

The Florida Patriot War

By  
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The year 1812 is recalled by many as an important year in military history. In Eastern Europe Napoleon led an army of nearly 600,000 men into Russia and entered the streets of a burning Moscow in September of that year. By December the French stagger out of Russia with barely 10,000 remaining. On the Iberian Peninsular Wellington undertook an offensive to drive the French from Portugal and Spain that included a victory at the Battle of Salamanca and the capture of Madrid. While, even though it is scarcely recalled by the rest of the world, the year 1812 is remembered by some in North America for the war, named for the year it began, in which an aggravated, upstart American republic declared war upon a preoccupied British Empire. However, this war, the War of 1812, was not the only military venture undertaken that year by American men at arms. Three months before America would charge blindly into a war with a world superpower, it was carried, stumbling into another war by single-minded, under qualified and over confident men. These men, believing they were doing the will of the current administration, went against a former superpower that possessed something many Americans coveted; land. That land, owned by a weak and occupied Spain, was East Florida.

East Florida, almost entirely what would be recognized as Florida on a modern map became a target of fear, greedy speculation and intrigue. Similar to its larger “cousin” of a war, the War of 1812, this invasion of Florida, now known as the Patriot War, was nearly a complete disaster. The difference was that there were some successes and moments to swell national pride during the War with Great Britain while the Patriot War in Florida provided no such instances. It was, as one historian aptly named it, a fiasco.

Spanish claims in North America predate those of all other European powers. Her vast, rich colonial empire spread from the reaches of South America northward to an undefined border in the interior of the North American continent. By the early 1600s Spain was competing with

both France and Great Britain for territory in North America. This colonial competition in conjunction with political and economic discord in Europe, led to several wars over the next one and half centuries that had implications for the North America.

In 1761 Spain entered the global conflict known as the Seven Years' War involving Britain, France, Prussian and a number of other European powers. Spain entered as an ally to France and opposing Britain, with the hope of checking Britain's growing worldwide power. Because of Spain's entrance into the war the British were faced with threats from all directions. To the north and west of her colonies were the French territories of New France and Louisiana. To the south, the Spanish territory of Florida that was the costal area from the Mississippi River eastward encompassing parts of the modern states of Mississippi, Alabama, and all of the current state of Florida. The area between the Mississippi and the Chattahoochee Rivers became known as West Florida and the rest, East Florida. Further south laid the Spanish controlled island of Cuba, a host of other smaller islands in the West Indies and the colonies of Central and South America.

Britain quickly determined to strike at Spain's most fortified and most lucrative settlement in the Western Hemisphere at that time; Havana. In August of 1762 a British fleet with 10,000 completed the conquest and "delivered a body blow to Spain's economy and prestige, since all Spanish-American commerce funneled through Havana."<sup>1</sup>

This loss for the Spanish was offset three months later when Spain and France signed the Treaty of San Ildefonso (the second of three treaties that are known by this name). A particular agreement of this treaty called for France to pass ownership of the Louisiana to her ally, which resulted in a continuous stretch of Spanish territory from East Florida to Louisiana, to Texas and

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<sup>1</sup> R. Ernest Dupuy, and Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Encyclopedia of Military History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 677.

beyond. By the time the Treaty of Paris was signed in February of 1763, Britain's dominance on the oceans had secured many more of the Spanish and French islands of in the West Indies while her dominance on land had secured New France. To regain Havana Spain was compelled to trade Cuba for East and West Florida giving all of North America east of the Mississippi River over to Britain. It would take another global war to return Florida to Spain.

When American colonists decided to remove themselves from the British Empire Britain's old adversaries lined up beside the American cause to one extent or another for reasons that can be best summed up by the old axiom, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." This was undertaken by Spain in 1779 for similar hopes to those that brought her into the Seven Years' War with the added aspiration of regaining what was previously lost.

In November 1782 the American colonies signed a second Treaty of Paris that granted the colonies independence from the British Empire but this treaty would not go into effect until the end of hostilities between Britain and the Americans' French and Spanish Allies. This would come on January 20, 1783 when the Treaty of Versailles ended hostilities between the European powers, which subsequently returned the Florida Territory to the Spanish empire that reestablished the continuous swath of Spanish territory that rimmed the Gulf of Mexico and extended inland and west to California. This territory would again be broken apart in 1800.

Under increasing pressure from Napoleonic France Spain entered into Treaty of Ildefonso (the third by that name). This treaty handed over the Louisiana Territory to Napoleon while Spain maintained a weakening grasp on East Florida while West Florida was in a state of international limbo. Some believed it was a part of the Louisiana Territory and thus belonged to France while others maintained it was Spanish territory. This question remained unsettled.

Spanish authorities remained in West Florida but they held little sway, if any, and were essentially cut off from any guidance or support from their mother country.

In East Florida, since the territory's return to the Spanish Empire in 1783, the Spanish subjects that had witnessed the tumultuous changes over the previous decades realized the tenuous situation in which they lived. The residents of the most heavily fortified city in East Florida, St. Augustine, "felt their weakness and insecurity, and hardly ventured to go beyond the range of the guns of the castle"<sup>2</sup>. For the residents of St. Augustine and the rest of loyal subjects of Spanish Florida the situation was not going to improve. The land was sparsely populated and the colony had become economically unimportant to the shrinking and increasingly distracted Spanish Empire. In Europe that distraction was Napoleon while in North America the Spanish subjects of involuntarily neglected East Florida continuously heard whispered yearnings from the north.

Since the creation the American republic the eyes, and desires of many of its citizens had been focused on the conquest and settlement of the vast American continent. The Nashville Clarion vividly described this sentiment. The editorial proclaimed, "Where is it written in the book of fate that the American republic shall not stretch her limits from the Capes of the Chesapeake to Nootka sound, from the Isthmus of Panama to Hudson Bay?"<sup>3</sup> However the obvious problem presented to the people of the fledgling country was that the nation was essentially sandwiched between the remnants of the "old world" empires to the north, south and west in conjunction with Native American opposition in all directions, which effectively bottled up that dream.

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<sup>2</sup> George R. Fairbanks, *History of Florida* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & CO., 1871), 244

<sup>3</sup> Julius W. Pratt, *Expansionists of 1812* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1957), 14.

While the first two administrations held these same desires of expanding it would be the third administration, that of Thomas Jefferson, that would take the most significant step. The Louisiana Purchase was made possible due to the interrelated and continuing intrigue and devastation within Europe and the French colony of Saint Domingue. Continuing needs for finances for war in Europe combined with the destruction of a French Army in Saint Domingue by a slave revolt, turned war of independence, delivered Napoleon ample reason to sell the territory to the United States. Jefferson's purchase of the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon's France delivered to the Americans an all but incomprehensible sized tract of land that probably should have soothed the expansionist desires for the foreseeable future. But Louisiana was unknown, unsettled, wild and almost certainly peopled by more, probably hostile Native Americans. Territories much closer, some presently under American control, some not, were far more appetizing to the expansionists. British Upper and Lower Canada to the north, the eroding frontiers in the Old Northwest and Spanish East and West Florida to the south were the logical stepping-stones before the conquest of the Louisiana Territory and beyond. These regions were either settled or explored to a great extent giving Americans at large had a working conception of their geography, floral, fauna and current inhabitants.

By the time James Madison took office the Old Northwest was being populated, cleared, plowed and built up. The Canadas, though sparsely populated, were economically viable and were firmly seated in the increasingly powerful British Empire. East and West Florida, though, were still in a state of imperial neglect as the Spanish Empire had far more pressing issues. In late 1807 and early 1808 Napoleon sent his armies into Spain and Portugal to enforce his Continental System. As a result the Spanish ruling family was deposed, Napoleon's brother

Joseph was placed on the French throne and Spain and her colonies were thrown into a state of turmoil.

Coinciding with this imperial neglect was a constant migration of American settlers into the Floridas. In these Spanish regions it was far more common to come across a person that was a property seeking American citizen or an exiled Tory from the War of Independence than it was to find someone born under the Spanish Crown. It would not be long until these Anglo-Americans developed designs of their own for these Spanish provinces and when they did these plans often fit those secretly held designs of the expansionist minded U. S. government. Yet, aside from just being the possible target for expansion the geographical fact of the Floridas being connected to the United States created four particular problems.

The Madison administration also inherited the growing tensions between the United States and Great Britain that had been developing and escalating over the previous decades. By the beginning of the Nineteenth Century the disputes between the two countries included the British practice of impressing sailors from American merchant ships to fill the ranks of the huge Royal Navy in its war against France and perceived incitement of Native American violence against Americans settling in the frontier territories. Calls for war and the avenging of national honor reached high point only months before Madison's election. On June 22, 1807 the HMS Leopard fired upon the unsuspecting USS Chesapeake and forcefully impressed four American seamen under the pretense the men were deserters from the Royal Navy. Federalist and Republican alike called for war but the American government maintained a course of peaceful coercion.

Since Jefferson's administration the American government hoped to use economic sanctions to force Britain into acquiescing to the American point of view. Embargos and "Non-

Intercourse” acts were put in place but these were far more damaging to the American economy than the British. Americans were forbid by their own government to trade with the British Empire and British trade was similarly restricted from the United States. Thus, smuggling became a profitable and widespread activity and Spanish Florida played role.

The St. Mary’s River, the border separating the United States and Spanish East Florida, became a port of import and export for American and international smugglers alike. A fact which was known far and wide do to its openness and its execution often done in plain view of American official on the northern bank of the river. One concerned citizen of Savannah, Georgia made it his duty to inform the governor of Spanish East Florida of the illegal activity. He wrote, “the existing embargo in the United States which has been laid on for great political purposes, of which your excellancy has doubtlessly been appraised, has been evaded in many instances in the St. Mary’s River.” The writer concluded that, “it may be presumed that that our government is not yet acquainted with [the smuggling]. Your excellency will therefore excuse an individual for recommending the circumstances to your wisdom and patriotism.”<sup>4</sup> Even with the action so open and so noticeable that a citizen was able to discern the situation clearly, do to the lack of governmental control in East Florida, the situation was probably so far out of the governor’s hands that he could not stop the smuggling. That is assuming he wanted to.

In early in 1808, in an effort to curb or dissuade smuggling the United States Navy dispatched four gunboats to the area to scour the waterways between St. Mary’s River and Savannah. One of them always maintained a station at the town of St. Mary’s, Georgia, a major port of smuggling into the U.S. and within sight of the main smuggling town of Fernandina on

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<sup>4</sup> *Anonymous to East Florida Governor, April 10, 1808. Verso-Anonymous addressed to James Madison, From Library of Congress, James Madison Papers, [http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.10\\_0215\\_0217](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mjm.10_0215_0217) (accessed April 19, 2007)*



the Spanish owned Amelia Island. This small projection of military power did little to slow smuggling, but it did increase the chances of confrontation. On one occasion, in late April, 1808 an American gunboat seized an American registered ship within Spanish waters. As a result the local Spanish military commander “threatened to seize on the first American property that should come within his power, if [the seized vessel] was not given up.”<sup>5</sup> Without further evidence it is unclear what happened to the seized ship and if anything came of the Spanish commander’s specific threats. Yet this case illustrates the tensions how similar instances in the following years tried and strained American-Spanish relations as the smuggling continued and began to gain the notice of the government. By early 1812 the Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin began to receive reports “that British goods to an immense amount have been imported into Amelia Island, with the view of smuggling the same into the United States.” Also coming into Washington were reports “of illegal slave imports from the Spanish island.”<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the concerns of smuggling was the pressing and threatening concern that Spanish Florida was a sanctuary for runaway slaves from the southern states. Until 1790 Spanish authorities had an official policy of encouraging slave to come to Florida. This policy was revoked, but slaves still went and more often than not head for Native American controlled territory where they would enter into a sort of gentle servitude to the Indians but would “uniformly testify to the kind treatment they receive[d].”<sup>7</sup> This kind treatment included being on nearly equal status economically and socially and in return they were expected to pull their share

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<sup>5</sup> “Philadelphia, May 11; The Schooner Maggy..” *Washington Federalist*, May, 18, 1808, *America’s Historical Newspapers 1690-1922*. Groton Dunstable Regional High School Library, Groton MA., <http://infoweb.newsbank.com> (accessed April 10, 2007)

<sup>6</sup> Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana IL.: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 169

<sup>7</sup> James G. Cusick, *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida* (Gainesville FL.:University Press of Florida, 2003), 47

with military service in the case hostilities. To those of the American south this meant their greatest fear, armed Africans and this meant a constant fear of an insurrection of their own slaves supported by those who had already escaped.

Similar to the fear of an attack of avenging, freedom fighting or dastardly, depending on the point of view, runaway slaves was the nearly two-century-old threat of Indian attacks from Florida. Under Spanish rule the Indians maintained autonomous regions in which they were free to continue their lives as they wished which kept Spanish-Native American relations tolerable. However this hands off policy, practically outside of Spanish influence, allowed the Indians the freedom to assert their own “international policy.” The Native Americans, comprised of the Seminole, Creek and Miccosukee tribes, were quite aware of the American custom of encroachment, investment and eventual seizing of Indian lands. This, of course would lead to the inevitable attacks upon the other. Many Americans, especially those along the Georgia-Florida border who had felt the sting of raids from Florida, felt it would take the seizure of Florida and the replacement of the ineffective Spanish authorities to pacify, control or even destroy the Indians.

A last concern, and one that was growing in magnitude as the possibility of war with Great Britain grew increasingly likely, stemmed from the Spanish-British alliance that had had formed in response to Napoleon’s invasions into the Iberian Peninsular in 1807 and 1808. As clamor for war against Britain grew louder, especially since the election of the “War Hawks” in the 1810 election, President Madison and his administration began too look at the strategic situations that may develop. If the United States did declare war on Britain, would it be prudent to leave the enemy’s ally in possession of such an obvious base of operations and potential invasion route. This situation was not lost on the civilian population as well. One “gentleman”

in New Orleans, summing up the sentiments commented in a letter that “if there should be the most distant probability of East Florida falling into the hands of any European power whatever, we should, without hesitation, fix our standards at St. Augustine and Pensacola.”<sup>8</sup>

To the joy of the American government a part of that territory was secured in 1810. In West Florida the continuous stream of legal and illegal American immigrants into the Spanish territory finally had the outcome many were hoping for. A “revolution” occurred when American settlers seized power in the territory and declared independence. Claiming that they remained loyal to the sovereign of Spain as long as they could, to whom they had pledged their allegiance, the conspirators claimed they were left with no choice. They claimed that they were “left without any hope of protection from the mother country, betrayed by a Magistrate whose duty it was to have provided for [their] safety and tranquility” and that they had been “exposed to all the evils of a state of anarchy” and it was “[their] duty to provide for [their] own security.”<sup>9</sup> To provide for this security a new government was formed and became known as the Convention of Florida. A president of the Convention was elected and a letter was immediately sent off to the James Madison. The President of the Convention, John Rhea wrote an “expression of their hope and desire that this new commonwealth may be immediately acknowledged and protected by the Government of the United States as an integral part of the American Union.”<sup>10</sup> The “Revolutionists, as they were called by the Spaniards,” soon wrote a constitution calling for a

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<sup>8</sup> “Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in this City, Dated N.O. Nov. 16, 1810.” *New Jersey Journal*, January 1, 1811, [America’s Historical Newspapers 1690-1922](#). Groton Dunstable Regional High School Library, Groton MA., <http://infoweb.newsbank.com> (accessed April 5, 2007)

<sup>9</sup> John Rhea, “By the Representatives of the People of West Florida, in Convention assembled. A Declaration,” *American State Papers: Foreign Affairs* 3:396, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsp.html>

<sup>10</sup> Letter from John Rhea to President James Madison, 10 October 1810, *American State Papers: Foreign Affairs* 3:395

republican government, fixed the rate of taxation, agreed upon a flag design and created the Republic of West Florida. A few months later, on October 27, 1810 the territorial governor of Louisiana arrived and took possession of West Florida for the United States.<sup>11</sup> Protests to this seizure came from Spain and her ally, Britain but the United States remained unashamed and unaffected. It was commonly believed, and if not believed, members of the American government tried to act as if they believed, that West Florida was a rightful possession of the United States through the Louisiana Purchase.

Political enemies of the administration decried the absorption of West Florida as an act of aggression against a nation with which they were at peace. Still, the majority of American nation was in an expansionist mood and slowly moving towards all out war in the name of expansion (though in the guise of “Free trade and Sailors’ Rights), especially since the election of the War Hawks and, to many, West Florida was a mere stepping stone.

One of the most outspoken War Hawks, a characteristic that won him the Speaker of the House position, Henry Clay delivered a speech concerning the Floridas in late 1810. Though trying to maintain a tone that he probably hoped would endear him and the United States as a reluctant conqueror his true feelings as an unabashed expansionist were not too well hidden. He declared:

I am not, sir, in favor of cherishing the passion of conquest. But I must be permitted to conclude by declaring my hopes to see, ere long, the *new* United States (if you will allow me to use that expression) embracing not only the old thirteen states, but the entire

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<sup>11</sup> Caroline Mays Brevard, *A History of Florida: From the Treaty of 1763 to Our Own Times* (Deland FL.:The Florida Historical Society, 1924), Volume 1, 28-29

country East of the Mississippi, including *East Florida!* and some of the territories to the North of us also!!!<sup>12</sup>

Not needing to be diplomatic with words, the *Concord Gazette*, published in Concord, Massachusetts stated the sentiments in word Speaker Clay wished he could use. It read, “If we can take West-Florida so easy, we had better include also East-Florida and Canada. *We want the whole.*”<sup>13</sup>

The tumult of veiled and open expansionist rhetoric focused on East Florida caught the ear of a like-minded, 72 year old Georgian. George Mathews, a Revolutionary War veteran, and by 1810, former general of the Georgia militia, former governor of Georgia and former Congressman who had hopes of extending his public career and cementing his legacy as a national idol. Mathews, too, saw how seemingly easy it was for the “Revolutionists” in West Florida to take control and how quickly the United States accepted the territory as a protectorate. He began to develop a similar scenario for East Florida and sought out those he thought would also be interested. For most of 1810 Mathews traveled along the border of the Floridas and Georgia, on both the Spanish and American sides, to see what type of feeling he got from the inhabitants.<sup>14</sup>

The United States was already at work on a scheme that was similar to the West Florida action and to what George Mathews was surmising. Which was to simply find a way to have the territory handed over to the American government. The American agent to the Choctaw Nation,

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<sup>12</sup> “Intelligencer; Jan. 8; Mr. Clay’s; Florida; Mississippi; East Florida; National; North;” *Salem Gazette*, January 18, 1811, [America’s Historical Newspapers 1690-1922](#). Groton Dunstable Regional High School Library, Groton MA., <http://infoweb.newsbank.com> (accessed April 5, 2007)

<sup>13</sup> “West Florida; East Florida; Canada;” *Concord Gazette*, January 29, 1811, [America’s Historical Newspapers 1690-1922](#). Groton Dunstable Regional High School Library, Groton MA., <http://infoweb.newsbank.com> (accessed April 25, 2007)

<sup>14</sup>Cusick, 27

Colonel John McKee had been in contact with Vincent Folch, the nearly treasonous Spanish governor of Pensacola. McKee visited Washington to apprise the President of his dealings with Folch. McKee told Madison that Folch had made numerous overtures to the United States for such a handover, even writing his superior in Havana informing him that it would be best if Spain just ceded the Floridas to America.<sup>15</sup>

Mathews had similar information but he optimistically included in his statement a near guarantee that he could rest East Florida from Spain and through his many political connections arranged a meeting with Madison. Madison was more than happy to meet the old soldier and in January 1811 the two met in the executive mansion in Washington. Madison and his cabinet were thrilled. They made Mathews the United States' commissioner to the Floridas and enthusiastically presented Mathews' plan to Congress, which, in a secret session, passed a resolution in support of the President's view and on January 15, 1811, Madison signed it.

The resolution stated that, "considering the influence which the destiny of the territory adjoining the southern border of the United States may have upon their security, tranquility, and commerce, . . . the United States . . . cannot, without serious inquietude, see any part of the said territory pass into the hands of a foreign Power." To assure this the president was authorized to take "all or any part" of East Florida through agreement with the local authorities, or, if it was believed that a seizure by a "foreign Power" of the territory was immanent, the president could use the armed forces to occupy the territory in a preemptive strike. However, if preemptive military occupation were the case, the occupied real estate would still be "subject to negotiations."<sup>16</sup> If the territory was peaceably handed over with a stipulation that, once the

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<sup>15</sup> Cusick, 27-28

<sup>16</sup> Pratt, 74

perceived crises had passed there could be a “re-delivery of the country at a future period . . . to the lawful sovereign.”<sup>17</sup>

On January 26, 1811 Secretary of State James Monroe officially informed General Mathews and Colonel McKee that they had been appointed “commissioners for carrying into effect certain provisions of an act of Congress relative to the portion of the Floridas situated to the east of the river Perdido.” Their mission was to begin immediately but it was to be accomplished “with that discretion which the delicacy and importance of the undertaking requires.”<sup>18</sup> The mission was to be done as quietly as possible and in a way that would not implicate the president or the government of the United States and also with the hope that all could be accomplished without, or at least before, it being recognized by Great Britain.

Monroe’s letter also sets forth instructions to the commissioners concerning certain particulars towards Spanish authorities, people and property in order to try to maintain an air of benevolence in order to be able to grasp once the deed was done. Spanish officials were to be allowed to remain in their particular office, reasonable government debts to the people would be assumed by the United States and all lawful land titles would be honored. Spanish soldiers could enter into the United States Army if they wished, but if not, their transportation to another Spanish territory would be provided for while all military stores that fell into the possession of the United States were to remain the property of Spain. Monroe also made it an important point for the commissioners to make it known to the residents, especially the Spanish Catholic population, “the universal toleration which the laws of the United States assure every religious

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<sup>17</sup> James Monroe, “The Secretary of State to General George Mathews and Colonel John McKee.” 26 January 1811, American State Papers: Foreign Affairs 3:571, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsp.html>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

persuasion” to “[quiet] the minds of uninformed individuals, who may entertain fears on that head.”<sup>19</sup>

Mathews and McKee headed south and planted their operations in the town of St. Mary’s, Georgia which was “a lusty frontier town where smugglers and raiders, pimps and prostitutes, robbers and adventurers, soldiers and seamen, though disliked, associated with and were catered to by more respectable elements of the town.”<sup>20</sup> It was also a station for American gunboats and near by, on a muddy spit of land, was the modest U.S. Army post at Point Petre (Peter today) that had about one hundred and fifty men of a tattered infantry regiment. The government made further preparations. The Navy Department ordered Captain Hugh Campbell to send five additional gunboats to the St. Mary’s station from Charleston and in May of 1811 a company of sixty United States Marines arrived from Washington and encamped on the southern tip of Cumberland Island which is at the mouth of the St. Mary’s River just about a half of a mile from Amelia Island. All this activity did not go unnoticed and “the Spaniards were doubtless alarmed at the first appearance of the troops” wrote Marine Corps Commandant Lt. Colonel Franklin Wharton, “but I supposed are now reconciled.”<sup>21</sup> The wonder is to what did he think they felt reconciled to. Perhaps, because the government troops had not attacked Spanish territory yet the Spanish were reconciled to the idea that they were there for defensive, even peaceful purposes? Or were the Spaniards reconciled to a fate of eventual invasion and defeat by a neighbor that building up a force that would quickly overpower the forces they could call upon.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Rembrandt W. Patrick, *Florida Fiasco: Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida border, 1810-1815*(Athens GA,: University of Georgia Press, 1954), 44

<sup>21</sup> Lt. Colonel, Commandant Franklin Wharton, USMC to Captain John Williams, USMC, June 26, 1811, National Archives and Record Administration, Record Group 127, Letters Sent By the Office of the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Washington D.C.



Diplomatically Mathews and McKee kept up a constant stream of letters to Folch in an attempt to have him hand over the Floridas. Three times Mathews' personal assistant, Colonel Ralph Isaacs met with Folch pushing insisting that the United States would accept to protect East and West Florida until the rightful sovereign requested their return. Folch insisted that he had tried to convince his superiors but they, being buoyed by news of success from Spain against the French, ordered Folch to hold them at all cost.<sup>22</sup> Mathews' and Madison's hopes for a quiet and gentle hand over of Florida faded.

This did not deter Mathews. He believed that the occupation of East Florida was essential to the interests of the United States and for the safety of the people of his state of Georgia. To accomplish this he would have to create a revolution from within East Florida similar to the successful one in West Florida. To accomplish this he would need to find a suitable person to assume authority and a body of men to take a significant risk as soldiers of this revolution, or as they became known as "Patriots." Mathews openly proselytized on the northern and southern side of the border but he attracted few followers. Weak Spanish authority had allowed many to grow wealthy and few thought the risks worth taking. What Mathews needed was "a well-placed resident of Spanish-Florida." He found John Houston McIntosh, a well-known Georgian who had purchased land in Florida in 1803 and was, technically a Spanish subject. Together they devised a simple plan. They would incite a revolution, place McIntosh as the new, legitimate local authority and Mathews would just so happen to be nearby as an agent of the United States to accept transfer of the territory.<sup>23</sup> Just the way Madison and Congress had approved. Somewhat.

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<sup>22</sup> Patrick, 33

<sup>23</sup> Charlton W. Tebeau, *A History of Florida* (Coral Gable, FL., University of Miami Press, 1971), 106

Now that he had a leader he needed Patriots. Still, even with a legitimate, Spanish subject landowner Mathews was amazed how few of the Spanish citizens saw the need or had the desire to commit what some may think is treason. So Mathews looked north. In Georgia there were plenty of men with the need of their country and state in their hearts and it would only take a little prodding, or bribery, with promises of fifty acres of land or more, depending on current social status, and the possibility of employment within the new government to start to draw men to the cause.

Besides the rising number of Patriots he could count on, Mathews could look to the U.S. armed forces to aide him in his efforts. After all Monroe assured him that, if in the execution of the instructions given him, based on the resolution of Congress, the forces would be “afforded [him] upon [his] application to the commanding officer of the troops of the United States on that station” and if he needed naval assistance he would “receive the same upon [his] application to the naval commander.”<sup>24</sup>

Commanding the troops at the station at Pt. Petre was Lt. Colonel Thomas Adam Smith. Smith had been ordered to Pt. Petre in January of 1811 for the express purposes of placing himself at the complete disposal of McKee and Mathews to guard territory handed over to the two men by local authorities.<sup>25</sup> Smith accepted the situation for what it was and considered himself ordered to cooperate with Mathews even if it was not exactly how the resolution and his orders had stated. Commanding the growing Naval and Marine force in the area was Captain Hugh Campbell. He had been previously in command of the Charleston station but was ordered to take command near St. Mary’s in November of 1811. Though, over the previous eleven

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<sup>24</sup> James Monroe, “The Secretary of State to General George Mathews and Colonel John McKee.” 26 January 1811, American State Papers: Foreign Affairs 3:571, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwsp.html>

<sup>25</sup> Cusick, 34

months, Campbell had been ordered to transfer gunboats, ammunition and other stores to the area, he had received no explicit orders on how to act in conjunction with Mathews as the plot unfolded.

Over the next five months Mathew, McKee and McIntosh worked to solidify their support but as the time of action drew near a complication arose. Lt. Col. Smith had to leave Pt. Petre and his subordinate; Major Jacint Laval was placed in command. Mathews and Laval knew each other well. The two shared a small dwelling in St. Mary's which gave Laval had been witness, often unwillingly, to the inner workings of the developing conspiracy. Laval did not hold the plan in high regards and had a different view of what the orders of the government were. When Mathews approached Laval for the use of his men, Laval denied the request. The Major saw nothing in his orders, or the letters from the government to Mathews that allowed Mathews to use American force to invade another country's territory and he was right. They could be used to protect land handed over to the United States, not take it. A growing dislike and distrust began to grow between Mathews and Laval. Mathews stewed in his anger while Laval held his ground as long as he could. In early March, 1812 as Mathews and the Patriots were getting prepared to launch their campaign Mathews finally badgered Laval into submission in a public scolding on the streets of St. Mary's. Laval consented to let Mathews have fifty of his men. However, Laval soon rescinded his pledge of support once he learned that the plan called for his men to act as volunteers in civilian clothes and not as U. S. Army soldiers. Mathews was furious. He sent a scathing letter to Secretary Monroe claiming misconduct, mismanagement and even a suggestion that Laval, because of his French birth, may have different designs for the

Floridas, even though Laval was “man of ’76” like Mathews. Mathews felt that “had it not been for Laval, East Florida would already be independent of Spain.”<sup>26</sup>

Mathews hope for naval support was in better shape, but not at all to the extent he hoped. Captain Campbell was still unsure of his position in all this. He too had received instructions to protect American interests but wondered if those interests extended to the conquest of foreign soil. He informed Mathews that he would participate to the extent his orders allowed. What those orders were, he did not really know. On February 29 he wrote to Secretary of the Navy, Paul Hamilton seeking clarification. Campbell wrote that he would do what he believed was for the public good but he “should feel much more Gratified in Being Honored with Instruction.”<sup>27</sup>

By the second week of March, a “large collection of Georgians and Floridians, with all the wood-choppers and boatmen in the neighborhood of St. Mary’s, met . . . and organized a provisional government, and chose John Houston McIntosh Esq., Director” who appointed Colonel Lodowick Ashley in charge of the Patriot Army.<sup>28</sup> Their plan was to cross the border, raise the standard of the Patriots, proclaim independence and gather support to move on St. Augustine. St Augustine had a significant population that could provide a sizable militia, close to three hundred Spanish soldiers and was protected by the famous Spanish fort Castillo de San Marcos which had stood against enemies since the founding of the city. Now, with the lack of support from the Laval’s regulars from Point Peter the Patriots had to determine a new course of action. One that would have a more modest goal.

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<sup>26</sup> Cusick, 91-92

<sup>27</sup> Captain Hugh Campbell to Secretary of the Navy Hamilton, February 29, 1812, Christopher Dudley ed., *Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History, Volume I* (Annapolis Md: Naval Institute Press, 1986), 1:87

<sup>28</sup> John Lee Williams, *The Territory of Florida: or Sketches of the Topography, Civil and Natural History of the Country, the Climate, and the Indian Tribes, from the First Discovery to the Present Time, A Facsimile Reproduction of the 1837 Edition*(Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1962), 193

On March 12 the Patriot army, numbering somewhere near one hundred and forty men crossed the St. Mary's River and occupied Rose's Bluff which happened to be the plantation of William Ashley, brother of the Patriot military commander. From here the Patriots decided the best course of action, due to the lack of military support was to secure the town of Fernandina on Amelia Island. Amelia Island was protected by ten Spanish soldiers and some old canon that had to be dug out of shifting sandbanks. The Spanish commander of Fernandina, Lt. Justo Lopez called a council of war and asked the residents what should be done. They decided to oppose any attempt to take the town. They immediately began to prepare their town by build breastworks and mounting the old cannon. Then they waited.

On March 17 the Patriots boarded several boats and began to move on the river towards Fernandina. In the harbor, Captain Campbell had brought his five gunboats into line as a show of force that was done in a way he would describe as "a quite friendly manner." He had decided that his participation was only to ensure any vessels in the harbor, which there were many, would not be used against the Patriots and that his men had "orders not to fire a shot Unless first fired upon" for the "Effect of preventing Blood."<sup>29</sup>

Seeing the boats full of men and American Navy gunboats off their shore swiftly changed the minds of the citizens and commander of Fernandina. When Colonel Ashley landed Lopez accepted him and offered the town up for surrender. The terms of surrender were established in a manner to least offend as many concerned parties as possible as the Patriots hoped to gain support from the populace while somehow trying not to enrage the Spanish or their British ally.

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<sup>29</sup> Campbell to Hamilton, March 21, 1812, Dudley, 1:88

To placate the resident the articles of capitulation called for the respect of private property, a continuance of the lumber cutting economy of the region by those who had claims at the time and all valid land claims would be respected. Those who wished to stay could without repercussion and those who left had until May of 1813 to sell their property at market value even if the United States entered into a war with Spain. To keep the British happy the trade in and out of Fernandina would remain free of U.S. duties for thirteen months and all vessels were ensured safe passage. To look benevolent to the local Spanish authorities the Spanish soldiers would be allowed to march out of town with all military honors so long as they did not take part in any actions against the Patriots as long as the current conflict persisted.<sup>30</sup>

Also within the document of surrender were the stated intentions of the Patriots to cede the captured territory to the United States after twenty-four hours of occupation. It was just as Mathews dreamed, a successful revolution of Floridians willing to hand over the territory to the nearest agent of the United States. The following day Mathews would go to Fernandina and accepted the territory as American soil.

More good news for Mathews arrived on the 17<sup>th</sup> in the form of the return of Lt. Col. Smith's return from his furlough to Pt. Petre. He immediately resumed command of the U.S. troops there and, as stated in a letter to the Secretary of War, "in obedience to my instructions of the 26<sup>th</sup> of Jan'y. 1811, I have sent a detachment of fifty men to receive and defend in the name of the United States the town of St. Fernandina and the island of Amelia."<sup>31</sup> Also arriving at Fernandina was the sixty-man detachment of U.S. Marines under Captain John Williams.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> the Patriot soldiers, the U.S. Army troops and the Marines formed in parade in Fernandina's town square for the formal handing over of the town to Mathews. The Patriot

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<sup>30</sup> Williams, 194-195

<sup>31</sup> Pratt, 100-101

flag, a white banner with a silhouetted charging soldier with a Latin phrase, that has been stated in many ways the most accepted on being *vox populi, lex suprema*, was lowered and the American flag was hoisted. The excited Mathews proclaimed to all gathered, “I go to St. Augustine, and from there our victorious men move on Mobile and Pensacola. But we won’t stop. On to Venezuela! We’ll rout the autocratic Spaniards and plant the flag of freedom over all of South America.”<sup>32</sup> But about the same time Mathews was basking in his glory Secretary of State Monroe was at work rescinding Mathews’ instructions. News of Mathews’ scheme had reached Washington and the administration saw it as a breach of his powers. Also, war with England was certainly approaching and war with Spain, though weak, had to be avoided. Monroe’s letter would remove Mathews as the American agent to Florida and place Georgia’s Governor David Mitchell in charge of Florida affairs.

Between the 18<sup>th</sup> of March and the 4<sup>th</sup> of April the Patriots remained in Fernandina with the hopes of more men joining them. Some did come but not as many as the Patriots had hoped but by the 4<sup>th</sup> they had to continue their revolution, with or without mass support. The Patriot army moved south with Mathews at their heels for the instances for when they came across even the slightest resemblance of a settlement they could formally cede the “conquered” territory to the United States. Right behind Mathews were the various detachments of Soldiers to protect the new territory. The Marines remained in Fernandina and Captain Williams became the military governor of the town.

By the 12<sup>th</sup> they had reached the free African American settlement of Fort Mose (Moo-Say), also known as Mossa Old Fort, which was only two miles from the walls of St. Augustine. The Patriots were close in proximity but far away in hopes of taking the city and its looming

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<sup>32</sup> Patrick, 106-107

stone fortress. A stalemate ensued in the proximity of St. Augustine. The Patriots could not take the town and the Spanish garrison inside was too weak to sortie out and engage the Patriots. On the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup> the Spanish made their first open act of resistance to the invasion. A Spanish gunboat anchored within range of Ft. Mose and opened fire. Inside the fort were Patriots and Lt. Col. Smith with his soldiers. He had the American flag hoisted and the firing stopped. The Spanish were willing to fire upon the Patriots but in an attempt to avoid all out war they would not fire on American forces. Here the invaders waited, unsure of their next move. Lt. Col. Smith wrote to the U.S Adjutant and Inspector, on April 26, requesting four pieces of large artillery in order to have any hope for the taking of St. Augustine and even then it may be questionable as he had only one hundred and nine men and the Patriots only had ninety three.<sup>33</sup>

Hoping to find some way of breaking the stalemate the Spanish Governor Juan Jose de Estrada sent emissaries to the Seminoles asking their chief, Chief Payne and his brother Bowlegs for assistance. Cautious about entering into a white mans war the brothers bided their time. They knew of the American lust for land and the implications that may have but they also made their living selling livestock and other agricultural goods to the Americans. Eventually they approached the Patriots to see what their revolution may have to offer to the Seminole people and offered their assistance. Shockingly, they were rudely and condescendingly told by Mathews to, essentially, go home and mind their business! This offended the proud leaders and Seminole people and, to the undoubted happiness of their escaped slave members and friends, decided they would work against the Patriots.

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<sup>33</sup> Lt. Col. Smith to U.S. Adjutant and Inspector, April 26, 1812, T. Frederick Davis, "United States Troops in Spanish East Florida, 1812-1813," *Fort Mose.Com*, [fortmose.com/pw\\_part1.html](http://fortmose.com/pw_part1.html) (accessed March 3, 2007)



In late April, while Mathews was absent from Fort Mose, a shocking letter arrived. Mathews would be dismissed and replaced by Governor Mitchell and the U.S. government repudiated all the Patriots activities. McIntosh was puzzled. He wondered how the government could abandon the Patriots after being such an integral part of their formation but resolved to maintain the revolution. Lt. Col. Smith was also dismayed as he and his puny force was now 100 miles inside of foreign territory without hopes of reinforcements. Captain Campbell was elated when he heard the news. He declared himself to be “the happiest of mortals.”<sup>34</sup> The Spanish were elated and the anti-administration press had a field day with the news of the invasion, cession and now abandonment of the government’s aggressive policy. By July 1, an official investigation began in Congress concerning the Administrations role in Florida

However, the replacing of Mathews, who upon learning of his dismissal head north to Washington to plead his case, with Governor Mitchell was a lateral step by Monroe. He replaced one committed expansionist with another. Officially Mitchell was to hold what was already in American hands and to only move further against the Spanish if the British attempted to occupy Florida. This would conveniently make it all now seem like a defensive action of the State of Georgia and not the United States.

On May 4 Mitchell wrote to Lt. Col. Smith informing him that he was now under his command and he should remain where he was until further orders or in the case he had to retire due to attack. With Mitchell also came a sizable number of militia from Georgia that added to McIntosh’s growing number of Patriots. McIntosh’s army was growing larger due to the outlandish promise of land tracts up to 3,000 acres and a tacit acceptance of plundering of private property. This would lose any moral high ground claimed upon the principle of freedom and

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<sup>34</sup> Cusick, 106

liberation of Florida and lead most of the Patriot Forces to disintegrate into bands of pillagers attacking without discrimination.

The confusion and stagnation of the Patriot and U.S. advance into Florida had given time for Governor Estrada to marshal his forces and prepare to go on the offensive. On May 16 Spanish force consisting of Spanish Soldiers and African Americans attacked Ft. Mose under the guns of a Spanish Schooner. Smith was forced to retire inland and the fort was burnt to the ground by the attackers. Over the next three months Smith remained in his camp and the Spanish maintained St. Augustine. On occasion small bands of soldiers, Indian or African Americans would cross each other in small skirmishes, but there were no major assaults. The stalemate solidified even further on June 11 when a squadron of ships from Cuba arrived with soldiers and a new governor General Sebastian Kindelan y O'Regan. Upon his arrival, Kindelan sparked a series of letters between himself and Smith. Kindelan was essentially asking what the United States' intentions were to which Smith usually responded with the quintessential "I am a soldier following orders, ask my superiors." Eventually all communication was cut off due to perceived insults by each from the other.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this breakdown in communication there were much higher level talks had been going on since the first news of the build up of Patriot forces reached Washington. In Washington Monroe was trying to persuade the Spanish and English that this was not at all an action by the United States. The Spanish consul to the United States Luis de Onis and British consul Augustus Foster demanded an explanation. With tensions rising between America and Britain Monroe had his work cut out for him. He was told by Foster that if necessary "his

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<sup>35</sup> T. Frederick Davis, "United States Troops in Spanish East Florida, 1812-1813," *Fort Mose.Com*, [fortmose.com/pw\\_part1.html](http://fortmose.com/pw_part1.html) (accessed March 3, 2007)

government should proceed to vindicate the Rights of Spain by force of Arms.”<sup>36</sup> Also, within the government chambers of Washington was a growing debate over how to handle the growing problem of the Florida Patriots. It was no secret that the administration had some influence over the situation and in July of that year the issues were brought to the floor of Congress. An act authorizing the occupation of East Florida passed the house but fell just short in the Senate. Soon after it was brought to the floor again with the same result. Congress having denied the administration the backing needed to continue with its policy it soon became necessary to design a new plan to reverse the events underway. This would leave those involved in the events, the Patriots, the militiamen and U.S. forces involved with a sense of abandonment that would continue to grow as time went on.

Four months since arriving at Ft. Mose in April Smith’s command was severely suffering from a lack of provisions and proper clothing due to the difficulties of maintaining a steady supply chain from Pt. Petre and Fernandina. He constantly called for artillery, more men, assistance from the Navy and Marines but none of it was forth coming. He was growing increasingly tired of his present predicament. He wrote to a friend that he was “truly tired of this Damned Province and would not remain (if it rested with him) one month longer in my present situation for a fee simple to the whole of it.”<sup>37</sup> The difficulty in the supply chain was due to the fact that in the territory under Patriot control, the land between the St. Mary’s River and St. Augustine, became a lawless and dangerous place filled with the roving, plundering bands of Patriots bringing the revolution to those who continued to support the Spanish king or even remained neutral and the latter fighting back. The Patriots also ventured deeper into Seminole

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<sup>36</sup> Patrick, 61

<sup>37</sup> Cusick, 211

lands which inevitable instigated conflict with the already aggravated nation. On July 25 the Seminoles began launching raids against Patriot parties and outposts and plantations.

The arrival of the news concerning the declaration of war against Great Britain raised the hopes of those in Florida including Smith. Surely the Florida situation would have to be taken care of, one way or another before the war with Britain heated up. Still, the affairs around St. Augustine remained stagnant but away from the town the action intensified. The war here was not Patriots and U.S. troops against Spaniards but at its base, white men, mostly Georgians, against Native Americans and African Americans.

While the war devolved into campaigns of retribution the Patriot revolution was fading. McIntosh, Director of East Florida had no government and no control. His enabler, Mathews had died on his trip back to Washington and some of the other original Patriot leaders faded away in the hope they would not be hung as traitors when the whole charade came down around them. Increasingly the war was being carried on by Georgians hoping to wipe out the Seminole threat to their state with occasional aid from the forces of the United States.

Outside of St. Augustine Smith's men grew increasingly sick during the summer months but in mid August news arrived that 250 Georgia volunteers under Col. David Newnan were in the vicinity of St. Augustine. They had established a blockhouse and an encampment for the reestablishing of supply lines and though subject to constant raids and attacks from Seminoles, African Americans and the occasional Spaniards they held their positions. He informed Smith he was ready to move against the Seminoles and he hoped he could first assist Smith. Accordingly a supply train was assembled to bring the much-needed material to Smith. The wagon train would set out from the blockhouse located along Davis Creek move through a tropical morass known as Twelve Mile Swamp and then into Smith's camp. In charge of this

supply train was Captain Williams of the Marines. He and twenty of his men had been acting as couriers between Governor Mitchell and the various Patriot, Georgia militia and U.S. military posts in Florida.

At dusk on September 12 the wagons, guarded by the Marines and a handful of Georgia militiamen, entered the canopied Twelve Mile Swamp. Almost immediately an ambush erupted from the darkness of the swamp. The trained Marines formed into line and fired back but soon after Williams fell to the ground wounded. The Marines and Georgians, realizing the linear tactics were not suitable took cover in the thickets. Seven more Marines were wounded and Williams was hit seven more times before his men dragged him to safety. The attackers, a band of Seminoles and African Americans, believed to be numbering about sixty now moved in for the kill. They set one wagon on fire and commandeered the others and a Seminole warrior finished off a wounded Marine and scalped him. Seeing this either angered the Marines or made them determined not to face the same fate. They stood and advanced upon their attackers with their bayonets. This show of force caused the attackers to fall back into the brush and continue to snipe at the Marines throughout the night but withdrew in the morning. When word reached Davis Creek block house a relief party was sent out. Reaching the Marines they moved back to the blockhouse carrying the still alive Captain Williams. For nineteen day Williams fought his injuries but eventually succumbed to them. Smith's situation was now desperate. Without the supplies in that wagon train he could remain no longer where he has in the state he and his men were in. Smith was forced to burn his camp and seek shelter at the blockhouse on Davis Creek. The flames and smoke from Smith's camp brought a general celebration to the people of St. Augustine but the suffering in Florida was not over.<sup>38</sup> A week later the Georgia volunteers under

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<sup>38</sup> Cusick ,235

Col. Newnan moved on the Seminoles hoping to destroy their settlements. For nearly three weeks they are constantly engaged in guerilla warfare, never reaching a major Seminole town and being forced to withdraw back to their camps. Though their actions are a dismal failure Newnan and his men are proclaimed heroes.<sup>39</sup>

Soon after Col. Newnan's expedition word came from Washington that there would be another change in command of the East Florida problem. Mitchell would be replaced by Brigadier General Thomas Pinckney with the ultimate intention of the government, which was under increasing pressure from Congress, to start to de-escalate the situation and withdraw. But the Georgia legislature did not find this so appealing and with the leadership of Governor Mitchell it passed a series of resolutions calling for the occupation of Florida as a matter of state and national security. However, for the meantime all U.S. forces were to remain where they were to defend against depredations of the Seminoles. Throughout Georgia and the neighboring state of Tennessee a general call went out to gain support for the crushing of the Indian threat from Florida. In the province of West Florida a faction of the Creek Nation was preparing to fight the encroaching Americans while the actions of the Seminoles in East Florida was causing more and more alarm.

Seminole and Patriot raids continued as did the raids of Georgians already in Florida but no major offensive action was taken until February of 1813. On the seventh of that month three hundred Georgians accompanied by a detachment of Smith's Riflemen, the Marines, now under Lt. Alexander Sevier and bands of Patriots moved deep into Seminole territory. Their object was to accomplish what Newnan could not; destroy the Seminole's homeland. They moved on the major towns of the Seminoles, named after their leaders Payne and Bowlegs and every small

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<sup>39</sup> T. Frederick Davis, "United States Troops in Spanish East Florida, 1812-1813," *Fort Mose.Com*, [fortmose.com/pw\\_part3.html](http://fortmose.com/pw_part3.html) (accessed March 3, 2007)

settlement they came across. When the expedition was over they had destroyed 386 houses, 2,000 bushels of corn, 2,000 deerskins and drove away three hundred horses and four hundred heads of cattle. Col. John Williams of the Tennessee militia wrote, “The balance of the Seminole Nation is completely in waste.”<sup>40</sup> The Seminoles were in a dire state. They were scattered without food or shelter and, though they were not wiped out as a Nation they were effectively blunted as a threat until, at least, 1818.

For the United States the Patriot revolution was becoming a problem it did not need. The first eight months of war with Britain had produced little but defeat and outright embarrassment on the field of battle. Monroe worked feverishly to find a way to honorably abandon the Patriot cause in Florida. To accomplish this he needed to seek amnesty for the Patriots. Agreed upon by Onis, an Act of Amnesty was issued by Kingdon on March 18, 1813, exactly one year after the formal acceptance of Fernandina by General George Mathews. The act called for the Patriots to take an oath of allegiance to Spain within four months. In conjuncture with the agreement on amnesty American forces were to withdraw from East Florida and on May 6, 1813 the last of U. S. forces embarked aboard boats in Fernandina and landed at Pt. Petre.

For many of the Patriots who lived in Florida when the revolution began they accepted the amnesty offer. Others that were not sure if the Spanish officials would live up to their word or if their neighbors who had remained loyal to Spain would seek retribution for the chaos and losses, headed north to Georgia and beyond. But this was not the end of the Patriot cause. John McIntosh had assembled handful of men determined to fight on. Georgians Buckner Harris and Daniel Delany now became officials of the Patriot government. They hoped that “either the United States would again intervene, or else that they could make terms with St. Augustine

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<sup>40</sup> Pratt, 231

which would assure them possession of some of the lands they had hoped to gain in the revolution.”<sup>41</sup> They issued continuing proclamations condemning the Spanish authorities in St. Augustine and calling on the people to rise and fight for their freedom and threatened former Patriots if they took the oath of allegiance. Few people came to their standard and their threats, their continuing raids and their mere presence in the land they controlled along the St. Mary’s River brought the ire of the loyal Spanish subjects. In Early August, 1813 citizens from Fernandina set out to defeat the Patriots along the St. Mary’s. In the battle that ensued the Patriots drove off their attackers. Instead of using the victory for a precursor to an offensive movement the Patriots used it as a way to extend the idea of coming to a negotiated peace. Between August and January of 1814 nothing was accomplished as Kindelan refused to enter into negotiations with the Patriots. Frustrated, Buckner Harris and a force of about eighty “Patriots” (most of them from Georgia) moved into the devastated former land of the Seminoles and established a government for the newly formed District of Aluchua. They built a blockhouse on the site of the former Seminole town of Payne and quickly petitioned Congress for annexation that was just as quickly denied. The intrepid Patriots stay in their new locale for nearly four months constantly addressing letters to state and national official seeking any sort of recognition they can get. They also offer their services to U.S. military commanders in the southern districts but they are rejected. In May of 1814, while on a reconnaissance patrol, Buckner Harris is killed in a Seminole ambush. Their leader gone, the Patriots abandon their blockhouse and scamper back across the Georgia border leaving East-Florida, for the first time in two years, in relative peace.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 239



The Patriot War was over but the American desire for Florida did not fade. Following the War of 1812 and the First Seminole War in 1818, the United States, through diplomacy, not invasion was able to secure Florida with the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819. The implementation of the plans for the annexing of Florida by the means proscribed to in 1811 by Mathews, Madison and Monroe would certainly become a “How Not To Guide” as the American nation looked westward and south in the coming century. Later in the Nineteenth-Century Florida residents affected by the Patriot War, by then U.S. Citizens sued their government for the devastation of their property during the war. Their claims were heard and by Judge Isaac Bronson and others that eventually awarded nearly \$200,000 in reparations but that was less than half the total claimed. Judge Bronson would declare the Patriots War “an episode in the general history of the nation, which, as an American citizen, I could wish might remain unwritten.”<sup>42</sup> But it has not remained unwritten and is beginning to receive more and more scholarly attention and it is well that it should. Great nations must be honest with its past and recognize its missteps as well as its achievements. Though the Patriot War was a “story of aggression, of repudiation, of executive double-dealing, of inhumanity” it should also be recognized as an early instance of how our checks and balance system prevailed even in a “hawkish” atmosphere when Congress checked presidential power.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Patrick, 303

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

## Sources

### Primary:

The Internet has been a godsend to those of us who seek out primary historical resources but lack the funds to freely travel to the various repositories that house them. One source I was happily able to locate were the digitized document of the James Madison Papers from the Library of Congress Website (<http://loc.gov>). Also available from the Library of Congress website is the entire series of the American State Papers. A collection of congressional documents dealing with debates and resolutions of congress as well as reports to Congress by military, naval, treasury and diplomatic officials.

Beside government Internet sites I was fortunate to have available to me the *America's Historical Newspapers* database (<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>) that compiled 230 years of newspaper articles searchable by publication, subject, date, city or any combination of those. This allowed me to seek out dozens of articles written at the time of the Patriot War from different political, sectional and national vantage points.

More Internet searching brought me to a website dedicated to preserving the memory of Ft. Mose in Florida ([http://fortmose.com/patriot\\_war.html](http://fortmose.com/patriot_war.html)). On this website is the republication of the correspondence of Lt. Col Thomas Smith of the U.S. Army. These correspondences were originally published in the *Florida Historical Quarterly* by T. Frederick Davis in the late 1920s and early 1930s and give a near daily account of Smith's command in Florida.

For more specific points concerning the naval operations I used *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History* volumes 1 and 2, edited by William S. Dudley and produced by the Naval Historical Center. This is an incomplete four-volume set (volume 4 is still in the works) that encompasses all the aspect of the service of the United States Navy in the years 1811-1815 including the letters of Captain Hugh Campbell that deal with the activities concerning the Patriot War.

For a very detailed prospective I was able to use the records of the United States Marine Corps that are available from the National Archives. Record Group 127 contains all Marine Corps correspondance including the letters sent between the officers in charge of the Marine Corps detachment assigned to support the Army along the Georgia-Florida border and Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington D.C.

Secondary:

Until Recently, the one and only in depth study of the Florida Patriots War was Rembrandt W. Patrick's *Florida Fiasco: Rampant Rebels on the Georgia-Florida border, 1810-1815* published in 1954. Being a complete study, this book was extremely helpful and entertaining by the fact of emphasizing the "fiasco" part of the title. Covering from the first intrigues of the Government to the court squabbles that came as late as 1851 concerning losses incurred during the war. The author is considered one of the Pre-eminent scholars of Florida history and uses a wide range of evidence but focuses mainly on the American side of the story.

In an effort to round off the Patrick's telling of the story by the additional use of more international sources James G. Cusick produced the second of the two books written on the subject in 2003. Cusick's *The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida* is an extremely detailed and balanced thoroughly researched book. Cusick places the Patriot War in the context of the global and hemispheric drama that had been growing since the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe and also places it in the social and racial context of the American south in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Aside from Patrick's and Cusick's book there is only one other book on the shelves that deal with the Patriot War in a significant manner. Julius W. Pratt's *Expansionists of 1812* deals with the Florida Patriot War in the larger context of the desires of many Americans in the early 1800s to grab adjacent lands from neighboring territories such as Florida, Canada and early attempts upon Texas.

Another helpful source was the *Encyclopedia of the War of 1812*, edited by David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler. This encyclopedia covers all imaginable subjects concerning the War of 1812 and subjects that have a connection to that war. Information can be gained from the biographical entries on the various personalities involved in the Patriot War as well as from entries concerning the Patriot War itself and Florida.

To set the military and international diplomatic picture prior and during the Patriot War I consulted *The Encyclopedia of Military History*. This extensive text gives a brief synopsis to all known major conflicts from the dawn of civilization to the 1960s. Though the Patriot War was too small to receive its own study in the text there was considerable space given to the wars for

North America and the Napoleonic Wars and their impacts on colonial rule and exchanges of territory as a result of those wars.

Also consulted were a group of General histories of the State of Florida ranging in publication date from 1837 to 1971. The two earliest, *The Territory of Florida: or Sketches of the Topography, Civil and Natural History of the Country, the Climate, and the Indian Tribes, from the First Discovery to the Present Time* by John Lee Williams, published in 1837 and *History of Florida*, by George R. Fairbanks' published in 1871 were of limited use because these both were produced in jingoistic fashion and based on anecdotal evidence. However, as the editors of the republished facsimile of William's work openly admitted that this text is not to be considered a "literal historical account" but notes that Williams' work on the Patriots War "rises above the level of much of the rest of the "history" in this volume." In order from oldest to newest the other works consulted were:

A History of Florida: From the Treaty of 1763 to Our Own Time by Caroline Mays Brevard (1924), *Florida Under Five Flags* by Rembert Wallace Patrick (1960) and *A History of Florida* by Charlton W. Tebeau (1971). Each of these books devotes a few pages to the Patriot War that allows the reader to get a general overview of the causes and controversies but offer little if any specifics.

To place the Patriot War into the broader context of the War of 1812 a couple of books dealing with the War of 1812 were used. The two I chose from an ever growing number of books dealing with the war were John K. Mahon's *The War of 1812* which is considered the most detailed single volume on the War of 1812 and the most widely praised book published to date on the war, Donald R. Hickey's *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict*.

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