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Susan R. Parker



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MEN WITHOUT GOD OR KING: RURAL SETTLERS OF EAST FLORIDA, 1784-1790

by Susan R. Parker

IN 1784 Spanish colonists returned to the Florida peninsula after a twenty-year hiatus of British rule. In St. Augustine troops from Cuba walked the streets talking in Spanish, former émigré residents or their relatives moved in to reclaim old homes, and mass was sung again in the parish church. Out in the countryside the settlers debated in English what their fate might be under the new regime. The few Spanish that they saw were the military detachments assigned to the frontier posts or the sailors bringing supplies.

Two decades before, in peace negotiations ending the Seven Years War, Spain had traded its Florida territory to ransom British-held Havana. Florida's cession to Great Britain ended 200 years of Spanish occupation. Soldiers from the Iberian peninsula and Floridian creole inhabitants evacuated the province rather than remain to live under British rule. In the middle of the 1770s subjects loyal to the British crown began immigrating to East Florida, and by the end of the American Revolution its population had increased fivefold.¹ Peace parleys in 1783 again transferred Florida's ownership-this time, back to Spain. In 1784 and 1785 British transports arrived to evacuate officials, troops, residents, and their belongings from Florida. A number of British subjects, however, chose to stay to seek their fortunes as subjects of Carlos III.

In St. Augustine the former British subjects lived among a mixture of recent arrivals from other parts of the Spanish em-

Susan Parker is a historian for the Historic St. Augustine Preservation Board and a doctoral student, University of Florida. The author wishes to express her appreciation to Darrett B. Rutman, University of Florida, for his assistance with this study.

1. Robert L. Gold, *Borderland Empires in Transition: The Triple-Nation Transfer of Florida* (Carbondale & Edwardsville, 1969); J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Florida in the American Revolution* (Gainesville, 1975), 21.

pire, but the settled rural region—the basins of the St. Johns and St. Marys rivers—remained exclusively Anglo. When Spanish policy eventually allowed new settlers to enter the region in 1790, the presence of an already established Anglo population ensured continuity and stability on East Florida's vulnerable northern border.²

As used in this essay, the term “Anglo” means those individuals who immigrated into East Florida from the American colonies to the north or from the British Isles (and a few from other northern European countries) and who remained in Florida after 1784. Their accents may have differed, but they had in common their northern European origin and the fact that they were not Roman Catholics in a colony where Roman Catholicism was the official religion. Spanish immigration policy in 1784 required adherence to Roman Catholicism, although it allowed already settled Protestants to remain in the province. The term, “Protestant,” applies more to Anglo settlers in default than it does as an indication of allegiance to a formal set of religious tenets. One typically priestly description referred to the resident as being “of religion, if any, Lutheran.”³

Anglo attitudes and goals often differed from those of Spanish officials in St. Augustine. The cultural background of the Anglos, as well as their nationality, was alien to the men who governed East Florida. Those officials expected obedience, loyalty, and sacrifice from settlers who were vulnerable to attack by Americans and Indians on a frontier that Spain could not really defend. One Spanish officer describing East Florida's northern river region in 1784 thought that the attributes of the area surpassed the qualities of its inhabitants. Although there were “probably some of good reputation,” Spanish navy officer Nicolás Grenier stated that most of the settlers were “men without God or king.”⁴ They were, in fact, men and women in the act of exchanging their kings, for the question had been put to

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2. Among those who arrived subsequent to the 1790 royal order inviting settlers were John McQueen, Andrew Atkinson, and, several years later, Zephaniah Kingsley.
 3. White baptisms, Book I, 208. St. Augustine Cathedral Parish Records (CPR), Diocesan Center, Mandarin, Florida (microfilm copies at St. Augustine Historical Society).
 4. Nicolás Grenier, November 10, 1784, in Joseph Byrne Lackey, *East Florida, 1783-1785: A File of Documents Assembled and Many of them Translated* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1949), 307.

them whether to remain and live under Spanish control or to depart for other parts of the British Empire.

Those individuals unfettered by sizeable families and those who possessed a marketable craft were the ones most likely to relocate to other colonies. Many bachelors and other spouseless persons moved on to Nova Scotia, the Bahamas, and Central America. Some relocated to England, and still others, perhaps with some trepidations, returned to their former homes in the new United States. With St. Augustine as its only urban area, East Florida needed few of the tanners, bakers, and cobblers who had fled into Florida during the American Revolution. The Minorcan community already filled those trades in St. Augustine.⁵

On July 14, 1784, two days after assuming office, Governor Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes authorized "a comprehensive census of the inhabitants . . . with indication of their intentions [whether to remain in or depart East Florida], families, slaves, occupation, and estates." The censustakers segregated St. Augustine residents and rural dwellers (*vecinos del campo*) into separate lists. The "gentlefolk" (*personas decentes*) were special groups, as were free blacks.⁶

Spanish officials made two other enumerations of rural residents before the inception of the expanded settlement policy in 1790. Father Michael O'Reilly took the census gathered during the governor's tour of the backcountry in 1787. In November 1789 a third list of the settlers living along the St. Marys and Nassau rivers was compiled.⁷ This study includes any head of

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5. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148; Petition of William Pengree, November 30, 1786, bundle 41B4, roll 16, East Florida Papers (EFP), Library of Congress (microfilm copies at St. Augustine Historical Society); Philip D. Rasico, "The Minorcan Population of St. Augustine in the Spanish Census of 1786," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 66 (October 1987), 167-84.
 6. Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes to Bernardo de Gálvez, July 16, 1784, in Lackey, *East Florida*, 231; Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148, EFP. Recent studies of the contemporary population of East Florida are Sherry Johnson, "The Spanish St. Augustine Community, 1784-1795: A Reevaluation," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 68 (July 1989), 27-54 (focusing on the town's Hispanic population); Rasico, "Minorcan Population of St. Augustine" (translates the 1786 census of the Mediterranean-born residents); and, for a review of the urban black population, Jane Landers, "Black Society in Spanish St. Augustine, 1784-1821," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1988).
 7. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148; Pablo Catajal to Zéspedes, November 15, 1789; Pablo Catajal "Report Affirming the Number of

the household who listed the St. Johns, Nassau, or St. Marys rivers, or the coastal islands at their mouths, as a place of residence. Excluded were residents of the estuaries of the North or Matanzas rivers or of the coastal areas south of Matanzas Inlet. Those riverbanks soon evolved into a "Minorcan littoral" with only a few leftover British residents interspersed.⁸

No personal documents reveal the reasons for settlers' decisions to stay in Florida. A comparison of the censuses discloses that, between the time that the questions were asked and the day of the final embarkation, families changed their minds, probably several times. Of those who elected to remain on the northern rivers, seventy-one heads of household stated their intentions in the 1784 census. Of the twenty-nine who by the time of the census had decided to stay only the carpenter Robert Gilbert stated his reason— an elderly and infirm parent "about 100 years old" who could not be moved.⁹

Indecision or plans to move elsewhere concerned more than one-half of the seventy-one respondents. Twenty-four families, one-third of the remaining households, did not determine their option when asked. Some hoped to move to West Florida or Louisiana, where richer soil was reported. Even Henry O'Neill, who later served as the governor's appointed magistrate on the St. Marys, answered "undecided" about his plans. Eighteen households who reached the decisions to depart reversed their thinking before the evacuation ended. Samuel Harrison of Amelia Island and Spicer Christopher of Talbot Island both declared their intentions to depart the province, but changed

Families Who Have Taken the Oath of Allegiance to His Majesty and Inhabit the Southern Bank of the St. Marys River, Nassau [River], Amelia and Talbot Islands with Expression of the Total of Individuals in Each One, Their Religions, Property, Etc.," December 10, 1789, bundle 120C10, roll 46, EFP.

8. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148, EFP. For the settlement patterns of North and Matanzas rivers, see Kathleen Deagan, *Phase I Background Research and Assessment of Historic and Prehistoric Archeological Resources in St. Johns County, Florida* (St. Augustine, 1981), 117-21, and Susan R. Parker, "Developmental History of St. Johns County," in Historic St. Augustine Preservation Board (HSAPB), *St. Johns County Historical, Architectural and Archaeological Survey* (St. Augustine, 1987), 162, mss. on file at HSAPB. "Minorcan" became a generic term applied to the Mediterranean refugees (or their descendants) from Andrew Turnbull's New Smyrna enterprise.
9. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148, EFP.

their minds. Their descendants occupied the same acreage when Florida became an American territory in 1821.¹⁰

Historian Helen Tanner attributed the last-minute changes in plans by those who originally had intended to leave to incoming reports of inhospitable attitudes toward the immigrants displayed by officials in the Bahama Islands. The Bahamians' lack of assistance to the evacuees led to a high death rate among the arrivals. Professor J. Leitch Wright, Jr., noted that the Tories, who had immigrated to Florida, distrusted and doubted the ability of the newly created United States to control its vast geographic area. The Loyalists predicted that the government would either fail or its territory would be reduced, and those who remained on the edge of frontiers wanted to be on hand to take advantage of the restoration of "British liberty and dominion."¹¹

A few evacuees discovered that their decisions to leave Florida had not been the wiser choice, and within two or three years they reappeared at the Florida border requesting permission to return to become Spanish subjects. Wealthy William Pengree had moved into Georgia, only fifty miles from the Florida border. In 1786 Pengree's overseer, with a portion of his employer's slaves and a cache of corn, presented himself to the commander of the Amelia Island post and requested permission to resettle in Florida. Pengree's wealth and numerous black laborers were a welcome addition to the region. Thomas Cryer, his son, daughter-in-law, and her parents, also afraid for their safety in Georgia, returned to Florida. The elder Cryer and his son Morgan's father-in-law recently had voted in Camden County's (Georgia) first election as new United States citizens. Reddin Blunt, who had chosen to evacuate to an alternative British territory, moved back to East Florida from Nova Scotia three years later. Instead of returning to his former residence near New Smyrna, Blunt settled on Nassau River.¹²

Professor Wright also observed that Florida's white, English-speaking settlers were not transplanted Britishers happy to re-

10. Ibid.; Work Projects Administration (W.P.A.), *Spanish Land Grants in Florida*, 5 vols. (Tallahassee, 1941), II, 41, III, 16.

11. Helen Hornbeck Tanner, *Zéspedes in East Florida, 1784-1790* (Coral Gables, 1963), 65; Wright, *Florida in the American Revolution*, 145.

12. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148; Zéspedes to Richard Lang, May 2, 1789, bundle 120C10, roll 46, EFP; Marguerite Reddick, *Camden's Challenge: A History of Camden County, Georgia* (Jacksonville, 1976), 4-5.

turn to the mother country, but regarded themselves as Americans.¹³ Americans they were indeed. Based on the Spanish documents, 83 percent of the group who chose to remain in Spanish East Florida (or returned after a short absence) were born in America, in colonies that had become the new United States. The Anglo rural settlers of East Florida hailed from all the former colonies south of New York, except New Jersey.

This extension of British America into Spanish Florida fits the pattern discerned by John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard that, in the lower South, migration was from other colonies rather than via direct passage from Europe. Although the exotic schemes of the early years of East Florida's British period brought in a hodge-podge of immigrants from the British Isles and other parts of Europe, they were no longer settled in the rural areas in 1784. Those living along the northern riverbanks of Spanish East Florida were overwhelmingly of American birth. Among the eleven heads of households born in the Old World, all but two settlers from the Mediterranean were natives of northern Europe. Four were from England, two from Switzerland, and one each from Scotland, Ireland, and the Alsace region of France. Both southern Europeans— Manuel Marshall

TABLE 1
BIRTHPLACE OF AMERICAN-BORN, RURAL SETTLERS
(HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD) OF NORTHERN RIVER REGION,
EAST FLORIDA, 1784-1790

Colony	Number	%
America (no colony)	13	25.5
South Carolina	11	21.5
North Carolina	8	15.7
Virginia	8	15.7
Pennsylvania	4	7.8
Georgia	3	5.9
Maryland	3	5.9
Florida	1	2.0
Total	51	100.0

Source: Census Returns, Bundle 323A, East Florida Papers.

13. Tanner, *Zéspedes*, 65; Wright, *Florida in the American Revolution*, 145.

from Malta and the Italian, Joseph Savy— were Roman Catholics.¹⁴

While European birth was exceptional among the rural settlers, Catholicism was even more unusual. Only five heads of families declared themselves to be of the “Roman Catholic Apostolic” church, and four of them were European born. William Kane from Pennsylvania was the lone American-born Catholic. Catholicism was not a unifying force among the few settlers who were its adherents. The Catholic families were scattered along the rivers, not clustered together. George Aarons, the Alsatian, lived about four miles up from the St. Marys harbor; Kane, much further upriver. Joseph Savy had his home on Fort George Island near the mouth of the St. Johns River. Manuel Marshall and an Irish Catholic bachelor, Thomas Pemberton, lived about six miles upriver from St. Johns Bluff.¹⁵

In East Florida, where Roman Catholicism was the state religion, more than 90 percent of the Anglo river households were Protestant. Already distant from the capital, their religion further excluded them from national festivals and rituals. In Spanish colonies such events, whether festive or funereal, always included a commemorative mass as part of any observance. No church existed in East Florida outside of St. Augustine, although in 1786 Carlos III had ordered special parishes to be erected for the Anglo-American settlers to be manned by English-speaking priests. Likewise, no provision was made for marriage between non-Catholics, hence many crossed into Georgia for the ceremony, while others just exchanged vows before witnesses. In doing so, they followed the examples of important Protestants in the province. In 1789, John Leslie, a partner in the Indian trading firm, Panton, Leslie and Company, and a Protestant, crossed the border to Cumberland Island in Georgia to wed William Pengree’s step-daughter.¹⁶

14. John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1706-1789* (Chapel Hill, 1985), 169-70; for the settlement schemes, see Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1986), 430-74; Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148, EFP.

15. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148, EFP.

16. Michael V. Gannon, *The Cross in the Sand: The Early Catholic Church in Florida, 1513-1870* (Gainesville, 1965), 95, 103; Catajal to Zéspedes, November 6, 1789, bundle 120C10, roll 46, EFP.

Attempting to integrate their children into the province's official culture, Protestant families submitted their children to baptism when priests visited the rivers in 1787 and 1790. Settlers also presented their slaves for the sacrament and encouraged free blacks attached to their households to do the same. In the early years of the second Spanish period, Catholic priests and the Anglo rural population still were hopeful about plans to establish parishes for the Anglo population and to inaugurate church-sponsored schools for their children.¹⁷

This rural population, so overwhelmingly American and Protestant, was composed mainly of farmers (*labradores*), with a few who called themselves by the grander term, "planter" (*plantor*); 80 percent of the settlers listed agriculture as their only occupation. Many named their plantations. Some individuals incorporated Old-World locations in the titles, like Isaac Rivas's "Mesopotamia" or Fatio's "New Switzerland." Other names expressed ideals, such as Henry O'Neill's "New Hope" or Angus Clark's "Liberty Hall." A few Protestant planters, in imitation of the Catholic Spanish, placed "San" (saint in Spanish) before their own given names to create titles. Spicer Christopher dubbed his place "San Cristóbal" and Frederick Hartley called his farm "San Federico."¹⁸

The livelihood of most settlers came from the land, either from the flora or the animals that foraged upon its scrub. A few residents possessed skills that could be used on the region's timber supply. Except for two blacksmiths, the craftsmen who lived along the rivers were carpenters and boatbuilders. Cypress trees, abundant and ideal for canoes, supplied John Houston of the St. Marys and Robert Gilbert on the St. Johns, both builders of small boats and canoes, with material. The St. Augustine government contracted with the residents to perform construction and repairs at the defense posts in the area. Wielding axes, drawknives, and planes did not preclude handling a plow. Several of the woodworkers claimed to be farmers in addition to their carpentry work. Houston, who planted twelve acres, and

17. White Baptisms, Book I; Colored Baptisms, Book I, CPR; Michael Curley, *Church and State in the Spanish Floridas (1783-1822)* (Washington, DC, 1940), 93.

18. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148, EFP; W.P.A., *Spanish Land Grants*, III, 79, 271-72.

Gilbert, with eight acres, referred to themselves only as farmers in 1787, although they had cited their boatbuilding skills three years before.¹⁹

A majority of the farmsteads were maintained by small families, usually consisting of only three or four persons. However, a number of households were more extensive. In determining household size and character, this study employed the same definitions and categories for household members as did the Spanish censustakers. Free persons in the household not part of the nuclear family (*agregados*), whatever their relationship, were considered as part of the household.

In addition to parents and their children, a household might include grandparents, grandchildren, widowed in-laws or siblings, white or free-black servants and workers, boarders, and visitors. Orphans with no explanation of their relationship to the host family appeared in the censuses. Itinerant laborers and tradesmen lived where they worked. Any of these *agregados* might be accompanied by their own spouses, in-laws, or stepchildren, and their respective slaves and livestock. Of the sev-

TABLE 2
SIZE OF HOUSEHOLDS IN NORTHERN RIVER REGION,
EAST FLORIDA, 1784-1790

Number in Household	Number of Households	%
1	5	6.6
2	9	11.9
3	12	15.8
4	13	17.1
5	9	11.9
6	9	11.9
7	5	6.6
8	6	7.9
9	5	6.6
10 or more	3	3.9
Total	76	100.5

Source: Census Returns, bundle 323A; "Report Affirming the Number of Families . . . of St. Marys and Nassau rivers, Amelia and Talbot islands," December 10, 1789, bundle 120C10, document 211, East Florida Papers.

19. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148; Francisco Huet to Zéspedes, September 11, 1788, bundle 119B10, roll 45; Lang to Quesada, September 15, 1791, bundle 121D10, roll 47, EFP.

enty-six families for which there is household information, thirty-two of them (42 percent) included agregados. For at least nine of the thirty-two families, the agregado was listed as a relative. Free blacks lived with five of these thirty-two families.

Agregados of various affinity, status, and function were associated simultaneously with the affluent households. With so many slaves, employees, and guests, the households changed complexion constantly. Although the affluent Anglo families left information of a sort that was usually lacking for the less prosperous, the fluid nature of the well-to-do households makes it difficult to sketch any portrait for them that endured for more than a few days. In addition, their wily patresfamilias often gave evasive answers to the authorities' questions about their holdings and households. Perhaps Francis Philip Fatio truly owned so much livestock that he could not give a number, but he made no effort to do so— and did not concern himself over any potential official displeasure from the omission.

Fatio was the most affluent resident in East Florida. He alternated living in St. Augustine and at his St. Johns River plantation. His son, Lewis (counted as part of his father's rural household), had his own town house in St. Augustine. Lewis supervised New Switzerland as well as other property on the St. Johns, frequently appeared at Amelia Island to await family ships, and often traveled to Charleston and Havana on business. At any given time any combination of the three young male servants, the steward and two single overseers, the orphan Jane Cross, or sons- or daughters-in-law and grandchildren might be at either of the Fatio houses in town or at New Switzerland. Augmenting the plantation's kaleidoscopic population, ailing Spanish officers often recuperated at the plantation. A detachment of soldiers was stationed there, ships arrived with their crews to take on lumber and oranges at the Fatio dock, and sometimes hungry, traveling Indians found food and rest.²⁰

Until its destruction by Indians in 1812, New Switzerland was the premier plantation of East Florida. There Fatio surrounded himself with the trappings of wealth and gentility— Chinese vases, a library, household silver, a piano, a gold-

20. Susan R. Parker, "I am neither your subject nor your subordinate," *El Escribano* 25 (1988), 54-56.

headed cane. The Swiss-born planter commanded wealth sufficient to pledge a dowry for his daughter that surpassed Governor Zéspedes's annual salary. At Sophia Fatio's betrothal to George Fleming, her father pledged 1,000 pounds sterling (or 4,445 pesos) in cash or kind to be delivered in two equal payments, the first half immediately, the second installment, two years hence. Governor Zéspedes's salary was 4,000 pesos (sporadically received).²¹

By virtue of his relative longevity in Florida, Fatio had been able to expand his plantation and commercial interests. He arrived in British East Florida in 1771. The following year Governor James Grant conferred 10,000 acres to him on the east bank of the St. Johns River. The grant was triangular in shape, with twelve miles of riverfront for its base. Unlike many contemporary British entrepreneurs in East Florida, Fatio was not an absentee investor, and he resided in the province to supervise and protect his investments. Although raiders during the American Revolution had plundered as close as Doctor's Lake on the west side of the St. Johns, the width of the river at that point provided effective protection for Fatio's property at New Switzerland.²²

Across the St. Johns from New Switzerland lived William Pengree, the second most affluent resident of the river region. When he returned to the province, William Pengree established "Laurel Grove" on Doctor's Lake. Like Fatio's, but on a smaller scale, the composition of Pengree's household was changeable. It included his wife and her children, a widower, the overseer (whose wife lived in a household on the St. Marys) and his sister, another foreman with a wife, child, and his own slaves, and still another family waiting for the governor to assign them some land to farm. Pengree was as likely to be in the Bahama Islands conducting business as he was to be found on the St. Johns River. Like Fatio, Pengree furnished his home with fine implements, such as the six silver-plated (*hoja de plata*) sugar contain-

21. Francis Fatio, Sr., died in 1811. *Ibid.*, 56; Francis Philip Fatio and Maria Magdalena Crespel, August 12, 1788, bundle 369, roll 170, EFP; Lackey, *East Florida*, 447, n. 1.

22. Gertrude N. L'Engle, *A Collection of Letters, Information and Data on Our Family*, 2 vols. (Jacksonville, 1951), II, 17-26; W.P.A., *Spanish Land Grants*, III, 13, IV, 65; Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774-1785*, 2 vols. (DeLand, 1929), II, 68.

ers and crystal bottles inventoried upon his death in 1793. His wardrobe included a silk waistcoat and silk stockings.²³

It was not a coincidence that the successful plantations of the region were situated close to each other. In addition to Fatio and Pengree, who did not report the size of their plantings, two of the three plantation owners with the largest reported cultivated acreage in 1787, that of forty acres, were near New Switzerland. Hannah Moore lived on Fatio's northern boundary, and Angus Clark, to the north of her. Timothy Hollingsworth of Talbot Island was the remaining planter along the rivers to report so much cultivated land. Within a few years Hollingsworth chose to move to the same preferred vicinity as the three above, but he developed the more vulnerable west bank of the St. Johns.²⁴

Here the enterprises were many miles from the forays and disruptions that had long plagued the region nearer the border. Not only was their more secure location an asset, but the availability of Fatio's markets and equipment contributed to their success. Neighboring farmers could use New Switzerland's turpentine still. Angus Clark and Fatio both profited when Clark supplied lumber that Fatio needed to complete a government contract. Through his influence Fatio (and two other East Florida residents) acquired special trading licenses from the count of Gálvez before the nobleman's death. This authority to import and export was not available to the other residents of East Florida.²⁵

Planting on this scale required supervisory personnel in addition to the laborers. Fatio and Pengree employed several men as foremen. Both Moore and Hollingsworth, each owning nine slaves, reported hired *agregados* as part of their households. Free blacks and mulattoes frequently were employed as overseers. John Gray, a free mulatto, worked as an overseer for Fatio, Clark, and Moore at different times. When Gray worked

23. When the pre-evacuation census was taken, Pengree was cultivating Mount Tucker, upriver from the site of Laurel Grove; Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148; Estate of William Pengree, bundle 303, roll 136, EFP.

24. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148, EFP; W.P.A., *Spanish Land Grants*, III, 222-23, IV, 8-11, 229.

25. Estate of Angus Clark, bundle 303, roll 136; Francis Philip Fatio to Joseph del Rio Cossa, June 26, 1787, bundle 98G8, roll 37, EFP.

as an *agregado* at Widow Moore's he brought along his two horses and two head of cattle.²⁶

The widow, Hannah Moore, made a particularly good showing for herself. In 1784 she was "squatting" on a farm abandoned by British evacuees. The next year she erected her own house on the land and had acquired one slave. By 1787 she had increased her slaveholdings to nine. In the summer of 1790 John Gray traveled to the "Indian nation" as her agent to purchase cattle. For extra funds she sewed. For making "four fine shirts, two ruffled and two plain," she charged four dollars.²⁷

In more than one-half of the river households there were no slaves. Of the eighteen farmers who planted ten or fewer acres in 1787, only one reported owning a slave. Farmers who owned no slaves could rent or board them, however. Correspondence reporting the theft or flight of slaves "deposited" with someone other than their owner suggests the frequency of such arrangements. For the most part the river residents relied upon the family to sow, hoe, weed, and harvest the crops, or they reciprocated services with their neighbors.

The most common size of plot under cultivation was ten acres, but three-fifths of the settlers planted more than ten acres. On farms where planting size reached twenty-five acres,

TABLE 3
ACREAGE UNDER CULTIVATION IN THE NORTHERN
RIVER REGION, EAST FLORIDA, 1787

Acres	Number of farms	%
1-5	5	11.4
6-10	13	29.5
11-15	7	15.9
16-20	9	20.5
21-25	3	6.8
26-30	2	4.8
31-35	2	4.8
36-40	3	6.8
Total	44	100.9

Source: Census Returns, bundle 323A, East Florida Papers.

26. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148, EFP.

27. *Ibid.*; Lang to Zéspedes, June 19, 1790, bundle 120C10, roll 46; John McIntosh to Quesada, April 22, 1792, bundle 122E10, roll 47; Francis Philip Fatio to Quesada, September 28, 1794, bundle 127J10, roll 50, EFP.

at least six slaves provided the labor. Henry O'Neill was an exception, but only in the kind of labor he utilized. Although he owned no slaves, O'Neill, with nine children in his house, had one of the largest families along the rivers. In 1787 when he reported cultivating thirty-five acres, he had six boys and a daughter over the age of ten to assist on the farm. James, at age twenty-two, and Eber, seventeen, could perform men's work. A white male and a white female servant were also part of the household.²⁸

Slaves were the real measure of wealth. Again the Anglo Floridians mirrored the states immediately north of them, although this reflected something of a change for Spanish Florida as a whole. In 1763, when the Spanish government prepared to hand over Florida to Britain, the emphasis in property had been on buildings. In the second Spanish period, Anglo river residents appraised the main houses of neighbors who had died with no more detail than the outbuildings in St. Augustine received. Even William Pengree's buildings merited only a summary description and broad valuations. In St. Augustine building tradesmen still evaluated structures for estate proceedings with minute descriptions of materials and dimensions. Slaves were listed and assessed with equal care in country and city, but the treatment of buildings reflected the relative importance of real property and slave property for the two cultures.²⁹

The public notary books (*escrituras*) provide information on the prices paid for slaves in St. Augustine. During the evacuation period Penny, a fourteen-year old, was sold for 270 pesos and eighteen-year-old Jane with her child, for 300 pesos. The next spring, after the loyalists had departed, a purchaser paid 280 pesos for James, age twenty, a bozal (recently brought from Africa and possibly untrained), while the price for the aging Amy, forty, was 110 pesos. No separate set of books was available for the river region, and rural parties had no convenient

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28. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148; Pablo Catajal, "Report Affirming the Number of Families," December 10, 1789, bundle 120C10, roll 46, EFP.
 29. Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "The Standard of Living in the Colonial Chesapeake," *William and Mary Quarterly* 45 (1988), 142; Charles W. Arnade, "The Architecture of Spanish St. Augustine," *Americas* 18 (1961), 149-86; Testamentary Proceedings, bundle 301-08, rolls 134-40, EFP.

solution but to prepare their own bills of sale (or have one of their literate neighbors do so), leaving few records of their transactions. From time to time the magistrates for the rivers reported to the governor slave sales made in the interior, but they were not subsequently recorded in the *escrituras*.³⁰

Of the river residents, Fatio and Pengree owned the largest number of slaves. In the pre-evacuation census Fatio claimed seventy-nine slaves, and Pengree reported sixty-three "employed in preparing fields." The next largest slaveholders along the rivers were Samuel Harrison with twenty-six and George Aarons with fourteen. In 1787 Fatio, with eighty-two, and Pengree, with forty-eight, owned more slaves than all other residents reporting slaves combined.³¹

Although reports of slave stealing reached the governor in 1785, the census two years later reveals no major change in the numbers of slaves owned by the Anglo settlers. In fact, the slave population between 1784 and 1787, before and after the evacuation, appeared to be static for the region as a whole. Although the number of reported small slaveholders (one to three slaves) doubled during the three-year period, the slaves were merely dispersed among more households. Even Francis Fatio owned only three more slaves in the second census than in the first. Pengree, who reported a net loss of one-fourth of his slaves during the same period, had relocated twice, unintentionally providing opportunities for escape.³²

For the more than one-half of the population that owned no slaves, livestock served as an evidence of wealth. Settlers raised cattle from their own herds, and purchased stock from the Americans in Georgia and from Indians on both sides of the St. Marys River. Five head of cattle per fifty acres was considered the most profitable arrangement. Fatio, one of the government contractors who provided fresh meat for the garrison, sold cattle purchased from other residents as well as from his own stock.

The inclusion of slaves and livestock in the censuses reflected the officials' assessment of their importance in the economy.

30. Slave sales in bundle 366, roll 169, pp. 107, 261, 493, 494; Lang to Zéspedes, October 15, 1788, bundle 119B10, roll 45, EFP.

31. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148, EFP; W.P.A., *Spanish Land Grants*, IV, 9.

32. Census Returns, bundle 323A, roll 148; Loyalty Oaths, bundle 350U4, roll 163, EFP.

TABLE 4
 SIZE OF SLAVEHOLDINGS IN THE NORTHERN
 RIVER REGION, EAST FLORIDA, 1784 AND 1787

Numbers of Slaves	Numbers of Households			
	1784	%	1787	%
1-3	5	25.0	11	52.4
4-6	7	35.0	5	23.8
7-9	2	10.0	4	19.0
10-12	3	15.0		
More than 13	3	15.0	1	4.8
Total	20	100.0	21	100.0

Source: Census Returns, bundle 323A, East Florida Papers.

The importance of these possessions to the residents is echoed in the settlers' transactions and, more often, their dickering over livestock. Few kinds of property were included in official reports or records, other than larger boats (such as schooners and bilanders), land, and slaves. Settlers bought and sold or bartered cattle, swine, and horses and deposited them as collateral. They also used them as a medium of exchange in the absence of coin in both friendly negotiations and as satisfaction in disputes. For example, the O'Neills, with no hard cash, arranged to use one of their horses as payment for needed corn. Mary Ann Clatworthy, who lived not far from Fatio, illustrated the place of cattle in the economy when she bequeathed to Mrs. Summerall a one-year-old steer, to Mrs. Loftin two choice cows and calves, to Mrs. Hambly a three-year-old steer, and to Mrs. Jennings, one cow and one calf.³³

The settlers demanded compensation for damages inflicted upon their animals. Magistrate Henry O'Neill considered the matter of restitution to Mr. Hendricks for his pigs shot by Mrs. Savy important enough to be reported to the governor. When Spicer Christopher's dogs killed some of the pigs belonging to his free black sharecropper "Judge" Lewis Fatio, who was magistrate for the St. Johns River region, reported that he had to intervene to negotiate a workable solution between the two men. Determination of ownership of slaves and livestock took the

33. Margaret O'Neill to Carlos Howard, May 30, 1790, bundle 121D10, roll 46, EFP; W.P.A., *Spanish Land Grants*, V, 132.

judges through a labyrinth of claims and counter-claims by residents. The problems frequently surpassed their legal ability or exceeded their jurisdiction and required input from the governor, especially when third or even fourth parties to the argument lived north of the St. Marys.³⁴

Slaves, horses, and cattle owned by settlers were equally desirable to the Indians and to Georgians, and Floridians formed posses to pursue these possessions across the St. Marys into Indian country, and into the nearby white settlements. Despite the governor's admonitions to take thieves alive inside East Florida's boundaries, settlers eager for blood and a part of the booty pursued the bandits with little caution in aiming their weapons.

Fear of Indian atrocities drew residents together to act as a unit. In the fall of 1787 the "inhabitants settled on Saint Marys River in great dread" of both Americans and Indians sent a petition to Governor Zéspedes, informing him of their plight and asking for his guidance and assistance. Two years later the St. Johns River settlers also jointly turned to the governor to express their fear following depredations by an Indian named Young Warrior.³⁵

Whether or not the residents truly acted in concert to oust Henry O'Neill as magistrate for the St. Marys is difficult to discern. Richard Lang, jealous of O'Neill's post, authored the complaining document to be signed by mostly illiterate neighbors. It accused O'Neill of neglecting to keep the residents informed of important correspondence from the governor. Lang might well have misled some of the inhabitants about the content of the document. A statement made later by John Houston, who had signed Lang's complaining letter with an X, indicated his disagreement with the allegations in the petition on which his mark appeared. But this coalition of Anglo settlers exercising what they believed to be their right to redress and to a voice in decisions effecting their welfare got Zéspedes's attention. After O'Neill's death a few months later, the governor ordered a

34. Henry O'Neill to Zéspedes, April 29, 1787; Petition of John Pileston with Report by Lewis Fatio, August 22 and 30, 1787, bundle 119B10, roll 45, EFP.

35. Residents of St. Marys River to Zéspedes, October 24, 1787, bundle 119B10, roll 45; Residents of St. Johns River, October 8, 1789, bundle 120C10, roll 46, EFP.

Spanish army officer to poll the residents about their preferences before Zéspedes chose a new magistrate.³⁶

The provincial records concerned themselves more with the prevention of smuggling and other illegalities in the northern region than with how and where the settlers had acquired items that they did not produce. Spain's restrictive commercial policy combined with the absence of stores in East Florida's rural area left the inhabitants few legal options. Nearby lay Cumberland Island, literally a free port, where ships of all nations docked, and stores sold their cargoes.³⁷ The United States did not yet have trade laws—restrictions that Georgia might well have chosen to ignore anyway.

Submerged in the reports and depositions arising from the strife of the evacuation of the British in 1784 and 1785 were a few statements about the settlers' means of supporting themselves. Henry O'Neill wrote to the governor that he was working "to convert the shingles and barrel staves [he had cut] into bread for his family." Both O'Neill and George Aarons were felling trees in the fall of 1785, when Zéspedes forbade the sale of the mastpoles and smaller products they had honed. A sympathetic Spanish captain at Amelia Island allowed O'Neill to take his wood into Georgia where he exchanged it for food and clothing.³⁸

According to Helen Tanner, "barrels of flour and salt meat, and the money to pay for them, constituted Governor Zéspedes' most fundamental problem throughout his administration." Like his predecessors in the earlier part of the century, Zéspedes had to rely on ports up the Atlantic coast for food and other supplies. Ocean currents made the voyage to New York or Philadelphia quicker and safer than the journey to Havana or Mexico. Food was cheaper in the United States and less subject to spoilage than provisions that were exposed to tropical heat and humidity. Spain maintained its mercantilistic policy with its

36. Residents to Zéspedes, December 29, 1787, and April 29, 1788; Jaime McTernan to Zéspedes, May 11 and 18, 1788, bundle 119B10, roll 45, EFP.

37. Fernando Hernández to Zéspedes, April 5, 1787, bundle 119B10, roll 45, EFP.

38. Deposition of Jesse Youngblood, October 20, 1785; Nicolás Valderas to Zéspedes, October 20, 1785; Zéspedes to Valderas, October 23, 1785; Manuel de los Reyes to Zéspedes, November 2, 1785, bundle 118A10, roll 44, EFP.

colonies despite economic trends developing in the colonies. National policy ran counter to sound economics, and was costly for the small-time settler as well as for the imperial budget.³⁹

The commander of the Amelia Island military post continually reported problems with securing provisions. During the Christmas season of 1785 Captain Manuel de los Reyes informed Zéspedes that the troops were “making do” for meals. His men had only beans to eat, while flour was available for purchase across the river in Georgia. By his own example Zéspedes gave tacit acceptance of the necessity to ignore the rules. The governor’s need for the foodstuffs carried in the holds of ships arriving in East Florida forced him to ignore his own regulations. When soldier Juan Francisco Garzes informed Zéspedes that two of Fatio’s vessels were leaving from Amelia Island with unlicensed exports, the governor replied that Garzes should let them proceed to Charleston because they would return with supplies “which were worth more than money.”⁴⁰

The settlers in north Florida also had to turn to the United States for supplies. No stores or trading posts existed along the East Florida rivers for the settlers. The Panton, Leslie trading firm operated two stores on the upper St. Johns (in present-day Putnam and Volusia counties), but they catered exclusively to the Indian trade.⁴¹ The necessity to travel to another nation to purchase goods required, in addition to expenditure of time, the acquisition of a passport if the trip was to be legal. “Anyone, black or white, male or female, who trie[d] to enter or leave the province without a pass” could be charged six pesos fine. Potential unpleasantness between former British Loyalists now residing in Spanish Florida and the citizens of the United States awaited them at Cumberland Island. The wounds of a war fought only a few years before still were raw, and fights and

39. Tanner, *Zéspedes*, 105-08.

40. Juan Francisco Garzes to Zéspedes, October 1, 1785; Manuel de los Reyes to Zéspedes, December 27, 1785; bundle 118A10, roll 44, EFP.

41. Manuel de los Reyes to Zéspedes, December 27, 1785; Pedro Vásquez, “Description,” July 5, 1785, bundle 118A10, roll 44, EFP. After 1790 the mercantile company opened a store on the St. Marys near the ferry for a short time, and one on the St. Johns at Picolata. When the latter closed, the store was relocated across the river at the former site of Fort Pupo. William S. Coker and Thomas D. Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Borderlands: Panton, Leslie & Company and John Forbes & Company, 1783-1847* (Pensacola, 1986), 365.

injuries resulted from shopping trips. The Spanish fugitive slave policy sometimes caused altercations, as demonstrated by the two Americans who tried to replace their own missing slaves with those found riding in George Aarons's canoe.⁴²

Only a short canoe trip across the St. Marys harbor into Georgia was required to visit Alexander Semple's store (*almacén de efectos y víveres*) on the north point of Georgia's Cumberland Island. Semple's patrons were as likely to see Spanish military uniforms as the homespun garb of the Anglo settlers who lived on the south side of the St. Marys River. The Amelia Island post commander and captains of Spanish ships anchored at the St. Marys often were forced to purchase Mr. Semple's merchandise: almost-fresh meat, salted meat, ham, flour, potatoes, butter, English crackers, small crackers, and rice. From other merchants on Cumberland Island the Florida residents purchased "beautiful guns," powder, gunflints, and riding saddles for both men and women.⁴³

Settlers implored the governor to relieve the stifling economic situation that forced almost all of them at some time into illegal activity. Petitioning in the fall of 1789, they reported that they found themselves "inconveniently situated far from St. Augustine and without proper clothing to buy . . . [nor with] a convenient port for their harvests." They requested "indulgences in their dealing and traffic" allowing them to "cut and sell lumber to any purchaser if it [was] not against His Catholic Majesty's interest." The investigative commission sent by Zéspedes two weeks after this plea confirmed the "Memorialists'" situation, adding that the settlers did "not have a detachment nor a cannonboat nor even a small boat to guard their plantations . . . [nor] a store to provide them with necessities." Although the area was "fertile, beautiful," and therefore, promising, the settlers were "exposed to be victims of the many ambitious characters that infest the major part of the United States, particularly Georgia."⁴⁴

42. Fernando del Postigo to Zéspedes, March 17, 1787; Howard to Henry O'Neill, September 15, 1787, bundle 119B10, roll 45, EFP.

43. Pedro Vásquez to Zéspedes, January 30, 1785; Reyes to Zéspedes, November 22, 1785; Nicolás Valderas to Zéspedes, December 28, 1785, bundle 118A10, roll 44; Francisco Huet to Zéspedes, July 21, 1788, bundle 119B10, roll 45; "Observations of the Three Commissioners," December 10, 1789, bundle 120C10, roll 46, EFP.

44. Petition of Richard Lang, November 14, 1789; "Observations of the Three Commissioners," December 10, 1789, bundle 120C10, roll 46, EFP.

Such was the state of the “foreigners” along the St. Marys and St. Johns rivers in the early years of Spanish East Florida. This northern rural region of the Spanish province was truly an “Anglo suburb,” home to its most homogeneous population. Its freshwater rivers and their connecting estuaries served as the thoroughfares for the inhabitants. Birth in the American southern and middle colonies, the Protestant religion, and reliance on farming and forest products for a livelihood were their self-declared affinities.

Spain had little to offer the rural settlers except the land itself— a place for their cabins and crops. In the early years of the second Spanish period that “offer” was merely permission to continue to occupy plots that they were working even before the transfer of flags. In spite of the lack of military protection and the governor’s decrees neutralizing the settlers’ capacity to defend themselves, the ownership of land was enough to sustain the residents and to attract more in the future.

This study, in addition to sketching a picture of the rural residents of Spanish East Florida, has sought to accomplish an even more elementary end: the recognition that this area was indeed continuously settled in spite of the departure from East Florida by the British government and many of its supporters. For years the presence of these persevering settlers has remained obscured behind an Anglophile intellectual thicket that has long held that without British rule, civilization vanished, plantations “sank back into the wilderness,” and the riverine area became dark and forbidding as “rank weeds . . . grew about the empty houses of the planters and the quarters of the slaves, where only savages and wild beasts roamed.”⁴⁵

45. Thomas Frederick Davis, *History of Jacksonville, Florida, and Vicinity*, (St. Augustine, 1925), 51.