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EAST FLORIDA PAPERS, 1784- 182 1

by SHERRY JOHNSON

IN 1821, as a result of the Adams-Onís Treaty negotiated in 1819, the province of East Florida was ceded from Spain to the United States. On November 5, 1821, during the transfer proceedings in St. Augustine, North American representatives certified that they had received a series of documents, a transaction that was affirmed by Spanish royal notary Juan de Entralgo.¹ In doing so, United States commissioners acquired the official archives relating to the Spanish administration in East Florida from 1784 to 1821, a time designated by historians as the Second Spanish Period.² Collectively, these documents have come to be known as the East Florida Papers.

Presently, the original copies of the East Florida Papers are located in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, but their journey from Florida took a long and circuitous route. As a representative of the Spanish government, Entralgo surrendered under duress the archival records entrusted to him. United States representatives, on the orders of acting governor Andrew Jackson and with help from American troops, seized five boxes of papers from Entralgo by breaking down the doors to the notary's office.³ The commissioners behaved in a similar manner at the St. Augustine residence of Governor José M. Coppinger where they broke into his office and seized an additional six

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1. Papers on the Transfer of the Archives to the United States, November 5, 1821, bundle 488, East Florida Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter cited as EFP with appropriate bundle number). The original documents were consulted for this research, but microfilm copies of the East Florida Papers are available in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.
2. The collection of documents contains some materials dated prior to the Second Spanish Period such as wills from the 1760s or copies of royal decrees previously issued.
3. Irene A. Wright, "The Odyssey of the Spanish Archives of Florida," *Hispanic American Essays: A Memorial to James Alexander Robertson*, A. Curtis Wilgus, ed. (Chapel Hill, 1942), 176.

boxes of documents.⁴ The United States representatives' actions perhaps were justified as they believed that Spanish officials intended to remove important documentation to Cuba. This would have deprived the United States and the territory of Florida of property rightfully theirs according to the terms of the cession treaty.⁵ The commissioners desired the archives in order to determine the validity of extant property claims and to facilitate future sales of unsurveyed land. Accordingly, when the archives were seized, records of property transactions were of primary concern to the United States commissioners.

Once the Spanish archives passed into possession of the United States, the American authorities apparently lost their enthusiasm for protecting the integrity of the documents. By the summer of 1822, Governor William P. DuVal, writing to Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, reported that the archives were being "very negligently kept."⁶ Hoping to forestall incidents of fraud, theft, forgery, substitutions, and alterations, the territorial legislature in August 1822 created an office of the keeper of public archives.⁷ Three years later, Florida's Land Claims Commission succeeded in bringing the need for safeguarding the Spanish archives to the attention of Congress, which established two custodial positions to be headed by appointed keepers of the public archives, one in St. Augustine and the other in Pensacola. William Reynolds was appointed as keeper for East Florida, but he was soon succeeded on January 2, 1829, by his associate, Antonio Alvarez. A native son and former secretary to Governor Coppinger, Alvarez performed this task for over twenty years, during which time the former Spanish archives—some 64,299 documents—remained in St. Augustine under his care.⁸

In 1848, three years after Florida had been admitted to the Union, Congress mandated that all public archives must be deposited in an office officially designated by the president under the care of a surveyor general. Consequently, President James

4. Ibid.; L. David Norris, "The Squeeze: Spain Cedes Florida to the United States," *El Escribano* 25 (1988), 132.

5. Norris, "The Squeeze," 128-33; Wright, "Odyssey of the Spanish Archives," 176.

6. Wright, "Odyssey of the Spanish Archives," 177.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 178-83.

K. Polk authorized in October 1848 the transfer of the archives in Alvarez's care to the office of surveyor general in St. Augustine. At that time, Alvarez sought to surrender his responsibility to the appointed surveyor general, Robert T. Butler, who refused to accept the documentation in "bundles undefined."⁹ Less than a year later, a new appointee, Benjamin Putnam, did accept the guardianship of the papers. On Putnam's recommendation and because of his years of exemplary service, Alvarez was retained as clerk and custodian of records, and the Spanish documents remained in the courthouse in St. Augustine. In 1857, a schedule of documents that had been prepared by Alvarez as part of the transfer in 1849 was sent to Tallahassee, presumably as a preliminary measure to yet another proposed relocation of the entire collection. The removal to Tallahassee never occurred because of the onset of the Civil War, but the Spanish archives now became the property of the state of Florida under the care of the clerk of the circuit court in St. Augustine. In 1861, Federal forces occupied the city, but the significance of the records was respected by occupation troops. Shortly after the war's end, in 1867, the papers became the responsibility of the United States attorney for the northern district of Florida.¹⁰

An inspection conducted in 1867 at the instigation of the General Land Office, Department of the Interior, sought to determine the location and the condition of records pertaining to land transfers. At that time, the General Land Office decided that the Spanish archives should remain in St. Augustine temporarily in the custody of the district attorney. In 1869, when the office of surveyor general was moved to Tallahassee from St. Augustine, Marcellus L. Stearns, the surveyor general, also transferred the archives to the capital. The documents remained in Tallahassee for another thirty-five years. A procurement act passed by Congress in 1903 authorized that the Library of Congress should receive documentation pertaining to local matters for future safekeeping.¹¹ Accordingly, the papers were transferred to Washington where they were examined, cleaned, and catalogued under the direction of librarian Mabel M. Manning.¹²

9. *Ibid.*, 185.

10. *Ibid.*, 185-90.

11. *Ibid.*, 195-201.

12. Mabel M. Manning, "The East Florida Papers," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 10 (August 1930), 392-97.

In succeeding years, many of the documents in poor condition—particularly records relating to property transfers (*Escrituras*)—were laminated and bound into volumes thus preserving the fragile and precious contents for future scholars.¹³

In 1965, the St. Augustine Foundation and the University of Florida in cooperation with the Library of Congress commissioned a microfilming project under the direction of Michael V. Gannon.¹⁴ With completion of the project, the nearly 65,000 documents became readily available to scholars and researchers. A quarter century later, in 1991, the Institute for Early Contact Period Studies at the University of Florida, also under the direction of Professor Gannon, sponsored a research visit to investigate the condition of the original documents. While portions of the Library of Congress collections had suffered from previous depredations and years of neglect in the nineteenth century, many portions of the collection are still legible, and other sections remain in excellent condition.¹⁵

By the twentieth century, the political orientation of the East Florida Papers— and particularly the correspondence of the Spanish governors— was recognized as a valuable asset by historians interested in utilizing primary materials to understand Florida's past. From these sources, many works on Florida's political and military history have been written by American and Spanish scholars such as Joseph B. Lockey, Helen Hornbeck Tanner, Janice Borton Miller, and Juan Marchena Fernández. These works provide the foundation for many subsequent studies.¹⁶ Archaeological research and preservation efforts of the Historic St. Augustine Preservation Board and the National Park

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13. Sherry Johnson, "Report on Archival Investigations in the Original East Florida Papers in the Library of Congress, November 1991" (typescript), Institute for Early Contact Period Studies, University of Florida, Gainesville.
 14. Michael V. Gannon to Gerard W. Gawalt, October 28, 1991, copy in author's possession; Gannon to author, October 28, 1991.
 15. Johnson, "Report on Archival Investigations," 7.
 16. Joseph B. Lockey, *East Florida, 1783-1785: A File of Documents Assembled, and Many of Them Translated* (Berkeley, 1949); Helen Hornbeck Tanner, *Zéspedes in East Florida, 1784-1790* (Coral Gables, 1963); Juan Marchena Fernández, "St. Augustine's Military Society," Luis Rafael Arana, trans., *El Escribano* 14 (1985), 43-77; Janice Borton Miller, *Juan Nepomuceno de Quesada, Governor of Spanish East Florida, 1790-1795* (Washington, DC, 1981). Rembert W. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco: Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida Border, 1810-1815* (Athens, 1954), did not utilize the East Florida Papers as a primary source.

Service rely on the material in the East Florida Papers.¹⁷ In recent years, the emphasis on institutional, political, and military history has been eclipsed by scholarship with social and economic emphases, much of which has been published in the *Florida Historical Quarterly*. The East Florida Papers lend themselves well to such studies. Shipping records illuminate trade networks that existed between St. Augustine, Fernandina, Havana, Charleston, and New York.¹⁸ A recent revisionist study of the *situado* (subsidy), which provided government salaries and monies for the upkeep of the garrison, has determined that until 1808, military revenues arrived with regularity.¹⁹ Jane G. Landers's examination of the black community in St. Augustine is an important contribution to an understanding of the little-known world of the inarticulate classes.²⁰ From the wealth of documentation in the East Florida Papers, new works continue to appear that add to the historical knowledge of life in the Second Spanish Period.

The East Florida Papers, while an important and valuable resource for scholars, is not without its flaws. Over the years, researchers have remarked about incomplete or fragmentary documentation within series of bundles (legajos) or within indi-

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17. The Probate Records (bundles 301 p5-19, reels 134-45, EFP); the Escrituras (bundles 361-80, reels 167-73, EFP); and the Book of Mortgages, 1784-1821 (bundle 407, reel 174, EFP) provide background information regarding the type of activity, structure, and the inhabitants of many of St. Augustine's historic sites. Susan R. Parker, research historian, Historic St. Augustine Preservation Board, to author, April 29, 1992. See also James Cusick, "Class and Ethnicity in Late Colonial St. Augustine," paper presented at the meeting of Society for Historical Archeology, January 1992, Kingston, Jamaica, and at the Southern Anthropological Society meeting, April 1992, St. Augustine; Luis R. Arana, "Construction of the Castillo de San Marcos, 1784-1821," *El Escribano* 25 (1988), 136-45.
 18. James Cusick, "Across the Border: Commodity Flow and Merchants in Spanish St. Augustine," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 69 (January 1991), 277-99; Christopher Ward, "The Commerce of East Florida during the Embargo, 1806-1812: The Role of Amelia Island," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 68 (October 1989), 160-79; William S. Coker and Thomas B. Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands: Pantón, Leslie & Company and John Forbes & Company, 1783-1847* (Pensacola, 1986); Pablo Tornero Tinajero, *Relaciones de dependencia entre Florida y Estados Unidos* (Seville, 1978).
 19. Ligia Castillo-Bermúdez, "The Situado: A Study in the Dynamics of East Florida's Economy during the Second Spanish Period, 1785-1812" (master's thesis, University of Florida, 1989).
 20. Jane G. Landers, *African American Life in Colonial Spanish Florida* (Urbana, IL, forthcoming); Landers, "Black Society in Spanish St. Augustine, 1784-1821" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Florida, 1988).

vidual bundles themselves— omissions that often were considerable. Of particular concern was the series of Notarized Instruments or Property Conveyances, the Escrituras (bundles 361-80). Two bundles from the original holdings of the Escrituras (370, 377) containing four years of documents (1795-1796, 1809-1810) are missing, although at one time the collection of Escrituras was complete and in United States possession.²¹ These records were part of the collection that American representatives certified having received from Juan de Entralgo in 1821. Included within this documentation were bundles for 1795-1796 and for 1809-1810.²² During the ensuing years, however, these two bundles apparently were lost as bundles 370 and 377 currently are not part of the Library of Congress collection. Gaps in the numerical sequence of the collection—bundles 381-84, 386-406, 413-87 are a few examples of missing legajos— suggest similar discrepancies, a process that Irene A. Wright diplomatically attributes to “attrition.”²³

The spiriting away of documents may not have been the exclusive province of North Americans, however. An examination of the Matrimonial Licenses (bundle 298R9) demonstrated that perhaps half of the documents are missing. This series ends abruptly without explanation with entries for May 1803, which suggests that the surviving bundle was the first of two or more bundles of marriage petitions required by law after 1778.²⁴ None of the missing documentation is held by the Library of Congress, and no evidence of these materials ever having been transferred to United States possession can be established, though similar registrations continued in Cuba throughout the nineteenth century.²⁵ Perhaps Governor Coppinger was successful in removing to Cuba some of the documentation he was charged with guard-

21. Notarized Instruments, bundles 361-80, EFP.

22. Papers on the Transfer of the Archives to the United States, November 5, 1821, bundle 488, EFP.

23. Johnson, “Report on Archival Investigations,” 4-5; Wright, “Odyssey of the Spanish Archives,” 200.

24. Richard Konezke, ed., *Colección de documentos para la historia de la formación social de Hispanoamérica, 1493-1810*, 3 vols. (Madrid, 1953-1962), III, 401, 406-13, 438-42. For Cuba, see Verena Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes and Sexual Values in a Slave Society* (Cambridge, 1974), 30-31, 96-99.

25. Johnson, “Report on Archival Investigations,” 6-7.

ing.²⁶ If such were the case, information about Florida's families and family networks may be available in collections in Havana. The noted Cuban historian Manuel Moreno Fraginals, however, believes such documents, if they do exist, will more likely be found in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, Spain.²⁷

In spite of certain gaps in the documentation, the collection of East Florida Papers is a unique and valuable resource for scholars of the Second Spanish Period.²⁸ Researchers may work with confidence that all materials held by the Library of Congress are duplicated on microfilm copies. Finding-guides to the microfilm and the original documents are valuable tools and can save many hours of documentary searching. In particular, the calendar compiled by archivists at the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History at the University of Florida is a superior research tool, and consulting either the original card catalogue or the microfilm copy on the first reel of film is recommended before initiating documentary research. Such vast documentation in original form or on microfilm awaits researchers and will contribute significantly to scholars' ability to interpret the role of Florida and the borderlands.

26. Norris, "The Squeeze," 125-33; Wright, "Odyssey of the Spanish Archives," 171-76.

27. Interview with Manuel Moreno Fraginals by the author, March 31, 1992, University of Florida. According to Bruce Chappell, much Florida material is in the Cuban Archivo Nacional in Havana. See Chappell, "Report on Archival Investigations in Cuba" (typescript, 1982), P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History.

28. Bruce S. Chappell, "Spanish Manuscripts of the Florida Borderlands in the P. K. Yonge Library," *Latinamericanist* 12 (March 1977), 4-5.