Nautilus* may account for Prosser's promotion as acting lieutenant, see Robert R. Rea, "A Naval Visitor in British West Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XL (October 1961), 142-53, and muster book, *Alarm*, ADM 36/4951.
30. Muster book, *Alarm*, ADM 36/4951.
31. Burnaby to Admiralty, February 22, 1766, ADM 1/238.
32. Admiralty to Navy Board, July 28, 1766, ADM/A/2585, NMM.
33. "Catalogue of Drawings & Engraved Maps, Charts & Plans; the Property of Mr. Thomas Jefferys." Map Room, British Library, London. The author consulted the Halifax, Port Royal, and West Florida charts in the Map Room of the British Library.

Of Cook's whereabouts and activity, little can be said. He may have returned briefly to the sea as commander of a packet sailing between London and Philadelphia.<sup>34</sup> In 1768, he was living on a farm near Camden, South Carolina, where he married, and by 1770 he was deeply engaged in map-making in that colony, developments that suggest the "estate" he boasted of may have lain there.<sup>35</sup> In 1775, he placed his West Florida property in the hands of Alexander Moore, hoping to sell it, but in 1777, he applied to the provincial council at Pensacola for a survey of the tract, only to be advised that it had been granted to someone else and he must be satisfied with another.<sup>36</sup> With that, James Cook disappears in the turmoil of the American Revolution. Only his charts and sailing directions survive.

His sojourn at Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1762-1763, led to the publication of *A Draught of the Harbour of Hallifax* which has frequently and erroneously been attributed to the more famous James Cook. *Alarm's* brief visit to South Carolina enabled Cook to produce *A Draught of Port Royal Harbour in South Carolina*, and his subsequent residence in that colony involved him in other surveying and map-making projects.<sup>37</sup>

From his West Florida experiences came three items of present interest. The first is "A Draught of Spirito Sancto with the Coast Adjacent," dated 1765, "by I<sup>a</sup> Cook." This is the record of Cook's observations between June 14 and September 4, 1765, while aboard H.M.S. *Alarm*. It tracks the ship from the bar of Pensacola Bay, roughly paralleling the coast, some fifteen miles off shore, as far as Cape Blaze (San Bias), then southeastwardly until landfall was made about fifty miles north of Tampa Bay, thence south and into "Spirito Sancto Bay." Frequent and regular soundings are recorded, along with bottom characteristics. Cook noted that in clear weather Cape Blaze could be identified from the deck of a ship when fifteen miles out at sea. The chart is

---

34. Philadelphia *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 17, 1767.

35. William P. Cumming, *The Southeast in Early Maps* (Princeton, 1958), 87, 238; Black, "Too Many Cooks," 8-9, 12-13. Assuming there was in fact an "estate," Black equated it with the West Florida land grant (p. 11). The author is inclined to differ on the ground that a land grant would not have been referred to as an estate that had "fallen in" to him, i.e., been inherited.

36. Colonial Office 5/613, 413-14; council minutes, March 26, 1777, C.O. 5/631 and C.O. 5/634, 464.

37. Cumming, *The Southeast in Early Maps*, 59, 87, 237-38, 243, 245, 254.

blank between Cape Blaze and Tampa Bay; as Cook explained, "Here I wanted to Survey but a Boat Could not be spar'd." His sketch of the coast between Pensacola and Cape Blaze is rather suggestive than accurate. He becomes usefully detailed when he charts the shores north and south of Tampa Bay, areas he actually surveyed.

James Cook's "Spirito Sancto" does not rival the "Survey of the Bay of Espiritu Santo" prepared by George Gauld, the expedition's official cartographer. Gauld restricted himself to the immediate shoreline on either side of the passes, the islands, and the outlines of the bay. It is evident that Cook had no opportunity to familiarize himself with the extensive upper reaches of Hillsborough and Old Tampa bays. He drew what an experienced eye might see from the deck of H.M.S. *Alarm*, at anchor off Mullet Key. He does fairly represent the islands at the entrance: Anna Maria, Passage, Egmont, and Mullet Keys (as they appeared in 1765). The logs kept by *Alarm's* officers, and George Gauld's fine charts, indicate that Anna Maria Key was called "Long Island"; Passage Key was called "Burnaby Island"; Egmont was given the name it still retains; modern Mullet Key also carries its eighteenth-century identity. These official designations were established, presumably by Captain Rowland Cotton and George Gauld, after *Alarm* entered the bay on June 23. Prior to that date, James Cook and the ship's people identified Egmont Island as "Alarm Island," Passage Key (which has markedly deteriorated in over 200 years) as "Prosser's Island," and Mullet Key as "Muschetto Island;"

From Cook's chart it is clear that he was chiefly engaged, in accordance with his orders, in surveying the coast north and south of Tampa Bay. Cook suggests that he worked some twenty leagues, roughly sixty miles, toward the south. It appears in fact that he went no more than about thirty-five miles from the northern tip of Anna Maria or Long Island—roughly as far as Venice—far short of Carlos Bay (Charlotte Harbor). His sketch is reasonably accurate to that distance. Sarasota and Little Sarasota bays can be identified. He shows, between the islands, passes that are suitable for canoes or longboats, as he does for the fifteen leagues (actually about forty miles) of coast north of Mullet Key. Along this stretch Cook defined St. Joseph Sound and gave the name of his mate to Anclote Island— "Halys Is." The "References" on the

manuscript chart declare that, "All the coast on this Draught is a low Sandy Barren Soil[.] here is great plenty of Deer & Wild Cattle[,] all sorts of Game & Fish[,] we found Indian Hutts but no person in them[.] Tides are Irreggular[,] Goverent by the Winds[,] Runs 12 Hours each way & Rises 4 or 5 Feet[.] Further of Spirito Sancto see Iournal of observations for the Alarm[.]"

In 1766, Cook refined his draught chart and published it as an inset, "A Draught of Spirito Sancto and Coast adjacent," on his general map of West Florida. The scale of the engraving allows for much more detail—two leagues to the inch, compared with five leagues to the inch on the manuscript chart. The printed chart carries soundings, different from but reasonably close to those reported by Gauld. More interestingly, this chart carries a set of place-names that may owe as much to the engraver as to the cartographer. Where before Cook had indicated a pass "for Longboats" at the south end of Anna Maria or Long Island, it appears here as "Longboat Inlet," now Longboat Pass. Passage Key has been named Egg Island, and Egmont has become Juno Island. Mullet or Mosquito Keys carry the name Muller Islands. To the north, a Bass Island (Sand Key today) is identified, and the name attached to Haley's Keys is properly spelled.<sup>38</sup> The brief "References" state: "Low Bushey Islands before the Main Land, one Ebb one Flood in 24 Hours, runs Rapid & Governed by the Winds, it rises 4 or 5 Feet. Latitude 27°41' & Longitude West from London 83°49' about 54 Leagues SE. of Cape Blaze. Variation 5°40 East." The delineation of both Hillsborough and Old Tampa bays suggests that Cook had had a good look at Gauld's charts of these areas, for they bear little resemblance to his first chart of Espiritu Santo.

James Cook's most ambitious project in 1766 was *A Draught of West Florida, from Cape St. Blaze to the River Ibberville, with*

---

38. The names of the islands at the entrance to Tampa Bay arc almost illegible on Cook's 1765 manuscript: Long Island may be deciphered, but the naming of Longboat Inlet is unquestionably the result of misreading the manuscript chart. It may be guessed that "Egg Island" was a misapplication by Bowen of the abbreviation "Egt" (for Egmont), and "Muller" is clearly a misreading of Mullet. The reversal of the positions of the names given Egmont and Passage Keys is an error on the 1765 manuscript. Bowen's engraved "Juno" might be read as June on the manuscript—which would make sense—but no such name appears elsewhere. Where the name of Bass Island came from is not known. The manuscript chart is in the Public Record Office.

*Part of the River Mississippi*.<sup>39</sup> As the cartouche is “Humbly Inscribed by his Most obliged & obedient humble Servt. James Cook” to “John Ellis, Esq. F.R.S. King’s Agent for the Province of West Florida,” it may be assumed that the former Royal Navy master sought the acquaintance of the distinguished botanist when he returned to England after his court-martial. It would have been a logical step for Cook to take, and Ellis would have been delighted by the cartographic treasures that Cook offered, for no decent map of the new province had yet appeared, and Cook’s *Draught of West Florida* included details of both Tampa and Pensacola bays. It is an impressive piece of mapmaking, but highly derivative in the western parts from earlier French sources and thereby inaccurate in many ways. Those sections which Cook had seen or partially charted— the coastal islands of the Mississippi Sound, Pensacola Bay to Cape San Blas, Tampa Bay— are the best and most interesting. The map carries one remarkable feature, the line of demarcation between British West Florida and the Spanish Isle of Orleans. It is quite uniquely and incorrectly shown as a straight line running due east from the juncture of the Mississippi and Iberville rivers to the open sea, completely ignoring the terms of the Treaty of Paris that the boundary should follow the rivers and lakes. It also locates Cook’s land grant— in the center of the modern city of Biloxi.

The *Draught of West Florida* provides two representations of Pensacola Bay— one as it appears on the coastline, the other a more precise mariner’s chart in the form of an inset in the lower left-hand corner of the large map. Cook’s expanded (1” = 1 1/2 miles) “A Plan of Pensacola Harbour, with the Marks for going in,” compares favorably with the first charts prepared by George Gauld. While Cook indicated that the western tip of Santa Rosa Island curved more abruptly northward than was the case, his distances, soundings, and sightings would guide the mariner safely. Reid’s Tree and Tartar Point were the customary navigation marks for crossing the bar and turning into the bay. The limits which duty imposed on James Cook are suggested by his very ill-proportioned rendering of the Gulf Breeze peninsula. He located Deer Point (now Fair Point) and the proposed “Creening

39. James Cook, *A Draught of West Florida, from Cape St. Blaze to the River Iberville, with Part of the River Mississippi*. “Published by the Author . . . . December 1776,” British Library Map Room.

Wharff," even a house unknown to Gauld, but he obviously had no knowledge of the shape or extent of the land to the eastward. In contrast, on the western side of the bay he locates the fort and sketches in the outlines of the town as platted by Elias Durnford. He also indicates Governor Johnstone's, Blanchard's, and Satterthwaite's establishments; English (Emanuel), Stoney (Lora), and Gull (Devil) Points; and the tiny settlement of Campbell Town.

Considering its extent, general accuracy, and detail of both Pensacola and Tampa bays, Cook's *Draught of West Florida* must be deemed a major cartographic achievement, certainly superior to anything available to the general maritime public in 1766. Gauld's work surpassed Cook's in every way, but the Admiralty would not release it for publication for more than thirty years.

To accompany his charts, Cook published a fourteen-page pamphlet entitled *Directions for three charts, one of West-Florida, one of Port-Royal, in South-Carolina, and one of Halifax, in Nova-Scotia, carefully surveyed, and approved, by many Gentlemen of Reputation*. The pamphlet sold for "10s. the whole, and separately, in proportion," and was advertised as available "at the Jamaica, Carolina, Hallifax and New-York Coffee-Houses." Among twenty-five listed subscribers were several with West Florida connections, notably John Ellis (king's agent), Edward [Edmund] Rush Wegg (attorney general), Jacob Blackwell (customs collector). A note indicating that the names of further subscribers would be "printed on the publication of the Charts" strongly suggests that the *Directions* was printed in 1766, rather than in 1768, the date pencilled on the title page of the only known copy.<sup>40</sup>

Cook's *Directions* for "Pensacola, in West-Florida, with the Coast adjacent" describes the northerly sailing course from the west end of Cuba, warns of easterly currents, and advises an approaching navigator of underwater and shoreline features (indicated on his chart) that will help to determine his landfall, east or west of either Cape San Blas or Pensacola. He observes that "there is no house along shore from cape Blaze to Mobilepoint, but to the westward in every inlet are houses, and some people

40. James Cook, *Directions for three charts, one of West-Florida, one of Port-Royal, in South-Carolina, and one of Halifax, in Nova-Scotia, carefully surveyed, and approved, by many Gentlemen of Reputation* (1766), John C. Pace Library, University of West Florida, Pensacola. The British Library holds only a photocopy.

of considerable property.<sup>41</sup>

Of "The Bay of Spirito Sancto" in East Florida he states: "It has a good harbour, but the land all about that coast is low land, and cannot be seen off a ship's deck, when in 7 fathom water. Many low sandy islands, and many marshes, covered with mangrove bushes, lay before the main land. Here is the greatest quantity of fish in the summer time I ever saw, to be caught with a sayne enough to load a ship, if the climate would admit of cureing them, even in a few days. Here is stone, proper for building, on this coast. Also great plenty of deer, and some wild cattle; but the main land, near the sea coast is generally sandy and barren."<sup>42</sup>

The last five pages of the Directions contain "A General Description of West-Florida" in two parts: "The Island of New-Orleans," and "Of the Coast of Louisiana." Cook suggests that he has seen New Orleans. He describes sawmills built on the banks of the Mississippi, and two sugar factories "which produce as good sugar as ever I saw." He admits that his rendering of the mouths of the river is "taken by a French engineer, having no opportunity to sound them myself, "but he backs that authority with the experience of H.M.S. *Nautilus* in 1765.<sup>43</sup> Cook's description of the Iberville and the shores of Lake Pontchartrain tends to an exuberance hardly justified by actual circumstances. It is difficult to see when he might have visited this country, and he provides some basis for thinking his information was derived from Captain Lieutenant James Campbell of the 34th Regiment, who was engaged in clearing the Iberville in 1764. His descriptions of the offshore islands is considerably more realistic. He notes that "Mobile bar cannot admit a vessel of above 14 feet and half of water, and when in the bay, they cannot lie near the town, but are exposed to a wild open bay." While likening the Mississippi Sound coast to that of Carolina, "producing stock, rice and corn," he bemoans the surroundings of Pensacola: "I may justly aver it to be the most barren place in the universe, especially near the water-side, which I think a great unhappiness, that Pensacola

---

41. Ibid., 7.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 10-11. This latter information Cook may have secured from Lieutenant John Blankett of *Alarm*, who accompanied *Nautilus* up the Mississippi, Rea, "A Naval Visitor," 142-53.

harbour, should be placed in such a deplorable, barren situation."<sup>44</sup>

Like most commentators, Cook predicted the growth of a prosperous colony in the rich bottom lands of the Mississippi River if it were "settled with a public spirit, about Ibberville, and if supported by Government." "The great river Mississippi would bring all nations of indians to trade," Cook remarked, but "as a few families, which are scattered about without protection, are always in fear of the indians, and on the least rupture may Expect to be soon sacrificed; Who would on such uncertainty, chuse to succeed them?"<sup>45</sup>

It was a pertinent question and may help to explain why James Cook preferred to settle in South Carolina rather than take up his grant and be remembered as one of the founding fathers of Biloxi.

---

44. Cook, *Directions*, 12-13.

45. *Ibid.*, 14.