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Frank Marotti, Jr.

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EDWARD M. WANTON AND THE SETTLING OF MICANOPY

by FRANK MAROTTI, JR.

During the Second Spanish Period (1784-1821) and its early years as a United States territory, East Florida was rocked by violence, lawlessness, and uncertainty. Under Spain's weak, distracted rule, the province served as a haven for Indians, runaway slaves, and white adventurers seeking to profit from Madrid's crumbling imperial fortunes. Moreover, a young, ambitious United States coveted the region, both to bolster its national security and to provide new lands for its burgeoning citizenry. When the American regime finally established itself, however, it soon faced armed resistance from Seminole warriors.¹

Edward Mills Wanton's life in East Florida spanned this entire tumultuous era. Wanton, a white American loyalist who owned land and slaves, was considered a "notable" by the local Spanish community. Although his name appears in the correspondence of Andrew Jackson and John C. Calhoun, as well as in the annals of Congress and the Supreme Court, he left only a few letters for posterity. Like some of his prominent white contemporaries, he entered into a relationship with a free woman of color who bore him at least ten children. Wanton played an important role in opening modern Alachua County to settlers. After entering into negotiations with the Seminoles, he led a group of black pioneers to establish a settlement financed by Spaniards, Jews, and Americans. A study of Edward M. Wanton's life, besides illuminating living conditions in a stormy era of Florida history, offers glimpses of one of the fascinating individuals who punctuated the history of United States foreign relations. Finally, a biographical portrait of Wanton

Frank Marotti, Jr., is assistant professor of history, Cheyney University, Cheyney, Pennsylvania.

1. Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida*, rev. ed. (Coral Gables, 1980), 89.

provides insights into the daily lives of the women, free people of color, Indians, and slaves that shared in his triumphs and trials.²

The birth of the United States transformed Wanton into a refugee and a Spanish subject. Born between 1766 and 1769, Wanton probably fled from Charleston in 1782 after a British policy blunder set off a brutal civil war in South Carolina that sent 6,000 loyalists and their slaves to Florida. London rewarded these staunch crown supporters by retroceding the colony to Spain in the treaty that ended the American Revolution, a move that saddled East Florida with almost two years of plunder at the hands of angry white "bandits."

Hannah Moore and her sons Edward Wanton and William Harvey, after some initial indecision, opted to take their chances with the incoming Spaniards rather than face another refugee experience. Moore, a widow whose tragedies are mirrored in her boys' surnames, astutely perceived opportunity in this period of transition. Three miles from the abandoned estate that she was cultivating stood one of Francis Philip Fatio's plantations. Fatio was a Swiss immigrant who had risen to become one of East Florida's most prominent planters and had accumulated holdings that fueled Moore's ambitions. The proximity of her land to the powerful Fatio offered Moore security as well as economic advantages. She put down roots and prospered.³

The Spanish colony's newborn neighbor, with its hearty appetite for territory, posed a problem for the mother country. To stave off potential American advances, Madrid decided to promote pro-

2. Joseph Burkholder Smith, *The Plot to Steal Florida: James Madison's Phony War* (New York, 1983), 99; Richard H. Immerman, "Psychology," in "A Round Table: Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations," *Journal of American History* 77 (June 1990), 170.

3. Spanish Census, file 1, p. 48, file 2, p. 155, file 3, p. 70, file 4, p. 39, file 10, p. 243, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville; Robert Stansbury Lambert, *South Carolina Loyalists in the American Revolution* (Columbia, 1987), 183-84, 307; Wilbur Henry Siebert, *Loyalists in East Florida, 1774 to 1785: The Most Important Documents Pertaining Thereto, Edited with an Accompanying Narrative*, 2 vols. (Deland, 1929; reprint ed., Boston, 1972), II, 130, 139-41; James D. Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records of East and Middle Florida, 1789-1868," 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1930), II, 233; Jane L. Landers, "Black Society in Spanish St. Augustine, 1784-1821" (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1988), 46-47; Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 94; Conversation with Susan Parker, St. Augustine Historical Commission, March 8, 1994.

perity in Florida through trade and immigration. Moore cleverly incorporated this two-pronged strategy into her personal plans. Edward, her younger son, served as the family's mercantile connection, while the elder William, John Gray (her free mulatto overseer), and her thirteen slaves tilled the soil. Soon, with the assistance of a liberalized land policy in 1790, Moore procured 851 acres in two plots along the St. Johns River. Meanwhile, Wanton acquired commercial experience with men like Miguel Ysnardy, a government official and sea captain, and James Cashen, a merchant and slave trader. Ysnardy, the province's translator, exposed Wanton to diplomacy at an early age. He also was a well-connected businessman who held one of three special trading licenses issued by the Spanish government in East Florida. By 1798 Edward was a clerk with an international enterprise, Pantón, Leslie & Company.⁴

When Wanton joined Pantón, Leslie, he became part of a firm operating a fleet of ships that linked its Pensacola headquarters to London, Havana, Nassau, St. Augustine, Mobile, and New Orleans. The company had succeeded in parlaying the threat of American power into a commercial empire. Its founders, loyalist Scottish businessmen based in Charleston and Savannah, had fled to British Florida where they came to dominate the Indian trade. The Spaniards feared that England's departure might divert this commerce to the Americans, thus negating a crucial component of their scheme to maintain sovereignty. Realizing that only Pantón, Leslie could provide the requisite resources and expertise, the crown, for security purposes, awarded the British company a de facto monop-

4. Michael Gannon, *Florida: A Short History* (Gainesville, 1993), 26; Spanish Census, file 2, p. 155, file 3, p. 70, file 4, p. 39; Historical Records Survey, *Spanish Land Grants in Florida: Briefed Translations from the Archives of the Board of Commissioners for Ascertaining Claims and Titles to Land in the Territory of Florida*, 5 vols. (Tallahassee, 1940-1941), III, 222-23 (hereinafter, *Spanish Land Grants*); Spanish Wills, East Florida, 1784-1816, pp. 48-59, St. Johns County Courthouse, St. Augustine; Joseph Byrne Lackey, *East Florida, 1783-1785: A File of Documents Assembled and Many of Them Translated* (Berkeley, 1949), 295-96; Deposition Taken in the Case of Estate of James Cashen, box 9, Glunt Papers, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History; Deposition of Sarah Faulk et. al., Concerning Edward Wanton, May 30, 1811, in Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," I, 63; Conversation with Susan Parker, March 11, 1994.

oly over Florida's Indian trade—a most unusual exception to Spain's mercantile policy. As a result, between 1783 and 1795, the company made the Indians a human barrier to help protect the Spanish provinces from the United States. In the process of conducting its business, Pantón, Leslie acquired town lots, plantations, ranches, and huge tracts of land from the Indians.⁵

When Spain involved itself in warfare against England in 1797, Florida's Anglo residents came under suspicion. Pantón, Leslie's eighty employees, all Protestants, had to swear neither to hinder the Spanish war effort nor to assist Madrid's enemies. In these uncertain times, Edward M. Wanton took refuge in the company. John Forrester, the East Florida operations chief who had become one of the firm's partners, appointed Wanton to a salaried position in 1798. He served at Picolata or Six Mile Creek until raids by the adventurer William Augustus Bowles in 1801 resulted in his reassignment to a more secure area. Joseph Summerall became Wanton's new supervisor. Summerall, the superintendent of the company's cattle business, had Wanton assist him by weighing and delivering beef to the local garrison.⁶

During the month that the Peace of Amiens was signed, March 1802, Wanton left the company in order to "arrange for planting." On November 23, 1801, in exchange for an oath of fidelity and a promise to develop Florida land, Governor Enrique White granted him 750 acres. Wanton's tract fronted the St. Johns River at Picolata, a strategic crossing point and the site of an old Spanish fort. Like his mother, he claimed river-front acreage that bordered the holdings of a wealthy planter. His neighbor was the powerful cattle baron Manuel Solana. Evidence suggests that Wanton also ran his own trading business from 1802 to 1804.⁷

5. William S. Coker and Thomas D. Watson, *Indian Traders of the Southeastern Spanish Borderlands: Pantón, Leslie & Company and John Forbes & Company, 1783-1847* (Pensacola, 1986), x-xii, 23, 3435, 187, 366-69; Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 94-97; Gannon, *Florida: A Short History*, 26.

6. Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders*, 209, 212-13; Deposition of Sarah Faulk, in Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," I, 6.

7. Deposition of Sarah Faulk; *Spanish Land Grants*, V, 193; Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," I, 4; *Spanish Land Grants Confirmed*, T#1 Tate-W#10 Waterman, St. Augustine Historical Society.

Wanton's experience with the company had allowed him to develop further his business skills, especially those applicable to the Indians and stock raising. These would prove valuable in the future. Pantón, Leslie partners functioned as frontier financiers, diplomats, traders, landholders, planters, ranchers, slave owners, litigants in court, and community leaders. Florida's transfer to the United States later afforded Wanton the opportunity to play all of these roles, just like his betters in the firm.

Racial considerations increased Edward's commitment to Spain and further distanced him from the neighboring United States. At the time of Governor White's grant, Wanton was in his early thirties and had three young children. Margaret "Peggy" Saunders Gray had been married to his mother's overseer. She was the daughter of Alejandro Saunders, a white South Carolinian, and his slave Isabel. Peggy may have been the same "Margarita Saunders" who successfully sued her master for her freedom in a Spanish court. In East Florida, miscegenation was fairly common. Miguel Ysnardy, Wanton's first employer, and John Leslie, an original Pantón, Leslie partner, both fathered children of European and African descent, as did other prominent Floridians, including Francisco Xavier Sánchez, George J. F. Clarke, and Zephaniah Kingsley. These men passed on property as well as other advantages to their offspring. Spanish law and culture did not restrict socioeconomic and political opportunities for blacks as severely as did the Americans. Moreover, East Florida was a frontier area where race became a concept altered by wealth, behavior, and social connections, and where upward mobility occurred more often than in a major colonial center.⁸ Edward M. Wanton saw evidence all around him that his quadroon children could prosper in Florida.

8. Jane Landers to author, May 2, 1988, in author's possession. Dr. Landers generously provided valuable information on the Wantons from baptismal, burial, and census records (hereinafter, Landers Correspondence); Spanish Census, file 3, p. 70; Landers, "Black Society," viii, 61-62, 80, 92, 158, 181; Landers, "Francisco Xavier Sanchez: Floridano Planter," in *Spanish Pathways in Florida: 1492-1992/Los Caminos Espanoles en la Florida: 1492-1992* ed. Ann L. Henderson and Gary Mormino (Sarasota, 1991), 180, 184; Coker and Watson, *Indian Traders*, 46; Smith, *Plot to Steal Florida*, 103, 138-39; Rembert W. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco: Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida Border, 1810-1815* (Athens, 1954), 87-88; Civil Proceedings, Petition of Margarita Saunders, *East Florida Papers*, reel 1522, St. Augustine Historical Society.

Social connections were crucial to Wanton's mixed-race progeny, even in relatively tolerant East Florida. The Roman Catholic Church offered opportunities to form ritual kinships through the mechanism of *compadrazgo*. Two godparents or *padrinos*, typically people of higher social status who could be expected to assist the family, served as sponsors when a child was baptized. Except for his first two sons, all of Wanton's children had white Spanish godparents. His neighbors, the wealthy Solanos, often sponsored his offspring.⁹

Through *compadrazgo*, Wanton strengthened his ties to the Catholic Church and Spanish state. He also supported Spain's policy for holding Florida by developing a land grant in a province that desperately needed settlers. Moreover, he had worked for a trading company of great strategic importance. Margaret found a better life in Florida than in Charleston. Her children could hope to inherit land, slaves, and freedom. Unfortunately, Spain's days in Florida were numbered.

The United States had long coveted Florida for expansionist and security reasons. Particularly, neighboring Georgians longed for additional lands and an end to Seminole border raids. Planters greatly resented the Indians for another reason: their slaves increasingly fled into Florida to live in the maroon communities, which the Seminoles held in nominal servitude. National security planners, for their part, believed the peninsula controlled the Gulf of Mexico and Cuba. Trouble would result if Florida fell into British hands.¹⁰

On January 15, 1811, Congress authorized President James Madison to occupy East and West Florida by peaceful means if local authorities offered the provinces to him. In the event that a foreign nation moved to acquire these Spanish possessions, Madison was to use force. Greedy Georgians recruited by George Mathews invaded Florida on March 12, 1812. After some initial confusion, United States land and naval forces came to the aid of the Patriots. Never-

9. Landers, "Black Society," 25, 120-21; Landers Correspondence; Smith, *Plot to Steal Florida*, 147.

10. Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 104; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 31.

theless, East Florida's acting governor, Juan de Estrada, stood firm. The Americans were not powerful enough to capture St. Augustine's Castillo de San Marcos. By May the besiegers knew that only additional assistance from Washington would crown their efforts with success. For over a year, despite opposition in the Senate in 1812 and 1813, United States forces remained in East Florida, defying international law and Congress. In the interim President Madison stalled, hoping that either Spain would capitulate or that London would invade.¹¹

Edward M. Wanton's world again seemed to be collapsing around him because of American power, but he stayed loyal to his adopted Spanish sovereign. Peggy and his children, as free people of color, would fare poorly under American rule, especially since East Florida's new governor, Sebastián Kindelán, had arrived in St. Augustine on June 11 accompanied by a contingent of nearly 100 trained Negro colonials, a move that incensed the Patriot invaders.¹² Also, Wanton again faced the people who had caused his mother to flee from South Carolina some thirty years before.

The key to the balance of power in East Florida was the allegiance of the Indians, who were subjected to a barrage of diplomatic initiatives from the Spaniards and Americans. The invaders blundered by refusing one Seminole faction's offer of support and by threatening the Indians with obliteration if they should enter the conflict. This posture played into the Spaniards' hands, who maintained that the Patriots intended to usurp Seminole lands. Free blacks and "Indian negroes" in maroon communities proved essential to Spain's diplomacy. African Floridians did their best to win over the Seminoles, for they knew that their freedom depended upon the status quo. On July 26, 1812, the Indians swept across the St. Johns River, setting plantations aflame, cutting supply lines, and sending scores of Patriots scrambling back to Georgia. The struggle for East Florida had become a race war. By August 9 Governor Kindelán could rightfully claim that the siege of St. Augustine had been lifted without using Spanish troops.¹³

11. Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 104-08; George E. Buker, *Jacksonville: Riverport-Seaport* (Columbia, 1992), 28-29; Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 48-54, 71, 102, 107, 113, 120, 247-54, 303.

12. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 139, 141.

13. *Ibid.*, 125, 142-43, 154, 169, 173-94; Smith, *Plot to Steal Florida*, 211.

When the Patriots reached Picolata on March 23, 1812, where Wanton owned land, they probably found his property abandoned but intact. Acting Governor Estrada had ordered all loyal men to burn their estates and flee to St. Augustine. Many obeyed the second part of his command, but none followed the first. In early April the Patriots gave East Floridians ten days either to join them or have their property confiscated. Wanton's family, in all likelihood, sought refuge in St. Augustine. Meanwhile, Edward remained in the Picolata area conducting reconnaissance missions for the Spanish governor. He supplied information on American troop strength and naval movements. Wanton also relayed intelligence from Tony Proctor, a black emissary who sought the support of the Seminoles. On July 5, Edward accurately predicted that Seminole warriors would rally to Spain in approximately two weeks.¹⁴

By the time that the Americans withdrew in May 1813, East Florida lay in ruins. Residents who wished to get on with their lives found shortages of cattle, draft animals, farming implements, and seeds for planting. Within a year the province had fallen from relative prosperity to misery. In the areas near St. Augustine "anarchy reigned." Georgia robber bands, Indian raiders, smugglers, and slave traders operated with impunity.¹⁵ The dark days of 1784 had returned.

Worse still, the Patriots refused to accept defeat. In January 1814 they again crossed into Florida, aiming to establish a settlement in the Alachua country, an area from which the Indians recently had been driven. President Madison, however, flatly rejected their offer to turn their "District of Elotchaway of the Republic of East Florida" over to the United States. Afterward, the Seminoles destroyed the fledgling settlement. If the president had repudiated the Patriots in 1811 with such a "simple, direct, and unequivocal statement," East Florida would have been spared the mass destruction that it had suffered.¹⁶

14. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 102, 110, 185; Edward Wanton to Governor, July 5, 1812, Panton, Leslie & Company, *The Papers of Panton., Leslie & Company*, 26 reels (Woodbridge, CT, 1986), reel 18.

15. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco*, 266, 302-03.

16. *Ibid.*, 279-82.

The invasion likely rekindled in Wanton's mind powerful emotions connected with the American Revolution. Like Britain's policy blunder in South Carolina during that conflict, Madison's miscalculations in Florida brought ruin to his life. He and his family, which comprised thirteen free persons and ten slaves, suffered injury and loss. Wanton lost six slaves, 1,025 bushels of corn and rice, 2,000 pounds of cotton, cattle and hogs, and his crops of peas and potatoes. In addition, the Americans destroyed or plundered his home, a corn house, three canoes, plantation tools, household furniture, books, and sundry papers of importance. Wanton estimated that he incurred losses amounting to \$6,445. Moreover, the Patriots imprisoned him for his loyalty to Spain, using "very much hostility towards him, which he bore with resignation rather than be disloyal to the oath of Fidelity he had taken." He faced more trouble in July 1815 when American slave raiders kidnapped his eldest son Billy's black wife and children, after demolishing his property at Picolata in the process. Fortunately, Georgia cooperated with the Spanish authorities, and the family was returned.¹⁷

Now in his mid-forties, Edward once again faced the unenviable task of rebuilding his life. This time, unlike in the American Revolution, Wanton emerged a winner in warfare. That his victory was at the expense of the young nation, which had caused him so much pain, must have sweetened the bitterness of past defeats and present destruction. Wanton's brother, William Harvey, also fought for the Spaniards. In 1817 Hannah Moore's boys used their war records to obtain additional land grants, 300 acres for Wanton, and 200 for Harvey.¹⁸ The brothers, by successively using the machinery of the Spanish state and then American institutions, transformed the tragedy of the Patriot War into a legacy for their black heirs.

17. Statement under Oath which Don Edward Wanton made of the injuries caused me during the invasion of the year 1812, by the Rebels aided by the troops of the line of the United States of America, under General George Mathews, file MC 31-74, Patriot War Papers & Patriot War Claims, 1812-1846, St. Augustine Historical Society; Copy of a grant to Don Edward Wanton, in Edward Wanton Correspondence, 1791-1832, box 9, Glunt Papers; Robert Franklin Crider, "The Borderland Floridas, 1815-1821: Spanish Society Under Siege" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1979), 129; Spanish Land Grants Confirmed, T#1 Tate-W#10 Waterman.

18. *Spanish Land Grants*, II, 223, V, 192-193; Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 138.

By 1817 a host of East Floridians realized that Spain's tenuous grip on the province was slipping rapidly. To secure their positions under American rule, they rushed to solicit land and were generously obliged by Governor José Coppinger. Fernando de la Maza Arredondo, East Florida's Indian commissioner for over two decades and an extremely influential businessman who had served the king for years at his own expense, was awarded 289,645 acres on December 22, 1817. He was required to commence the settlement of 200 Spanish families on this grant within three years. Arredondo's grant stood in the midst of the fertile Alachua territory, the same land from which the Seminoles had expelled the Patriots in 1814. Whites had coveted Alachua since the seventeenth century. Despite its apparent abandonment by the Indians, however, the crown stipulated that Arredondo's settlement could not violate Seminole rights. The latter, angered that the Spaniards were powerless to halt Andrew Jackson's punitive raid on Indian lands in 1818, were in no mood to negotiate with Spanish settlers. In fact, no Spaniard dared cross the St. Johns River above Buena Vista.¹⁹ Arredondo's potential bonanza and the need for delicate diplomacy to secure it would radically shift the course of Edward Wanton's life.

In February 1819 Spain ceded East and West Florida to the United States. More than two years passed, however, before the official exchange of flags, thus leaving Wanton in yet another transitional period. On his land near Picolata, he busied himself, his family, and his slaves by building houses and a well. He also raised cattle and hogs. The road to St. Augustine ran diagonally across the east end of his acreage, which fronted the St. Johns River at the strategic crossing point.²⁰ Perhaps he could emulate his mother, who had transformed the previous transitional period into family gains.

19. Crider, "Borderland Floridas," 58-61, 261, 290, 361; *Spanish Land Grants*, II, xvi, 43, 47; Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," II, 225-26; *United States v Arredondo*, 8 LEd 547 (1832); Amy Turner Bushnell, "Tomás Menéndez Marquez: Cariollo Cattleman and Contador," in *Spanish Pathways in Florida*, 118-39; Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 151-52.

20. *Spanish Land Grants*, III, 199-201; Allen Morris, *Florida Place Names* (Coral Gables, 1974), 122.

As fate would have it, serious illness in early 1820 moved Wanton to prepare his last will and testament. In this document he claimed to be the legitimate son of Philip and Hannah Mills. Earlier, in 1798, at the baptism of his son John, he had stated that his parents were John Wanton and Hannah Mills. After professing his belief in the tenets of Catholicism and expressing his desire to be buried in the parish cemetery in St. Augustine, he arranged for three masses to be said for his soul. Then, Wanton declared that he was a bachelor who had fathered ten children by a free mulatto named Peggy. He formally recognized these children as his "sole and universal heirs." All would share equally in his patrimony, and Peggy's offspring would be expected to provide for her. Wanton's slaves, stolen in 1813, still remained in Georgia. He especially was concerned about the fate of a mulatto named Phillis, who Wanton had freed before Georgia slave raiders kidnapped her. Don Eduardo hoped ultimately to secure her liberty by formally pronouncing her free and manumitted. He owned 1,400 acres at this time, but he had made arrangements to sell 400 of them to Lewis Guibert for 1,200 pesos.²¹

By the end of the year he had rebounded from his illness and was ready to follow his mother's example of turning adversity into opportunity. On December 16, 1820, opportunity arrived in the person of Horatio S. Dexter. Dexter, like Arredondo, was one of twelve St. Augustine merchants who enjoyed an influential place in the city. Dexter owned a plantation along the St. Johns at Volusia, speculated in Florida land, and engaged in commerce with the Seminoles. In August, Peter Mitchel, one of Arredondo's partners, had asked him to "undertake the formation of a settlement in Alachua." Dexter's first priority was to secure the approval of the Seminole Indians. Accordingly, he called on Wanton, whose Pantan, Leslie experience and Patriot War activities had prepared him well for Indian diplomacy, a talent that Dexter shared. He also needed Wanton to counteract the negative influence of some "old Indian traders." Wanton's charming, smooth-talking visitor enticed him, for on the same day he traveled to Volusia and agreed with Horatio S. Dexter to settle in Alachua.²²

21. Edward Wanton, Will, April 5, 1820, *Escrituras 1820*, *East Florida Papers*, reel 168, pp. 71-76.

22. *Spanish Land Grants*, II, 94, 98; Crider, "Borderland Floridas," 36, United States Congress, *American State Papers: Public Lands*, 8 vols. (Washington, 1832-1861),

Evidently, Dexter previously had obtained Indian title to land in another grant, so he was confident that he could work the same arrangements for Arredondo. The frontier diplomats based their hopes on their friendship with the deceased King Hijah, whose son John Hicks was an important Seminole leader. Dexter and Wanton wisely employed Tony Proctor, the free black who had worked successfully with Wanton in the Patriot War, as an interpreter.²³

In late 1820 or early 1821 Wanton received "tacit approval" for a settlement, but he remained cautious and advised in April that no other white should join him in Alachua. Wanton believed that the key to the Alachua enterprise's success was the Seminoles' opinion of him. The Indians were afraid that other settlers would follow Wanton and demand the same treatment accorded to him. Thus, for the moment, Wanton and his eldest son Billy, with some slaves, hacked out a settlement deep in Indian territory.²⁴

Despite the imminent American takeover, the Seminoles were not as anxious as their Spanish overlords to engage in a land giveaway. A series of meetings with the whites did little to allay their fears. In late May 1821, at Dexter's Volusia plantation, the Indians wondered how the king could alienate their land without their permission. If he had the power to do this, had he also given away their cattle and slaves as some whites claimed? Correctly suspecting that their removal from Florida was being contemplated, they categorically refused to cooperate in any land deal. Dexter and Wanton warned the Seminoles to disregard any who attempted to cheat them. They then advised the Indians to send representatives to

IV, 371; Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," II, 228; Horatio S. Dexter, *About the Settlement at Alachua*, December 3, 1820, in Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," I, 91-92.

23. "Excerpts From the Diary of John Banks," in James R. McGovern, ed., *Andrew Jackson and Pensacola*, 2 vols. (Pensacola, 1974), II, 23; John W. Griffin, ed., "Some Comments on the Seminole in 1818," *Florida Anthropologist* 9 (December 1956), 41-47; "Excerpts From the Topographical Memoir of East and West Florida with Itineraries," in McGovern, ed., *Andrew Jackson and Pensacola*, II, 26; Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," I, 79; Agreement of Horatio S. Dexter and Edward Wanton, with Tony Proctor, February 10, 1821, and to Fernando de La Maza Arredondo and Francis P. Sanchez in handwriting of Dexter, March 16, 1821, in Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," I, 93, 96-98.

24. Edward M. Wanton to James Riz, April 19, 1821, in Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," I, 103-04; *Spanish Land Grants*, II, 77, 98, 102.

Washington. The chiefs responded by empowering Dexter and Wanton.²⁵

Both the Indians and the Arredondo agents realized that American rule would flood the Alachua region with settlers. The Seminoles found themselves in a tenuous position, as the Spaniards could no longer provide a haven for them. Under the circumstances, their only white supporters were the Arredondo people, who might serve as valuable intermediaries with their enemy Andrew Jackson, the incoming governor. Moreover, Wanton and Dexter could moderate the effects of the inevitable Alachua land rush while at the same time possibly forestalling their removal from Florida. In addition, Wanton constructed a stone house in order to trade with the Indians. His companions were blacks, and the Seminoles were accustomed to maroon communities living amongst them. For their part, the Arredondo associates knew that if they did not settle Alachua, the Georgians would.²⁶ They strove, therefore, to obtain legal agreements to stymie American squatters. Politics had made bedfellows of the Indians and Arredondo.

Wanton must have been ecstatic. Like his former employers at Pantan, Leslie, he could now prosper by making himself indispensable as an Indian agent. On August 12, 1821, Dexter and Wanton offered their services to the territory of Florida. Acting Provisional Governor Captain John Bell, citing the specter of war and the need for diplomats "qualified and acquainted with the Indian character," relayed their offer to Andrew Jackson. Jackson, however, was not impressed. He wanted the Seminoles removed from Florida. Furthermore, Jackson harbored a deep resentment toward Spaniards and Indian traders—groups he held responsible for inciting frontier tribes to anti-American violence. Jackson also suspected that hundreds of Spanish land grants were fraudulent.²⁷

25. Thomas Murphy to Fernando de La Maza Arredondo, March 24, 1821, Murphy to Peter Mitchel, April 30, 1821, in Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," I, 94, 96, see also 81; *Spanish Land Grants*, II, 92; United States Congress, *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1832-1834), II, 913.

26. Horatio S. Dexter to Fernando de La Maza Arredondo, April 19, 1821 in Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," I, 102; *Spanish Land Grants*, II, 77, 101-02.

27. United States Congress, *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, II, 911-12; John S. Bassett, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (Garden City, NJ, 1911; reprint, Hamden, CT, 1967), 77, 301; Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1966), 62-63, 82; Clarence E. Carter, ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, 28 vols. (Washington, DC, 1934-1969), *Florida Territory*, XXII, 212-13 (hereinafter, *Territorial Papers*).

On September 17, 1821, Jackson excoriated Dexter and Wanton in a letter to Secretary of War John C. Calhoun. He informed Calhoun of an "unauthorized talk" by "self-made Indian agents" with "what they are pleased to call the King of the Seminoles." Dexter and Wanton only aimed to "obtrude themselves on the notice of the Government; and, secondarily to impress on the minds of the Indians *their absolute right to the country*." Jackson consequently ordered their arrest. In this and subsequent letters Jackson added that Dexter and Wanton were reputed to be "profligate characters" who intended to bamboozle the Indians, promote a fraudulent land grant, and jeopardize the "safety of our frontier" by preventing the white settlement of Florida. Jackson's diatribes convinced Calhoun that Dexter and Wanton were indeed "unprincipled individuals" attempting to "fleece" the Seminoles, who he termed "poor ignorant creatures."²⁸

Ironically, Indian relations had deteriorated so greatly that the territorial government felt compelled to avail itself of Dexter's services, despite opposition from Jackson and Calhoun. Dexter's empathetic and perceptive reports on Seminole life and the Florida interior were written with descriptive power, literary style, and "positive genius." He assembled the Indians at Moultrie Creek, near St. Augustine, where a treaty was signed on September 18, 1823. Meanwhile, Wanton devoted himself to the Alachua grant and oversaw the wilderness operation. Supplies were forwarded to him and traded with the Indians for livestock, such as "horses, negroes, cattle and hogs." These were used for the settlement and, in effect, made the Seminoles partners in the enterprise. Wanton also erected buildings, dug wells, placated the Indians, forwarded monthly reports, and assisted surveyors. For his efforts he received 1,667 acres and a yearly salary of \$500.²⁹

28. United States Congress, *American State Papers: Miscellaneous*, II, 911-12.

29. Mark F. Boyd, "Horatio S. Dexter and Events Leading to the Treaty of Moultrie Creek with the Seminole Indians," *Florida Anthropologist* 11 (September 1958), 65-95; *Territorial Papers*, XXII, 681, 697, 721; United States Congress, *American State Papers: Indian Affairs*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1832-1834), II, 432; Articles of Agreement Between Edward M. Wanton, Horatio S. Dexter, and Thomas Murphy, April 6, 1821, and Thomas Murphy to Edward M. Wanton, February 25, 1822, in Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," I, 99-100, 117-19, see also II, 229; *Spanish Land Grants*, II, 95, 99, 101, 103.

Like his former employers at Panton, Leslie, he played the roles of trader, diplomat, community leader, and landholder. Moreover, he again was associated with an international undertaking involving some of East Florida's most wealthy and powerful men, persons who could furnish security and opportunity under the new American regime. Rich lands were now his and additional patrimony for his free, mulatto children— an important consideration for a man over fifty years of age. The Alachua settlers were not the detested Georgians who had invaded Florida in 1812 and kidnapped his grandchildren in 1815, but were instead a mixed community of Jews, free blacks, Europeans, and migrants from the New York-New Jersey area.³⁰ Within his own limited sphere, Edward M. Wanton was a man of influence.

The Alachua settlement progressed steadily under Wanton's supervision. Dexter, Billy, and he initially needed sixteen horses to transport supplies to the wilderness. By March 1821 two houses had been built using slave labor. To facilitate transportation, Orange Lake Creek was cleared, thus connecting Alachua to the St. Johns River. Wanton was the sole white inhabitant. A year later slave quarters, Wanton's house, a kitchen, a corn house, an Indian trading store, a "lodging house," and a "large log-house" enabled his family to join him. When they arrived, they cleared and cultivated land and erected more buildings. Wanton traded with the Indians for a large quantity of horses, cattle, and hogs, as well as for small amounts of animal skins and wax. The entire settlement consisted of fourteen or fifteen persons.³¹ Because it was largely a black community, the Seminoles could tolerate it.

In February 1823 the settlement expanded greatly. One of Arredondo's associates, Moses Elias Levy, a Jew whose father had been a Moroccan high official and whose son David would later serve in the United States Senate, had met with Frederick S. Warburg— possibly of the famed banking family— in London regarding a Florida settlement. Warburg then recruited settlers in Germany and France on Levy's behalf. In December 1822 Europeans and a group of tradesmen from the Florida Association, which had purchased Alachua land from Arredondo partner and New

30. *Spanish Land Grants*, II, 88, 96-97, 103-10; Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 198.

31. *Spanish Land Grants*, II, 94, 98-99, 101-02.

York politician Jasper Ward, reached the St. Johns River by schooner. The party, twenty-two persons including slaves, proceeded to cut a road for "wheel carriages" from Picolata to "Wanton's," forty-five miles to the west. Along the way they built eight bridges. At Wanton's they found thirteen houses. After several months twelve more were completed, and ten others were nearly finished. The settlers also began construction of a water sawmill, established three plantations, and cleared 800 acres, of which 200 were under cultivation. Fifty inhabitants, eighteen of whom were blacks, lived at Alachua. By October 1824 the Arredondo Grant contained 200 residents and twenty farms. Wanton's quadroon son Billy purchased 100 acres of Alachua land in the same year.³²

American rule seemed to be boosting Wanton's fortunes. The Treaty of Moultrie Creek had assigned the Seminoles to a reservation south of the Alachua country, freeing it for a white influx. In November 1824 Governor William P. DuVal appointed Arredondo partner Peter Mitchel to the Florida Territorial Council. Moses Levy became one of the area's richest men. His plantation stood less than three miles from Wanton's. When Alachua County was organized in 1824, Wanton's home was designated as the temporary county seat. In February 1825 elections were held there to select the commissioners who would choose a permanent seat. Circuit riders regularly preached at Wanton's, where a post office had opened in 1826. When the Florida Territorial Council became elective in that year, Wanton served as an election judge, and his home was the precinct polling place. New roads linked the settlement to Tampa Bay and Black Creek (in present-day Clay County), making Wanton's a crossroads village.³³

Edward took advantage of American judicial and legislative institutions to consolidate his gains. His grants from former Spanish Governors White and Coppinger were confirmed by a federally mandated land commission. In May 1824 the Superior Court of

32. Glunt, "Plantation and Frontier Records," II, 237; *Spanish Land Grants*, II, 87-88, 93-99, 102; Caroline E. Watkins, *The Story of Historic Micanopy* (Gainesville, 1976), 26; Deed Book E, pp. 132-33, St. Johns County Courthouse, St. Augustine.

33. Fritz W. Buchholz, *History of Alachua County, Florida: Narrative and Biographical* (St. Augustine, 1929), 49-59, 76-77; Watkins, *Story of Historic Micanopy*, 33-35, 67; *Territorial Papers*, XXIV, 428-30, 783-85; Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 138.

East Florida awarded him \$800 and 1,667 acres for services rendered to the Arredondo partners from 1822-1823. Wanton and Dexter resorted to the courts because Jasper Ward had delayed paying his share of their contracts. In 1826 Wanton was among those East Floridians petitioning Congress under Article 9 of the treaty of cession for compensation for damages incurred during the Patriot War. He breathed a sigh of relief in 1832 when the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Arredondo Grant was valid.³⁴ Now his ownership of Alachua land was confirmed.

At the same time, however, the stage was being set for the destruction of all that Wanton recently had attained. The Indians' dissatisfaction with the reservation lands designated for them at Moultrie Creek led to a modified arrangement—the Treaty of Payne's Landing. Friction between the Seminoles and the settlers proliferated until 1835 when the Florida frontier erupted in the Second Seminole War, the lengthiest and most costly Indian war in America's history.³⁵

In February 1823 the Seminoles so respected Wanton that they supplied him with abundant game. They had been his friends since his Pantan, Leslie days and had asked him to settle among them—a rarity for a people who were “very jealous of the neighborhood of the whites.” Still, they did not wish to countenance the arrival of other whites in Alachua. Early in 1823 a disaffected Dexter and approximately a dozen Indians, some of them chiefs, came to Wanton's to burn the settlement. Wanton convinced them to leave peacefully. The Seminoles concluded that since they “had given him permission to stay they would not ask him to go, but as soon as he left the others would have to leave.”³⁶

34. *Spanish Land Grants*, V, 192-95; Award of Superior Court in the Case of Horatio Dexter and Edward Wanton vs. the Alachua Proprietors, May 15, 1824, Edward M. Wanton to Horatio S. Dexter and Thomas Murphy, April 7, 1822, Murphy to Dexter, April 25, 1823, in Glunt, “Plantation and Frontier Records,” I, 120-22, 132-34; Memorial of Spanish Subjects Resident in East Florida Previous to Cession of that Province to the United States, July 14, 1826, 23rd Cong., 1st sess. H.R. 368; Smith, *Plot to Steal Florida*, 289; *United States v Arredondo*.

35. Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 155-60, 168; Gannon, *Florida: A Short History*, 32.

36. William Hayne Simmons, *Notices of East Florida: A Facsimile Reproduction of the 1822 Edition. with Introduction and Index by George E. Buker* (Gainesville, 1973), 49; *Spanish Land Grants*, II, 77, 95.

Three years later Governor DuVal decried the poverty and inadequacy of the Seminole reservation. Wanton also commented on the disturbed state of the Indians. In 1829 he was one of several petitioners who requested troops, arms, and ammunition to protect the settlement from increasingly hostile warriors. During the same year, to make matters worse, the territorial legislature tightened its manumission laws and required all freedmen to leave Florida within thirty days. Hardening racial lines foreshadowed bleak times for Wanton's family. By 1832 Alachua settlers expressed fears that their slaves would flee to the Seminoles. Moreover, Indians defiantly roamed the county at will.³⁷

Wanton's financial and physical well-being also slipped at this time. At the end of 1829 he was forced to sell a tract of 200 acres located at Picolata in order to pay his St. Johns County taxes. In 1831 he asked the Seminoles to reimburse him for Hector, a slave he had purchased from them a decade earlier. Hector's female owner had died before he could be delivered, and her family decided to retain him. Wanton consented, on condition that the purchase price be refunded with interest. Ten years later, Hector still lived among the Seminoles, though they admitted the validity of Wanton's claim against them. Hector's masters could not pay Wanton unless the money was deducted from federal annuity funds reserved for the Seminole nation. The Indians also owed Wanton an additional sum for merchandise sold to them on credit; however, the debtors were either dead or absent from Florida.³⁸

In desperation Wanton appealed to the Seminoles' new American agent, John Phagan, hoping that he, unlike his predecessor Gad Humphreys, would remedy the situation. Phagan sympathized with Wanton and noted that he was in "great distress," having been confined to his bed for over three years. Governor DuVal, who had known Wanton for many years, agreed with Phagan. He forwarded the appeal to Secretary of War Lewis Cass, who delegated the case to Elbert Herring at the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Herring replied that the matter was one for Congress not the Bureau, but he would

37. Watkins, *Story of Historic Micanopy*, 15; *Territorial Papers*, XXIV, 284-87, 644-45; Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 129.

38. St. Augustine *East Florida Herald*, December 16, 1829; Edward M. Wanton to John Phagan, December 21, 1831, box 9, Edward Wanton Correspondence.

ask Phagan to use his influence either to deliver Hector to Wanton or to obtain payment from the Seminole annuity.³⁹

The United States was exerting tremendous pressure on the Seminoles to vacate Florida by January 1, 1836. On December 17 and 18, 1835, the Indians responded by plundering two Alachua plantations and fighting a pitched battle in which eight whites died. The village of Micanopy, formerly called Wanton's, was located only six miles from the fighting. In August 1836 reports of approaching warriors forced Wanton and other settlers to move into the fort erected at Micanopy. He took with him household furniture, boxes of dry goods, and medicine from his small trading business.⁴⁰

After Wanton moved into the fort, soldiers occupied his property. On August 24, 1836, the garrison's commanding officer, Major B. K. Pierce, ordered an evacuation. Pierce had only enough horses and wagons to transport the sick and some public property. Wanton, who was chronically ill, left in a small wagon with nothing except a few pieces of furniture, bedding, and clothing. The evacuees proceeded a few hundred yards from the fort and halted. Major Pierce then ordered his troops to burn the fort and the village in order to prevent them from falling into the hands of the Seminoles. Wanton lost his buildings, merchandise, a great quantity of furniture, kitchen utensils, tools, and farming implements. In addition, the soldiers destroyed ten barrels of molasses, three cases of sugar—each weighing 1,000 pounds—and a pair of hand millstones. Wanton estimated his losses at \$1,812.50. The refugees moved to Fort Heileman near Garey's Ferry on Black Creek.⁴¹

One can easily imagine the memories that flooded Wanton's mind as he watched his dreams go up in flames. He was nearly seventy now. As in the American Revolution and the Patriot War, United States troops had destroyed his possessions. Conflict sparked by the expanding nation had transformed him into a refugee once again. Wanton was left with few material assets. Only his

39. William Pope DuVal to Lewis Cass, May 26, 1832, Elbert Herring to DuVal, June 1, 1832, in Edward Wanton Correspondence.

40. Tebeau, *History of Florida*, 159-60; James Edwards of St. Augustine, Administrator of Estate of Edward M. Wanton (synopsis of memorial), April 6, 1846, 29th Cong., 1st sess., H.R. 556.

41. James Edwards of St. Augustine, Administrator of Estate of Edward M. Wanton.

land remained in Alachua. He had sold most of his holdings obtained under Governors White and Copping to Lewis Guibert in 1820, James Riz in 1823, and Francis Avice, Zephaniah Kingsley, and Ralph King in 1834. Other St. Johns County acreage had been alienated in order to pay taxes. Also, on May 16, 1834, by means of a "deed of gifts," he had transferred twenty-five acres to his eldest son Billy. This tract was the kernel of the family fortune, having originally been granted to Hannah Moore in 1791.⁴²

Wanton's new home, Garey's Ferry, was an important trading center during the Seminole War. Its log buildings formed a small village around Fort Heileman, which consisted of a temporary wooden stockade, a quartermaster workshop, and a stage depot. Black Creek linked Garey's Ferry to the St. Johns River. Other points in the territory were accessible by land. This location afforded a man with Wanton's mercantile experience and connections a chance to start over. He hired out one of the three slaves. He also seems to have carried on business with the assistance of his former Alachua neighbors and old Spanish families, such as his compadres the Solanas. Wanton's land in Alachua County and his brother William Harvey's St. Johns County holdings were also assets. In addition, Wanton was pressing one claim against the United States for depredations that its military had committed in 1812-1813 and another for burning his Micanopy property.⁴³ He would again use his physical location, commercial expertise, social ties, land, and American institutions to rise from the ashes of war.

Edward Mills Wanton died in 1839. Had he lived until 1840 he could have returned to Micanopy with his fellow settlers. Wanton's goods were valued at \$7,051. He was "in the black" despite the panic of 1837 and its accompanying depression. More than half of his estate stemmed from the \$4,000 award from the United States for his Patriot War losses. Wanton never saw this money, but it was collected shortly after his passing. Another \$2,000 came from the

42. *Spanish Land Grants*, III, 199-201; St. Johns County List of Taxable Property, 1835, 1846, Deed Book K, p. 341, St. Augustine Historical Society; Deed Book C, p. 74, Deed Book K, pp. 295,300, Deed Book L, p. 30, St. Johns County Courthouse.

43. Morris, *Florida Place Names*, 103; Floyd E. Boone, *Florida Historical Markers & Sites: A Guide to More Than 700 Historic Sites: Includes the Complete Text of Each Marker* (Houston, 1989), 63; In Re Estate of Edward M. Wanton, Dec'd, file 2190, Duval County Probate Packets, Florida State Archives.

value of his slaves and their wages. A gold watch and debts owed to the estate amounted to another \$1,000.

In 1849 the Circuit Court of Eastern Florida fully confirmed Wanton's tracts within the Arredondo Grant. Five years later, in 1854, Congress awarded the Wanton estate \$1,812.50 for the destruction of his Micanopy property. His surviving free mulatto children— William, Charles, Edward, Hannah, and Phillip— inherited his land, money, and slaves, along with his brother William Harvey's holdings. James Edwards, an early Alachua settler from England who became a prominent planter, administered the estate.⁴⁴

Wanton's free, colored descendants faced a racist American regime that increasingly viewed them as a threat. They occupied a tenuous position between white and black. Their father had lived his entire life within a cultural minority in the South Carolina low country, in Spanish Florida, and in the United States territory of Florida. The Wanton heirs, as free, landholding, African-American slave owners living in the rural South, also found themselves members of a tiny minority. Nevertheless, they survived and maintained their family ties, managing to retain their patrimony under the Confederacy and Jim Crow. In 1877 Philip Wanton, after selling some of the land he had inherited from his uncle William Harvey, stipulated that the new owners must construct a marble-floored brick tomb large enough to accommodate all of the family remains buried on the tract. When Philip died in 1880 he passed the Wanton-Harvey estate to his daughters Nancy and Margaret. They remembered their grandfather Edward as a British native— perhaps a reflection of family tales of his Loyalist sympathies. On November 1, 1919, Philip's last daughter, Nancy, passed away. She willed her land to the children of her sister Margaret. Margaret Wanton Anderson, named after her grandmother Margaret "Peggy" Saun-

44. James Edwards of St. Augustine, Administrator of Estate of Edward M. Wanton; In Re Estate of Edward M. Wanton, Dec'd; Act for Relief of James Edwards and Others, in *Statutes at Large* 10 (1855), 801; "Alachua County Tax Rolls, 1846," *Florida Genealogist* 3 (Winter 1979-1980), 39; St. Johns County Probate Records, 1784-1933, Records of Wills and Letters of Administration, 1866, Order Book A, pp. 389-92, St. Johns County Courthouse; Bureau of the Census, *Tenth United States Census, 1880*, Florida, schedule 5, "Persons Who Died During the Year Ending May 31, 1880," 60; Copy of a Statement Written by Julia Edwards in 1885 concerning her father James Edwards of Micanopy, box 51, Julia Edwards Manuscripts Collection, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History.

ders, had christened her eldest son "William," just as her great-grandmother Hannah Moore had done over a century before.⁴⁵

Edward Wanton, to be sure, suffered at the hands of the United States, whose power in the American Revolution, the Patriot War, and the Seminole War adversely affected him. To survive he employed coping strategies that utilized the very institutions of the state that so frequently uprooted him. His activities in Spanish East Florida as a planter, diplomat, trader, clerk, and soldier strengthened the province and helped to hold the Americans at bay temporarily. When Georgians invaded in 1812-1813, he rallied to the defense of his Spanish sovereign. Later, when the United States takeover occurred, he wrested monetary compensation from the new regime and exploited its judicial and legislative systems in order to obtain material advantages.

Wanton also made his share of contributions to the establishment of United States institutions in Florida. He played a major role in opening a rich area to American settlement. Moreover, when the seeds of democratic government were sown in Alachua County, Wanton's home nurtured them. Indeed, Micanopy and Alachua County can trace their modern roots to black pioneers, led by Edward Mills Wanton, who paved the way for the establishment of a multicultural community of Africans, Americans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, Jews, and Spaniards in the wilderness of north-central Florida.

45. Gerald N. Grob and George Athan Billias, eds., *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives*, 6th ed., 2 vols. (New York, 1992), I, 127; Florida Census, Putnam County, 1860, 599, St. Johns County, 1870, 604, St. Johns County, 1880, 12; Bureau of the Census, *Tenth United States Census, 1880*, Florida, schedule 5, "Persons Who Died During the Year Ending May 31, 1880," 680; Tax Rolls, Marion County, 1845, Alachua County, 1846, St. Johns County, 1860, Florida State Archives; St. Johns County Circuit Court, box 111, fol. 31, St. Augustine Historical Society; Deed Book X, p. 9, St. Johns County Probate File, case no. C5154, St. Johns County Courthouse; Deed Book A, p. 317, Alachua County Courthouse, Gainesville; Daniel L. Schafer, "A class of people neither freemen nor slaves": From Spanish to American Race Relations in Florida, 1821-1861," *Journal of Social History* 26 (Spring 1993), 587-609.