

# PENSACOLA IN 1770

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AT the close of the Seven Years War, concluded by the Treaty of Paris in 1763, England was ceded all of the Spanish territory east of the Mississippi River, and Spain found consolation and compensation in a French cession to her of the Louisiana territory, including the Isle of Orleans on the east of the Mississippi. For purposes of administering the newly acquired territory the British divided the area into two provinces, East and West Florida, with the Apalachicola River as the boundary between them<sup>1</sup> and with San Augustine and Pensacola as the seats of government.

Partly as a result of unsatisfactory experiences in the attempt to develop the provinces, and partly in an effort to effect economies throughout the military establishment in the Western Hemisphere, the government in London in 1768 ordered a general retrenchment program which included the diminution of the garrisons at the outlying posts. There was, therefore, a drastic reduction of military personnel in both East and West Florida, with Pensacola being all but abandoned by the military.<sup>2</sup> Hardly had the program begun, however, when additional Spanish forces at New Orleans and strained relations between Spain and England brought a reversal of the policy. The French inhabitants at New Orleans had viewed with distaste the transfer to Spain, and friction between the citizens and the officials became constant. In 1768 this discontent flared into open rebellion, the Spanish governor was evicted, and a provisional government was

<sup>1</sup> See the Proclamation of 1763, in *Annual Register*, 1763, pp. 208 ff. This proclamation, with certain insignificant omissions, may also be found in Henry Steele Commager, *Documents of American History*, I, 47 ff.

<sup>2</sup> British policy in these provinces has been the subject of two recent publications: Cecil Johnson, *British West Florida, 1763-1783* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1943), and Charles L. Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province, 1763-1784* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1943).

established by the local residents.<sup>3</sup> In order to quell the rebellion Charles III in 1769 dispatched Alejandro O'Reilly, an Irishman in Spanish military service, to the scene of the trouble; O'Reilly brought with him a large army. The presence of such a force in the immediate vicinity seriously disturbed the British governor of West Florida, and he besought the home government to send reinforcements for his scanty garrison. His fears were multiplied when, in 1770, Spanish eviction of an English whaling party from the Falkland Islands<sup>4</sup> brought the two nations to the brink of war. In order to meet any possible threat to the Floridas, General Thomas Gage ordered the Sixteenth Regiment to Pensacola as reinforcement; the expedition sailed on March 27, 1770,<sup>5</sup> and it is with one aspect of the reinforcement program that the following letter deals.

The document here presented is from Jonathan Ogden to Robert Morris and is one of the large collection of original manuscripts in the Robert Morris Papers in the Rutgers University Library. The recipient of the letter was the natural son of Robert Hunter Morris, Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court before the Revolution. Robert Morris (*c.* 1745-1815) himself was admitted to the bar in August, 1770, became a licensed counsellor in 1773, served as Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court from 1777 to 1779, and was the Federal District Judge in New Jersey from 1789 until his death in 1815.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, the identity of Jonathan Ogden, the writer of the letter, is not so easily ascertained. From a letter dated March 3, 1770, in the Robert Morris Papers we learn that Jonathan Ogden had

<sup>3</sup> For the details and implications of this rebellion see J. E. Winston, "The Cause and Results of the Revolution of 1768 in Louisiana," *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, April, 1932; A. S. Aiton, "Spanish Colonial Reorganization under the Family Compact," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, August 1932; and Alcée Fortier, *A History of Louisiana* (New York, 1904). A short sketch of O'Reilly may be found in *Dictionary of American Biography*, XIV, 51-52.

<sup>4</sup> The definitive work on the Falkland controversy is Julius Goebel, Jr., *The Struggle for the Falkland Islands, A Study in Legal and Diplomatic History* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1927). This study concentrates on the later period, but gives full coverage to the episode in 1770.

<sup>5</sup> See Clarence Edwin Carter (ed.), *Correspondence of Thomas Gage* (Yale University Press, New Haven, two vols., 1931, 1933), particularly Gage to Earl of Hillsborough, February 21, 1770 (I, 246-248), Gage to Hillsborough, April 23, 1770 (I, 252-253), and Gage to Viscount Barrington, June 1, 1770 (II, 542-543). The complete correspondence of Gage is in the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan.

<sup>6</sup> A satisfactory short sketch of Robert Morris may be found in *Dictionary of American Biography*, XIII, 223-224.

been a guest in the home of Judge David Ogden in Newark, and that he had gone to New York a few days previously. In New York he was quartered in barracks, had freedom to come and go, and carried a sword—all of which would lead one to believe that he was an officer in the service of the king. Ford makes no mention of a Jonathan Ogden among the British officers in America,<sup>7</sup> nor is Ogden listed in any of the various works on the Sixteenth Regiment.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, available evidence does not indicate that he was a civil official in West Florida. The present sources show the existence of two, and possibly three, Jonathan Ogdens in the East Jersey area prior to the Revolutionary War, but of their youthful activities nothing is known. The writer of the letter was probably not the Jonathan Ogden from Morristown who served in Captain Bonnell's company of patriots.<sup>9</sup> He may have been the Jonathan Ogden who was one of the principal heirs of John Ogden in 1780, but nothing more is known of this particular Ogden, and identification cannot be certain.<sup>10</sup> Again, he may have been the Jonathan Ogden whom Sabine<sup>11</sup> mentions as having been a Loyalist and having settled in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, in 1783. There is some evidence that the writer of the letter was later a Loyalist, for he was apparently both friend and admirer of Judge David Ogden and his son Isaac Ogden, both of whom were Loyalists during the Revolution, but he makes no mention of either Samuel or Abraham Ogden, the two sons of the judge who were patriots. It is also curious that no later correspondence between Morris and Ogden is to be found, in spite of the evident warmth of their friendship, and that Morris makes no mention of Jonathan Ogden in any of his letters.

Pensacola August 15<sup>th</sup> 1770

Dear Bob

You shou'd have heard from me long before this, but as there has been but one direct opportunity since we have arriv'd, and an unavoidable accident preventing my sending any Letters by that, you must excuse me, and charge [it] to unwilling Neglect.

<sup>7</sup> Worthington C. Ford, *British Officers Serving in America, 1754-1774* (Boston, 1894).

<sup>8</sup> See particularly pertinent issues of the *Journal* of the Society for Army Historical Research, London.

<sup>9</sup> See William Ogden Wheeler, *The Ogden Family, Elizabethtown Branch* (Philadelphia, 1907), p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>11</sup> Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1864), II, 126.

I dare say a Description of our Passage—the Land we live in—it's Politicks &c. &c. will not be very disagreeable—You may recoll[ect] the [that] we left the Hook<sup>12</sup> on y<sup>e</sup> 13<sup>th</sup> of March, in s[—] days boisterous weather, we were below Bermuda in fourteen, got into the Lattitude of Turks-Island[s,]<sup>13</sup> changed our Course due West for those Islands, but on the 17<sup>th</sup> Day, in the Morning, made the Caicos-Islands, about five Leagues to the westward of those Islands, we run for; then changing our Course South, and leaving Sight of those Islands in the Evening, next morning by 8. o'Clock we made the Island of Hispaniola<sup>14</sup>—Turks-Islands are famous for mak[ing] large Quantities of Salt—The Caicos Islands a[re] a Cluster of rocky, barren, uninhabited Islands capable of producing nothing worthy of any one's Cultivation—Turks-Islands lie in the Lattitude of 21°-23' the latter in the Lattitude of 21°-30'. Hispan[iola] abounds on the North Coast with incredible high Mountains to be seen in a clear Day at the Dista[nce] of 30 or 40 Leagues<sup>15</sup>—After having got Sight of the Island took our Course nearly S: W: for Cape St. Nichola<sup>16</sup> a Cape & harbour in y<sup>e</sup> N: W: part of the Island.

In this Harbour, at a little Town call'd the Mole of St. Nicola, we were obliged to put in for water the Inhabitants are entirely French and governed by a Lieu<sup>t</sup> Govern<sup>r</sup> appointed by the govern<sup>r</sup> of the Island at S<sup>t</sup> Domingo,<sup>17</sup> the Metropolis; we din'd at his Honours in the most elegant French Taste, the victuals & Liquor were all taken away at once (a d—d Disappointment!) & we adjourn'd to the next Room for Coffee, as it is a Custom among the French never to drink after Dinner—The Town is [e]ntirely surrounded by rocky Mountains and barren Hills, of Consequence in itself has no staple Commodity, but subsists entirely by the smuggling Trade of Molasses, Sugers &c: from other parts of the Island. We found the Harbour full of English Vessels

<sup>12</sup> Sandy Hook, the departure point for vessels.

<sup>13</sup> Turks Islands and Caicos Islands are two clusters of islands due east of southern Cuba. Geographically a part of the Bahamas group, they are now attached to Jamaica for administrative purposes; the present population of the combined groups is approximately five thousand.

<sup>14</sup> The Spanish Española, or the island normally referred to as Santo Domingo.

<sup>15</sup> The length of the league has varied with time and country, but the English usage has been to give the league a distance of approximately three miles. It is hardly to be believed that the mountains of Santo Domingo could be seen at a distance of over one hundred miles.

<sup>16</sup> St. Nicholas. The Mole St. Nicholas is one of the two (Samaná Bay being the other) good harbors on the northern part of the island. At various times the United States has been anxious to lease or buy the harbor.

<sup>17</sup> Santo Domingo, the spelling of which is often confused by persons not familiar with Spanish usage. Ogden is in error here, for the government at Santo Domingo, the city, never had any connection with the western end of the island inasmuch as Santo Domingo was Spanish and the western portion was in French hands. Prior to 1770, the capital of the French possession, styled Saint Dominique, was at Cap Francois (present Cap Haïtien); in 1770 the administrative seat was moved to Port au Prince, which was the capital during the remainder of the time the French occupied the island and is today the capital of the Republic of Haiti.

For a short account of the French portion, see Mary W. Williams, *People and Politics of Latin America* (Ginn & Co., Boston, 1945, rev. ed.), pp. 276-286.

from all parts of America.<sup>18</sup> We weigh'd Anchor the 6<sup>th</sup> of April at Eleven o'Clock A. M. and set Sail for the East End of Jamaica, in two hours we made the East End of the Island of Cuba, and the next Evening the E. End of Jamaica—Cape S<sup>t</sup> Nichola is in y<sup>e</sup> Latt. of 20° N<sup>h</sup>. The E. End of Jamaica in Latt: 17°-45'. we were three or four Days sailing along the N: Coast of this Isl<sup>d</sup> and much delighted with a pleasant variety of verdant hills, and fruitfull valies, interspers'd with nuber[—]ss [numerous?] villages, & Sugar Plantations—from the west end of this Island we took our Distance for the Grand Commanes,<sup>19</sup> which we made in 36 hours, from whence Steer'd our Course for Cape S<sup>t</sup> Antonio,<sup>20</sup> the west End of Cuba where we arrived in four Days from the Commanes—

From the Cape of S<sup>t</sup> Antonio, we directed our Course immediately for Pensacola Harbour, where we arrived the 27<sup>th</sup> of April having been six weeks from N: York; and three Days.<sup>21</sup> one of the Transports the [*sic*] that Sail'd a fortnight after us got in before us.<sup>22</sup> General Haldiman<sup>23</sup> arriv[ed] a few Days after us from S<sup>t</sup> Augustine & is still with us. We were much “disappointed” as to Salubri[ty] of the climate; I dare say there's not a more healthfull Town in all America; an Ague is not known here, except it's brought from Mobbille, which is more sickly, or from some other part of the Province. It is some times excessively hot, and wou'd be intolerable were it not for the Sea Breezes, which set in every morning about ten o'Clock. The Thermometer is frequently at 90° it has been at 98¾° about two Years agoe and as low as 17° in the winter.

The Province of W: Florida or rath[er] District<sup>24</sup> contains in it but one County, which is Charlotte Co<sup>ty</sup>, in which is Mobbille, about 50 or 60 miles from hence, it was so Constituted for the Conveniency of holding petty Courts, as it wou'd be bothe inconvenient & expensive for Juries & Evidences to come

<sup>18</sup> The cordiality with which Ogden and his shipmates were greeted by the French is not without interest, nor is the fact that the harbor was “full of English Vessels from all parts of America.” The molasses trade was lucrative to both the French and the American colonists.

<sup>19</sup> Grand Cayman, one of the British possessions to the south of Cuba and to the north-west of Jamaica. The island is attached to Jamaica for administrative purposes.

<sup>20</sup> San Antonio.

<sup>21</sup> The rather roundabout route taken by Ogden's ship on the voyage to Pensacola was not unusual during the days of sail. Because of prevailing wind and current conditions, most vessels followed a route similar to that followed here, but without the wandering in the vicinity of Jamaica.

<sup>22</sup> The transport mentioned by Ogden was one of the ships bringing the Sixteenth Regiment to Pensacola. In addition to Carter, *op. cit.*, see Cecil Johnson, *British West Florida, 1763-1783* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1943), pp. 65-68; and Charles L. Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province, 1763-1784* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1943), pp. 27-28. The details of this expedition may be pieced together in the correspondence of General Thomas Gage in the William L. Clements Library of the University of Michigan.

<sup>23</sup> Brigadier General Frederick Haldimand, the commanding officer of the southern district.

<sup>24</sup> West Florida was created as a province by the Proclamation of 1763 and remained as a province until the return to Spain in 1783.

such a Distance. All the superi[or] Courts are held here as likewise a Court of Conscience every Month to try suits under £5 and is determin'd by three Magistrates from whence there is no appeal. the Partie's Oath is all the Evidence required.

The Setled Boundaries of West Floriada [*sic*] is as follows—on the North, by a Line drawn due East, from the Entrance of the River Yassou,<sup>25</sup> into the Missisipi [*sic*], to the River Apilachicola [*sic*];<sup>26</sup> on the East, by that River; on the South, by the Bay of Mexico, and on the West, by the River Missisipi [*sic*],<sup>27</sup> though this takes in part [of the] Lower Creek & Chactaw<sup>28</sup> Nations, who are both at Peace with us, though at present at a bloody war with each other. In general the Soil is Sandy tho fertile and capable of producing Corn, Indigo, rice &c. with proper Cultivation, and all kinds of vegetables fit for a Kitchen Garden without foreign manure.

We have here a Council, and most respectable Assembly, consisting of four [&] twenty members.<sup>29</sup>

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of August<sup>30</sup> Govern<sup>r</sup> Chester<sup>31</sup> arriv'd from London, but last from Jamaica, and has taken his Place accordingly. He has brought over Philip Livingston,<sup>32</sup> as his private Secretary, and I believe as a *Chief Guide* for he has already made him one of the Council. M<sup>r</sup> Livingston intends practising the Law here, for a Good Attorney was very much wanted.

<sup>25</sup> Yazzoo River.

<sup>26</sup> Apalachicola River; above the point of juncture of the Apalachicola and the Flint the river is known, and was then so known, as the Chattahoochee River, and this was the upper part of the eastern boundary.

<sup>27</sup> Ogden was slightly in error in giving the boundaries of the province, since the western boundary was not the Mississippi proper as far as the Gulf of Mexico. By the Treaty of Paris in 1763 France had excluded the Isle of Orleans from her cession of territory east of the Mississippi to England, and in establishing the boundaries of the province by the Proclamation of October 7, 1763, Lakes Pontchartrain and Maurepas and the Mississippi to the 31st parallel were fixed as the western boundary. In 1764 the western boundary was extended up the Mississippi to the confluence of the Yazzoo and the Mississippi. For the Proclamation of 1763 see *Annual Register* (1763), pp. 203-212; for the extension see the commission to Governor Johnstone reprinted in *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XXI, 1034-1035.

<sup>28</sup> Choctaw.

<sup>29</sup> An assembly was authorized when the province was created. It met at irregular intervals until 1772, after which it met only once, in 1778. For an adequate study of the government of the area, see Cecil Johnson, *British West Florida, 1763-1783*.

<sup>30</sup> According to Johnson, *British West Florida*, p. 76, Chester reported that he arrived on August 10, 1770.

<sup>31</sup> Governor Peter Chester was not an outstanding success as governor of West Florida, becoming unpopular with both Assembly and Council. Among other things, he was charged with defalcation and misappropriation of funds. See Mrs. Dunbar Rowland, "Peter Chester," in *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, Centenary Series*, V, 1-183, and Johnson, *British West Florida*, 76 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Livingston was a member of the New York family and was in London at the time of his appointment as Chester's secretary. Ogden's observation of the apparent relationship between the two men was uncommonly keen, for events proved that Livingston was indeed the "chief guide" and was accused of the same crimes as those committed by the governor. See Johnson, *British West Florida*, for frequent references to his activities.

Provisions, and all Kinds of Merchandises, are excessively dear here; our Bay which is about as large as York Bay abounds with a great Plenty and variety of Fish. I shall give you a moore [*sic*] particular Description of the Bay and Harbour, some future Opportunity, as well as a satisfactory Solution of that surprising Phenomenon the *Gulph Stream*. The Aurora-Borealis never makes it's Appearance here.

General O'Riley<sup>33</sup> is gone to Spain. We are under no apprehensions from an Invasion from the Spaniards at Orleans,<sup>34</sup> there is but one Battallion of the Spanish Army there.

The Persons<sup>35</sup> that hold the principal offices of Government at Orleans have rendered themselves so odious to the French Inhabitants (there being but very few Spaniards but what are in Office) by their Cruelty, Tyranny & Oppression that they want nothing but a favourable opportunity to make an entire Revolt this may be depended upon as Fact. I believe I have well nigh tir'd your Patience therefore give me leave to suscribe myself indeed in very deed

Your Affectionate  
Friend  
Jonathan Ogden

Tell S<sup>r</sup> Samuel I have not forgot him & M<sup>r</sup> & M<sup>rs</sup> Hedden.

<sup>33</sup> Alejandro O'Reilly had stamped out any vestige of revolution and put the area firmly under the control of Spain. His mission completed, he returned to Spain in 1770. See *Dictionary of American Biography*, XIV, 51-52.

<sup>34</sup> That is, as a result of the tension then existing between Spain and England as a result of the Falkland Islands dispute. In addition to Goebel, *op. cit.*, see Dionisio de Alsedo y Herrera, *Piraterías y agresiones de los ingleses y de otros pueblos de Europa en la América Española desde el siglo XVI al XVIII*, 405-437.

<sup>35</sup> The Spaniards.