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THE DEPARTURE OF THE SPANIARDS AND
OTHER GROUPS FROM EAST FLORIDA,
1763-1764¹

By WILBUR H. SIEBERT

The departure of the Spaniards, their dependents, and other inhabitants from East Florida when the British took over the two Floridas in 1763 began on April 12 when three schooners sailed from St. Augustine for Havana. Sixteen vessels left in August, two or more of them for Apalachee, including an English packet boat and the English sloop *Hawk*, one sloop left in September, a French sloop and six other vessels in October, two in November, including a French sloop, an English brigantine, an English sloop, and four other vessels in December. With one sloop on January 8, 1764 and eight vessels on the following day, the sailings were completed.

The troops which were removed—most of them to Havana—were as follows: two hundred and thirty-five Infantry, officers and men; ninety officers and men of the Mountain Fusileers; fifty-two officers and men of the Mounted Dragoons; thirty-nine Foot Dragoons, including the officers; eighty-five officers and men of the Militia; thirty-nine officers and men of the Artillery; and eleven free colored soldiers, four of whom were officers.

These colored soldiers had undoubtedly been on duty at the little town of Gracia Real de Mose, two and a half miles north of St. Augustine, which had a small fort and also a beneficed parish priest by

1. This account is derived from Governor Melchor Feliu's letter of Apr. 16, 1764, to Minister Julian de Arriaga, Enclosure No. 2—Persons Evacuated from San Augustin de la Florida, and a letter of Feb. 12, 1765, from the Royal Officials of Havana to Arriaga. See the author's *How the Spaniards Evacuated Pensacola in 1763*, in this *Quarterly*, October 1932.

the name of Don August de Rezio. The older people of the town had been fugitive slaves from Georgia and South Carolina. From 1733 such persons had been resorting to St. Augustine and had been ordered liberated by a royal decree of that year. However, they seem to have remained in bondage until March 1738 when Governor Montiano freed them in response to a petition from some of them. By his order they colonized at the site of the Pueblo da Gracia Real de Mose, where plots of land were laid out for them, and there other colored refugees settled from time to time. They were instructed in Catholic doctrine and good customs by the Rev. Josef de Leon. In 1756 the men of the little town were organized into a military company with their own officers, and a square sod fort was built with a battery of four guns for them to garrison and defend. This defensive work was commonly called the "Negro Fort." Governor Don Alonso Fernandez de Hereda was responsible for its erection and the formation of its company.²

At the time of the evacuation of East Florida by the Spaniards the civil population of the pueblo evidently consisted of eight-seven free colored persons, of whom thirty-one were men, thirty-four, women, and their twenty-two children. They and their priest all sailed away to Havana.

Another group of settlers in the presidio, but which was assigned to a district a little west of St. Augustine, was the Canary Islanders, who totaled two hundred and forty-six persons, their men numbering forty-nine, and their women fifty-six. There were also sixty-three Catalans, who, as their name shows, had come from Catalonia in northeastern Spain. Of these there were thirty-six women and

2. *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, July 1931 pp. 3-5.

twenty-seven children. The group of Germans was small numbering only twenty-four, with six men seven women and eleven children. Still another racial group was Indians. It comprised eighty-three persons, of whom fourteen were men, thirty-two women, and thirty-seven children. Only twenty of the group were called Christians.

Before speaking of the large and dominant Spanish population I wish to speak of the slaves, most of whom were negroes and a few of them mulattoes and all of whom, numbering three hundred and three, left the presidio with their masters. It is clear that the royal edict of emancipation of 1733 was no longer enforced in East Florida. Of the slaves the men numbered one hundred and two, eight of these being mentioned as the property of the King and four others as being mulattoes. Of the eighty-nine women slaves five were mulattoes. Four of the sixty-five slave boys and six of the forty-seven slave girls were also of the lighter color.

This completes the list of the various racial groups except the Spaniards themselves who took part in the exodus. Apart from the various military companies already mentioned, we catch only glimpses of the occupation of a few of the other male inhabitants in the report before us. The presidio of St. Augustine had only four seamen, and only four pilots to bring vessels in over the treacherous bar at the entrance to the harbor. It had two river guards and a master calker, who doubtless called on the pilots, seamen, and others to help him when he must careen a vessel on shore to stop the leaks in the bottom before it could leave port. The old stone fort at the north end of the town had its chief adjutant, who was Don Francisco Ponze; its second adjutant major, who was Don Pedro Balenzuela; and its chief sergeant, who was Captain Don

Alonzo de Cardenas. The fort and the other royal buildings were under the supervision and care of the overseer thereof, Don Luis Marquez Pacheco, and the chief master mason, Juan Perez, who were assisted by three engineers, Captain Don Pedro de Brozas Garay, engineer in ordinary, Captain Don Juan de Cotilla, another engineer in ordinary, and Don Pablo Castello, a volunteer engineer. The physician of the presidio was Don Francisco Baraza and its surgeon, Don Juan Bignon, while the comptroller of the royal hospital was Don Pedro Horruitiner y Pueyo. The chief customs guard was Don Antonio Fernandes, the chief officer of the royal accountancy was Don Juan Joseph Elixio de la Puente, and the notary of government and of the royal treasury was Don Joseph de Leon. There was an interpreter of Indian languages, but he is not named. The benefited priest of the parish church was Don Juan Joseph Solano, and the lieutenant of its main sacristy was Don Simon de Hita. Our list must conclude with Señor Don Melchor Feliu, lieutenant colonel of the second battalion of the Regiment of Spain and provisional governor and captain general of the presidio and its provinces.

There were a dozen invalided soldiers whose military connections are not noted. The white women and their children belonged mostly to the officers and soldiers of the presidio. The former numbered four hundred and eighty-two, their boys, four hundred and thirty-eight, and their girls, four hundred and forty-seven. Besides the parish priest in St. Augustine and the one at the Pueblo da Gracia Real de Mose, there were eight other priests, two "ecclesiastics," and three lay religious in the presidio, most of whom must have been connected with the convent of St. Helena in St. Augustine. Another re-

lated group consisted of thirty-one "exiled licentiates."

Not all of the white people and negro slaves went to Havana. A garrison consisting of Captain Don Bentura Diaz and forty-six Infantrymen and of an officer and two men of the Artillery, was detached and sent to the fort at Apalachee. They took with them the wives and children of the married men both totalling eight. No slaves were taken. A part of this group sailed on August 3, 1763. Two other groups, totaling thirty-three persons, left for the city of Campeche, on the southwestern part of the Gulf of Mexico. Of the thirty-three, ten were Militiamen, including their lieutenant; four were white women, and fourteen were children. They were accompanied by four negro slave men and two negro slave women. Both groups went at their own expense.

Nine persons remained at St. Augustine to look after the houses and straying horses, with the understanding that they would go to Havana as soon as their charges had been sold or abandoned. These nine comprised Don Joseph Delolmo, the interpreter of English, three Mounted Dragoons, two Infantrymen, two Militiamen, and one white woman.

Of all the people who sailed away the expenses of seventy-four—twenty-five women, and forty-nine children were borne by Señor Don Pedro Augustin Morel, the bishop of Cuba, those of the rest by the King. The latter numbered two thousand nine hundred and twenty-two, namely: eight hundred and ninety-five men, seven hundred and sixty women, six hundred and fifty-nine boys, and six hundred and eight girls. Four of the inhabitants who had embarked on board the *Nuestra Señora del Rosario*, perished in the shipwreck suffered by that sloop. Without including the nine persons who remained temporarily at St. Augustine, the total number of

persons who reached their destinations was three thousand and ninety-one. All of these, including, of course, the Catalans, were Spaniards except seven hundred and fifty-four.

The shipment of the artillery, munitions, other war materials, implements, etc., was made in the transports and includes one hundred and fifteen pieces of artillery, or parts thereof, of which seventeen were bronze cannon of different calibers; four were bronze and eight were iron swivel-guns; and two were mortars of English casting. There were two gun carriages and about fourteen score boxes and barrels of powder, some twenty thousand five hundred cannon balls, a quantity of grapeshot, and a supply of fuse. There were hoists for mounting cannon and handling heavy shot, and ramrods to send home the loads. Sixty-one of the seven hundred and eighty muskets were recorded as useless, but certainly not for lack of flints of which there were more than twenty thousand. Bullet molds and lead in bars supplied the means of making musket balls, while more than two hundred and fifty machetes enabled the soldiers on the march to clear away scrub palmetto. For the Mounted Dragoons there were sabres, pistols, lances and pikes, as well as bridles, saddles, and leggings. The supplies of saltpeter, sulphur, sal ammoniac, and camphor had their military uses, and so did the armorer's forge. A blacksmith's forge and jackscrews were of more general use, and one would suppose that the four pieces of sailcloth on hand was a scant supply. On the other hand there were plenty of tools for digging, such as pickaxes, hoes, and shovels, and plenty of tools for quarrymen, masons, carpenters, and coopers.

Along with all this laborers' and military cargo went the incongruous paraphernalia and ornaments

of the church and confraternities, which seems not to have been fully listed in the tabulation before us. The ecclesiastical properties noted by Storekeeper Blanco omit much that is recorded in Havana by the custodians of the confraternities of St. Augustine. He confines himself to the following articles: one statue of St. Mark, two altar stones, two altar cloths, a frontal, two metal candlesticks, and an altar bell; certain articles connected with the Mass, such as four missals, four silver chalices, three damask chalice veils, a Host box, three ciboria, and sixteen purificators; certain garments worn by the priests, such as six chasubles, four albs, four amices, and four cinctures; there were also four small cruet plates and cruets for the holy oil, and four bursas. Governor Feliu wrote to Minister of State Julian de Arriaga on April 16, 1764, that all the things belonging to the King, and which were stored in the royal warehouses, had been transported to Havana "with the exception of those which were lost in a sloop and in a brigantine which ran aground and were broken up in the keys." A launch and two longboats had been left at St. Augustine, which, "together with other trifles of great bulk and little value," were to be sold there to the King's account.

Governor Feliu called attention to the loyalty of the people, who forgot their native country and sacrificed their possessions for the sake of their religion and in order to live in the Spanish dominions. It was "an object of wonder and fear to the English themselves." He hoped that Arriaga would exert his powerful influence with the King so that the heavy losses of certain subjects might be rewarded. All of them had emigrated except the nine who had remained behind in order to conclude the sale of a number of horses which were "wandering about in the nearby woods." Since there was no one who

would act as attorney for the others to sell their farms and houses, Feliu had to allow them to choose and English merchant (John Gordon of Charleston, South Carolina) to attend to that matter until some person might be selected to return and dispose finally of everything owned by the Spaniards.

Governor Feliu commented on the conduct of Captain Hedges of the First Regiment of British troops who took possession of St. Augustine and remained for some days and of Major Ogilvey of the Ninth Regiment who assumed control of East Florida as lieutenant governor. During the time of Feliu's stay with them they devoted themselves to "the preservation of the most perfect harmony," but their troops soon began to dismantle the houses despite his appeals, "stealing everything that could be carried off and burned, in order to remedy their scarcity of firewood." This had greatly reduced the value of most of the houses. Feliu considered the delay of the British in buying the Spanish houses "altogether suspicious." It induced him to believe the evidence he had that Ogilvey dissuaded David Martin, a Scotch merchant, the only person who showed any inclination to buy, not to do it, by arousing his apprehensions. This perhaps explained the fact that more of the houses had not been sold, and that the few which had been, brought only a tenth to a fifth of their value. Moreover, Feliu was convinced that the slowness of the Court of St. James' in assigning families to colonize in East Florida had been "a great discouragement."

The "proprietary governor," Colonel James Grant, was hourly expected to arrive. He was said to be "bringing four hundred families of French Huguenots, who had already taken ship together with a hundred families from the Palatinate and would begin the settlement of the colony." It had

further been reported that, "in order to protect the new inhabitants from Indian raids," the British were sending an Infantry regiment in addition to the hundred and eighty men already there. So strong a garrison and the fact that the colonial government would be a civil establishment would invite settlement. But for the present, signs of early development were lacking; the bar—"the worst of the whole north"—being a "very serious obstacle," and "generally discouraging in view of the great losses which English trade" had sustained during the brief time it had frequented the port of St. Augustine.

Concerning the Indians, Feliu stated that their restlessness was constantly assuming greater proportions. Despite the assurance by edict that their rightful lands would be returned to them and those to be settled would be bought from them in a council of the chiefs, some of the Indians who had gone to South Carolina for their accustomed presents, raided the frontier on their return, killing fourteen people, and threatening to repeat their hostile acts along the southern coast. Georgia had had a similar experience, as its governor advised the governor of Florida by post. In consequence the latter had called in a detachment of men who were out cutting wood and had given orders for no one to leave the precincts of the fort.

In the north the Indians in battle formation attacked the regulars in plain sight of their posts and very often captured the latter with a boldness never before known of those barbarians. It was reckoned that they had committed four thousand murders and scattered more than a thousand families.

The British garrison, Feliu went on to say, had mounted fifteen cannon of twenty-four and thirty-two calibers and two twelve-inch mortars in the fort

at St. Augustine. They said they were awaiting more war materials as a result of the inspection made at the beginning of October 1763 by Colonel James Robertson throughout the Florida acquisitions. There was no indication of their completing the fort, and the engineer whom they had sent there, who was a surveyor, was busy making a plan of its immediate environs.

Feliu did not understand by the definitive treaty of peace that the houses or other buildings belonging to the Spanish King could be sold, but since it was not expressly forbidden, he had the royal houses, the main guardhouse, the convict barracks, the hospital, and the smithies appraised and sent a copy to Lieutenant Governor Ogilvey, giving his reasons. He also sent lists of the appraisals to Arriaga and the Conde de Ricla, governor of Cuba, for such action as they might think fit to take. In accordance with the definitive treaty he transferred the archives of the presidio of St. Augustine to Ogilvey, but brought away "the royal cédulas and other instruments belonging to the secretariat of the superior government" for delivery to Ricla.

In view of Governor Feliu's zeal and success in effecting the evacuation of East Florida and its transfer to the British officers, the King of Spain granted him the salary of four thousand pesos enjoyed hitherto by the proprietary governors for the full time of his tenure as provisional governor, less the amount of his pay as lieutenant colonel.