

Jose Del Rio Cosa

By JACK D. L. HOLMES*

Of the numerous, unheralded reconnoitering voyages made by Spaniards along the coast of East Florida during the second half of the eighteenth century, few exceed in interest that of Lieutenant of warship José del Río Cosa in 1787. His remarkable observations and judicious predictions for the future of Florida as a producer of naval stores make the document more than just an historical curiosity.

From the documents in the naval and war archives of El Viso del Marqués,¹ it appears there were two naval officers of similar name.² The explorer of East Florida was apparently José Antonio del Río Cosa, born in the Santoña mountains of Santander. After enlisting in the marine guards in October, 1773, he trained on land until 1775, when he went to sea. On June 22, 1775, he was commissioned ensign of a warship and he joined the ill-fated Spanish expedition against Algiers led by the redoubtable Conde, Alexandro O'Reilly. In May, 1776, he sailed on the frigate *Dorotea* in a fleet from El Ferrol to Havana, where he was attached to the naval base from July 2, 1776. Following his promotion to lieutenant of frigate on May 27, 1780, he fought in the naval expeditions of the young Conde, Bernardo de Gálvez, against Mobile (1780) and Pensacola (1781). He won his braids as lieutenant of warship in 1783 or 1784 and was commissioned captain of frigate in 1794, partly as a reward for his services during the 1787 expedition

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¹ The Archivo Museo Álvaro Bazán Marina de Guerra. Its director, Admiral Julio F. Guillén, was very helpful in securing copies of documents relative to José del Río Cosa. For comments on this rarely-consulted naval archive, see E. J. Burrus, S.J., "An Introduction to Bibliographical Tools in Spanish Archives and Manuscript Collections Relating to Hispanic America," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XXXV, No. 4 (November, 1955), 472-73, 482.

² The *other* naval officer, José del Río Cossa [*sic*], was born in Madrid in 1758. He began his services in the Marine Guards on January 25, 1777. Married in 1810, he was a Knight in the Order of Santiago. He died in 1817. Hoja del Servicios, Archivo Museo Álvaro Bazán, Sección de Indiferente.

to East Florida. He had once served as second-in-command of the first detachment of the third fleet, from April 19, 1783, and as captain of the first detachment of the twelfth squadron from December 6, 1784.³

Among his naval commands were the schooner *Elizabeth*, the sloop *Santa Teresa*, and the frigate *Amphitrite*. He served as sub-inspector of the naval school in Havana and later as interim-commander of the Havana Arsenal and adjutant to the commander. During his land duty he was also attached to the Hydrographic Commission and charged with the drawing of various plans and charts. Among his best were those of the Mosquito Coast and of Florida's East Coast, which accompanied his reconnaissance and report of 1787.⁴

There is one reference to his having engaged in the contraband trade between Jamaica, Trinidad and Havana. During the *pesquisa* of Juan Manuel de Cagigal and Lieutenant-Colonel Francisco de Miranda in 1783, Ensign of warship José del Río, commandant of the Cuban coast guard, was imprisoned on charges of defrauding the Royal Treasury.⁵ It is possible this was the other José del Río Cossa, but at any rate, the explorer of Florida continued in command of the schooner *Elizabeth* until the end of September, 1804, and on October 24, 1804, he died in Havana.⁶

The genesis of the 1787 Florida reconnaissance goes back to a royal order of June 4, 1786, when the Royal Official of Cuba, Francisco Javier de Morales, was ordered to sponsor an expedition to East Florida to determine the feasibility of developing the timber and naval stores industries in the Peninsula for the Havana Naval Arsenals.⁷

Lieutenant del Río Cosa's expedition was made in the schooner *San Bruno* during the summer of 1787. When he returned to Havana he received

³ Service Sheets of José del Río Cosa, and José Antonio Río de la Cossa, in *ibid.* Because of certain identity of dates, these service records probably refer to the same naval officer.

⁴ The chart was sent from Havana to Spain in August, 1787, carefully packed in a wooden case in care of Pedro Argain, commander of the hooker *Santa Rita*. Francisco Javier de Morales to Antonio Valdés, Havana, August 14, 1787, in *ibid.* The map is now in the Museo Naval (Madrid), Carpeta VI, Sección A, No. 14.

⁵ Juan Antonio de Uruñuela to Francisco de Borja, Marqués de Camachos (Comandante general de Marina), Havana, October 4, 1783, Archivo Museo Álvaro Bazán, Indiferente.

⁶ Service sheet of José del Río Cosa.

⁷ Morales to Valdés, August 14, 1787.

the congratulations and praise of his superiors. The governor of Florida, Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes, whose own efforts to persuade royal officials to encourage Florida industry had met with considerable indifference,⁸ wrote about the young naval officer's accomplishments, "It would be unjust not to tell you of the favorable concept which this good officer has earned in my sight. As a matter of fact, since his arrival he has never stopped dedicating himself with activity and ardour to the exact performance of the obligations which Your Excellency, in a wise choice, has seen fit to trust to his charge."⁹

*Observations corresponding to the measures for re-establishing East Florida in a flourishing state during the present Spanish government and advantages which may be derived from its products, particularly the making of pitch and lumber, as interesting as useful to a maritime nation.*¹⁰

The confidence placed in me by the commanding general of the port of Havana,¹¹ in having chosen me for the most exact and detailed reconnaissance of the forests, qualities of timber, pitch, and examination of the ports of St. Augustine, St. John's, and St. Mary's, in keeping with the Royal Order following the description of East Florida made by the settler, Francisco Felipe Fatio,^{11A} in which he proposes the advantages which will accrue to the

⁸ Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes y Velasco (1720-1820?) served as governor of East Florida, 1784-1790. Helen Hornbeck Tanner, *Zéspedes in East Florida, 1784-1790* (Coral Gables, 1963). On May 12, 1787, he made his own report and description of East Florida, which is printed in Arthur Preston Whitaker (ed. & trans.), *Documents Relating to the Commercial Policy of Spain in the Floridas, with Incidental Reference to Louisiana* (Deland, 1931), 49-61.

⁹ Zéspedes to Morales, San Agustín de la Florida, July 16, 1787, Archivo Museo Álvaro Bazán, Indiferente.

¹⁰ The report is a copy of the original, dated Havana, August 6, 1787, and accompanies an *expediente* of September 17, 1790, sent first to the Secretary of the Indies and then to the Secretary of the Treasury (*Hacienda*). It is in *ibid.*

¹¹ Francisco Javier de Morales.

^{11A} Francis Philip Fatio, an early pioneer planter of East Florida, was considered "a man of consequence" whose connections with the firm of Panton, Leslie & Co. aided in the trade with the Indians. He was said to be "enthusiastically in the Spanish interest, not only by words but by deeds, supplying the ordinary rations to the detachments stationed on the banks of the St. Johns River..." His loyalty oath and memorial to remain in Florida, dated 1784 and 1785 respectively, are in Joseph Byrne Lockey, *East Florida, 1783-1785, a File of Documents Assembled, and Many of Them Translated*, ed. by John W. Caughy (Berkeley, 1949), 204-05, 464. See also references in *ibid.*, 12, 461. Fatio's description of East Florida referred to is dated St. Augustine, March 18, 1785, and is in *ibid.*, 479-82. His later report of November 17, 1790, written in Havana, is in Whitaker (ed. & trans.), *Documents Relating to the Commercial Policy of Spain*, 124-38.

nation in the development and extraction of timber and pitch; have imbued me with a true patriotic spirit, and as a result of the great confidence which I have enjoyed, to give various essays concerning East Florida which, with the most careful attention, I have been able to acquire during the time of my reconnoitering task and projection of the maps loaned me some time ago.

East Florida is located between the latitude of 25 degrees, which at the southernmost point of the mainland is called Punta Lancha, and the latitude of 30 degrees 43 minutes where the "Bridge of St. Mary's" is located, confining the river of this name which runs to the West-Northwest with Georgia, and serves as the dividing line with the United States of America, and in the longitude of 393 degrees 36 minutes from the Meridian of Tenerife. Its peninsular shape is formed on the eastern side in a North-South direction from the "Cabeza de los Mártires" to "Cabo Cañaveral," and from this place it runs to St. Mary's port to the North-Northwest.

We may find on this coast the ports of Matanzas, St. Augustine, and the rivers St. John's, Nassau, and St. Mary's; this last-named (which has three sand banks forming bars at its entrance, as all those of this Coast do) is the most advantageous, for admitting 30- to 40-cannon frigates, and is even suited to warships of 60 guns during high tide. Its size and shelter from all winds make it the most desirable and deserving of the attention of our wise government.

The Nassau Bar, located in latitude 30 degrees and 28 minutes, presents three large sand bars which make its entry difficult, and it is subject to continual shifting because of the ebb and flow which moves the sand, thus making a change in the opening and closing of the mouths.

That of St. John's, which is formed by two bars in the latitude of 30 degrees and 20 minutes, is more regular, and it is reasonable to suppose that it has had little alteration from the time I explored it, inasmuch as the physical cause which is noted in the direction of the river, course of its waters, and shape of its entrance, somewhat narrow, shall always preserve its current in the turn which it forms and will not allow the sands to shift from one place to another.

That of St. Augustine (in the latitude of 29 degrees 53 minutes) is today the most interesting for being the capital of all trade carried on in the

Province. It has at its entrance six bars which form several channels, and are of such impermanency that not even the entrance pilots are certain of their location: no ship, no matter how small (which are those which ordinarily visit this port), can enter or leave without delaying its schedule three or four days, and sometimes more, for it is at the mercy of (as numerous examples show) the formidable sea raised by the winds from the first and second quadrants.

Matanzas, which is located in latitude 29 degrees 37 minutes, offers at the present secure entry to all ships which draw between eight and nine and one-half feet. The two bars, which can be seen, are formed by the intersection with an islet called Peñón, which runs from the North to the S.E., and the other, called Barretón, to the West, has little water. I am content to call attention to the example furnished by the Generals in the late war who attempted to surprise St. Augustine by entering by Matanzas with their ships through the channel, while the troops landed in the cove.

In the geographic chart which I have drawn there are notes corresponding to said ports for the clearest understanding of what I explored with all the interest of a sailor, not failing to include the trivial sights, resolution of triangles and shapes.

The West Coast runs Northeast to Apalache. Although Charles Bay and Tampa, or Holy Ghost Bay, are located there, I have no comment on them since I have not visited them.¹²

The land is generally flat and dotted with pines of excellent quality, live-oak, oak, walnut, ash, *darias*,¹³ sabine,¹⁴ mulberry, *liquidambar*,¹⁵ poplar, *cascas*,¹⁶ laurel, and other trees of lesser stature, among which are included the one called *fajima*,¹⁷ the seed from which by heating and washing, pro-

¹² For explorations of the west coast of Florida and Tampa Bay in particular, see Jack D. L. Holmes, "Two Spanish Expeditions to West Florida, 1783-1793," *Tequesta*, XXV (1965), 97-107.

¹³ The manuscript reads *Barías*. This is probably the tree *Cordia geras canthoides*.

¹⁴ *Juniperus* L.

¹⁵ *Liquidambar styraciflua*, L.

¹⁶ *Cinnamodendron axilare*.

¹⁷ Probably the wax myrtle or bay-berry tree from which myrtle wax was obtained for the manufacture of candles: *Myrica cerifera*. Comments on its use in Louisiana and West Florida are in Captain Phillip Pittman, *The Present State of the European Settlements on the Mississippi*. . . (London, 1770), 23; and James Alexander Robertson (ed.), *Louisiana under the Rule of Spain, France, and the United States, 1785-1807* (2 vols.; Cleveland, 1911), 1, 158.

duces green wax in considerable quantities. The land is irrigated by a number of rivers and creeks of excellent water.

Excellent quality products which are most easily produced for the sustenance of the settlers are corn, rice, rye, barley, and all kinds of garden stuff and vegetables, and there is even one odd man who raises wheat, but it is of poor quality.¹⁸

The same fruit trees which are found throughout Europe are also found here, but not of the same quality.

I have examined different mushrooms and forest roots which are good to eat and of sufficient nutrition. The natives told me they were called *Ache*,¹⁹ which has the same use as the bitter yucca,²⁰ and gives them the same benefit. In the preparation, flour cakes are made from the root, and they have better substance and juice than the cassava which is made in many parts of America. There are in abundance roots of *Itamo*, *chitubo*, sassafrass, viper root,²¹ and *chirras*, as well as grasses of *contralomblices*, *chumafina*, penny-royal,²² snake-root,²³ swallow-wort,²⁴ *penalope*, and house-leek,²⁵ along with many of botanical interest. Indigo also abounds of a very good quality, although not as good as that of Guatemala.²⁶ There is also tobacco, the seed for which (as I have been informed) came from Havana, and during my inspection I found what seemed to me to be very good and of large leaf.²⁷

The situation of modern Florida in point of commerce offers an epoch of the greatest happiness. The lack of recourse to England and the separa-

¹⁸ On the failure of wheat in the lower areas of Louisiana and the Floridas, see Jack D. L. Holmes (ed.), *Documentos inéditos para la historia de la Luisiana, 1792-1810* (Madrid, 1963), 153, note.

¹⁹ Possibly the sweet potato or yam: genus *Dioscorea*.

²⁰ The manuscript reads *yuca agria*.

²¹ *Scorzonera hispanica*.

²² *Mentha pulegium*.

²³ *Aristolochia serpentaria*.

²⁴ *Chelidonium majus*.

²⁵ *Sempervivum*.

²⁶ Indigo was a flourishing industry between 1770 and 1790 in Spanish Louisiana and the two Floridas. See Bernard Romans, *History of East and West Florida* (New York, 1775), 134-39; Jack D. L. Holmes, "Robert Ross' Plan for an English Invasion of Louisiana in 1782," *Louisiana History*, V, No. 2 (Spring, 1964), 166; and Holmes (ed.), *Documentos de Luisiana*, 155 note.

²⁷ On tobacco in Louisiana and the Floridas, see *ibid.*, and Jack D. L. Holmes, *Gayoso* (Baton Rouge, 1965), 90-99.

tion of her American colonies in this area, gave rise to an increased development in that Province (of which it is still capable), and which originated in the repeated incursions of the Americans against the Tories. These faithful vassals, deprived of their possessions and without subsistence in a people whose enthusiasm for liberty caused them to break the most sacred bonds, touching on anarchy, forced them to abandon their homes and they came in large groups to seek secure domicile in Florida. Suddenly the Province was filled with laboring hands accustomed to continual industry with such advantage and success in the production of crops, that at the end of the war they were counted at more than three thousand families, existing upon the benefits of construction timber, lumber for masts, and resin with such success, that upon the delivery of the Province to our Sovereign, those on the St. John's and St. Mary's Rivers and Port of St. Augustine, were producing 50,000 barrels of pitch. At this painful wound, becoming preoccupied with being expatriates, by the simple process of coming under Spanish rule, their emigration continued to the islands of Providence and Abacu, and to Georgia, where they never stopped thinking of their blessed Florida. They desired to be admitted under our domination, as has been practiced for some (conditionally until His Majesty resolves the question), and some have come, and I know from faithful subjects that at the moment when our Sovereign permits them land grants in this Province with the right to work timber and produce pitch, at least 1,000 inhabitants of Georgia and the Bahama Islands will arrive and in a short time they will form a progressive population, and they could become prosperous if only they enjoyed the free export of their pitch to ports in Spain and America with the same advantage as their experience demonstrated during the time of English rule.

The climate, which is of no less importance in determining active labor, is the most healthy in all America. Its location on the Globe enables it to enjoy a moderate temperature, and neither the rigors of cold nor heat interferes with the worker in his labor. Of no less advantage is the transportation of the products of their industry over very flat roads and rivers to the mouths of the St. John's, St. Mary's, and Port of St. Augustine.

The Indians, today more than ever, are in favor of the mild and benevolent character of our Government and the generosity with which the governor and captain general of that Province, Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes, acting in the name of our August Catholic Monarch, offers new triumphs for Religion and an interesting commerce by no means equivocal. The small villages or

towns which they have formed are preferable to the barbarism and evil ways of their former life when they had no other home than that offered by chance on the hunt. Their formation of ties to a Town can become political, civil and commercial. One finds perfect safety in their villages in the trade and contracts with all the formality of good faith. Many among them have formed plantations where they cultivate the land and raise livestock with some of the slaves they purchased in St. Augustine and Georgia during the time of British rule. This "new look" has brought them to a very lucrative dependency upon our commerce. The goods which they presently need can be supplied by us in exchange for skins and cattle, although it is currently done by the House of Panton, Leslie and Company,²⁸ which brings goods from London. It would be very desirable to have a Spanish member of the firm for his instruction regarding the trade with Indians, so that in the future he might serve as the founder of a company organized by Spaniards, thus freeing us by this means from the suspicion of having separated the Indians from the friendship of the Spaniards.

TREATISE ON LUMBER²⁹

Although at the outset of my reflections I related in general the advantages which that Province offers the State in the matter of construction lumber and masts, it is not so extensive as to embrace our Royal Navy, for although it is certain that from the environs of St. Augustine to the St. John's River, including the territory on its banks (which I have examined with the greatest care, while drawing its plan at the same time), there are large stands of pine, live-oak, sabine, and oak, with the facility of most convenient transportation, either by dragging or by water; they are not as suited due to the lack (which with the greatest disappointment I have seen) of height and breadth which I have generally noted in both kinds of masts and construction timber. I have not confined myself to one or two inspections; I have made numerous ones at various places where information from Francisco Felipe Fatio and

²⁸ The firm of William Panton, Thomas Forbes, and John Leslie was the leading economic power in Louisiana and the Floridas following the American Revolution. See Zéspedes to Gonzalo Zamorano, St. Augustine, October 2, 1786, in Duvon C. Corbitt (ed.), "Papers Relating to the Georgia-Florida Frontier, 1784-1800," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, XXI, No. 2 (June, 1937), 185; Marie Taylor Greenslade, "William Panton," *Florida Historical Society Quarterly*, XIV, No. 2 (October, 1935), 107-29.

²⁹ Descriptions of the timber trees of the area are found in Francis Harper (ed.), *The Travels of William Bartram* (New Haven, 1958), *passim*; and with particular reference to the use of timber for ships, George H. V. (Victor) Collot, *A Journey in North America* . . . (2 vols. and atlas; Paris, 1826; reprinted Florence, Italy, 1924), II, 151-58.

several planters on the same banks where they bordered the river, together with my system of asking them if in the neighborhood they had heard of or had seen very large timbers, to which they replied generally that they were very good, and, passing in their company to the site which they pointed out, I was further informed. By viewing myself, and by taking the knowledge of the carpenter overseer who accompanied me, it was sufficient to show their uselessness, and to reinforce our calculations, I took the geometric measurements of many pines which seemed to be outstanding, so that I can assure the Superior Government that I have found only one, which was 75 feet high and 18 to 20 inches in diameter, in a location one league distant to the south of Picalata.³⁰ The rest, from the plantation called Leslie, to the entrance of the river, are from 30 to 35 feet high; their thickness is irregular, being from 10, 12, and 16 inches, and from said thicket to the Laguna Valdés³¹ they are smaller and the cane very slender, which I attribute to the effect of the sweet water in the area, since it is not salty, and I have observed that the ones further north and on the sea coast are much thicker.

From the forests of live-oak which I have inspected, many of them are found (particularly on Talbot Island, the fork, and Hill's plantation) suitable of producing shaped timber such as yard-arms;³² seconds and thirds of a trunk are good for warships of 60 cannon because the girth is narrow and can form masts only for packet-boats and other small craft. This is not sufficient to establish a royal tree-felling operation because its usefulness would be soon ended since the timber-stands are small, and it would not repay the treasury for the initial investment, which is considerable for similar establishments. In addition, I have found many of the trees rotten in their trunks.

There is not the least doubt that if this most vital branch of commerce is attached to the present activities of our Merchant Marine (without which it cannot survive) and given the ease with which this Province can supply them in sizes for Packet-boats and brigantines, in truth it would soon achieve increased interest by conducting them to the ports of Spain, succeeding by this means in ending delays with ships of the Havana trade and the

³⁰ For the location of Picolata, see John M. Goggin, "Fort Pupo: a Spanish Frontier Outpost," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXX, No. 2 (October 1951), 139.

³¹ Said to be seven leagues long and four leagues wide, this is the point named George by the English. Two rivers feed the lagoon—the Valdés and Morales—and connect a beautiful island located at the mouth of the lagoon. Minutae to the *expediente* of José del Río Cosa, Archivo Museo Álvaro Bazán, Indiferente.

³² They were also suitable for futtocks: *ibid.*

hope of return, for with the sale of their goods, they could easily furnish cargoes at Port St. Mary's or on the St. John's River, where they could furnish timber of all qualities and uses of more advantage to them. At the present time it is not so convenient. As for the value of the timber, a cubic foot in rough state is 2 bits, 1 dozen superficial feet of pine boards bought at St. John's River, 18 dollars and 75 cents, and at 30, the same number bought at St. Augustine due to the cost of transportation there by land and sea. The barrel staves of white oak without bark for pipes³³ at 25 or 30 feet the thousand; for a hogshead, 20 or 25; and for quarter-casks and barrels, 16 or 20. Those of water oak, red oak, cypress or sabine are worth less because of the quality of the wood. For a thousand staves, bottoms will require 250 pieces, worth about half the price of the latter.

The boards of ash or pine are worth six and one-quarter cents at the rate of nine and one-half cents per foot.

This account is so brief because today only one planter on the St. John's River is producing them, and supply and demand roughly determine the value, for without an alternative or competitor, there can be no just price placed on the goods.

I know that the English during the last war had taken from the St. Mary's and St. John's Rivers timber of large size, to solve their absolute necessity of avoiding damage, in maintaining their ships in this place, they were forced to penetrate the interior with difficulty and some cost for many miles to secure a single frigate or warship mast, which they found by luck, and thus avoided a return trip to Europe.

TREATISE ON PITCH³⁴

The satisfaction which I have felt in seeing the abundance of pitch that can be easily produced in the vast, spread-out forests of pine, compen-

³³ The pipe or *pipa* was a large barrel containing two hogs-heads or 105 gallons. The pipe varied in size from the Canary Islands to Seville.

³⁴ Regarding the pitch pine, Francis Baily wrote, "These pines are of the species which is called by the inhabitants 'pitch pine,' and grow to an *enormous height and vast size*: they are bare of branches to near their tops; so that in travelling through them they appear like a grove of large masts, which has a very curious effect. In several places near the lake we saw the signs of persons having been there to make pitch, tar, turpentine, &c., from these trees: these articles they take to New Orleans, and turn to a good account." Francis Baily, "*Journal of a Tour in Unsettled Parts of North America in 1796 & 1797* (London, 1856), 346.

sate in part for my disappointment in the lack of floor timbers and construction lumber. The account presented by Francisco Felipe Fatio is not in the least equivocal in this matter. The simple view and the same prevalence of pine trees over many miles in extension assure sufficiently the great extraction which was made during the time of English rule of so valuable a substance. I have been in no plantation (although abandoned) which did not disclose (although in ruins) pitch factories, which attest to the richness and abundance of an activity in which the present continuation of the maritime powers and the political situation require more attention than usual.

Permit me to draw a parallel. The English did not begin to realize the value of the Province until the year 1776, when they began to benefit from their products with the greatest success. Suddenly they saw on the river banks and islands a multitude of settlers, which by the end of the war amounted to more than 12,000 persons. This large population, devoted to the manufacture of lumber and pitch, made such a success in their activities, that in addition to the quantity shipped from the St. John's and St. Mary's rivers, there were ready to export at the cession of the Province 50,000 barrels, at increased prices due to the war. At the present time you can see only shadows of what had been: there is only one Spanish settler who has developed the process along the bank of the St. John's adjacent to San Nicholas. The rest — Leslie,^{34A} Fatio, Pengre, Clark, Doctor Len, Boneli, etc. — as you can see by my charts, work no more than is necessary to keep body and soul together, in spite of which, the zeal of Governor Vicente Manuel de Zéspedes has encouraged them to more active labor, and it is hoped in this year that the settlers Pengre,^{34B} Fatio and Hill will be able to produce between 1,000 and 1,500 barrels.

The current values of the small quantities of pitch produced in this Province on the St. John's and St. Mary's Rivers are the barrel of pitch

^{34A} John Leslie, a native of Scotland, came to South Carolina and Savannah before he moved to St. Augustine and joined the firm of Panton, Leslie and Thomas Forbes. He died about 1803. Robert Leslie, another member of the firm, who also lived in St. Augustine, died in 1798. Greenslade, "William Panton," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, October, 1935, 107-29; Whitaker (ed. & trans.), *Documents Relating to the Commercial Policy of Spain*, 243; John Francis Hamtramck Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory and State* (Jackson, 1880), 132-33 note.

^{34B} William Pengree, owner of the plantation "Laurel Grove", had left East Florida during the British evacuation following the American Revolution and settled in Camden County, Georgia, but Creek hostilities persuaded him to return to his plantation in 1786 with his wife, child, and forty-eight slaves. Tanner, *Zéspedes*, 130.

containing 8 *arrobas* net-weight, 3 dollars;³⁵ that of black tar, 3; that of yellow, 3½, and resin, 5 dollars; this leads me to compute that the barrel of tar and pitch delivered in Havana could sell for approximately 5 dollars, the same, more or less, as that shipped from New Orleans.³⁶ It is certain that they are cheaper when brought from Charleston, where they are purchased in the four categories for about 11 and 12 reals, and charging only 8 to 10 for carrying charges. When brought from St. Augustine to Havana, they fetch from 14 to 16.

This branch of commerce being established for the ports of Spain, it is impossible to determine (in addition to making too little pitch) a fixed point for the costs of transportation, there being no standard for freight charges. Should His Majesty wish to encourage the production by conferring privileges to those who manufacture it and to those who buy it, it would be possible to set a legal rate moderate enough to destroy the pitch trade of the Baltic.

The profits obtained in this commerce, which ought to be handled on a reciprocal basis directly with the Peninsula, will go beyond these two branches of which I treat, resulting in an increase in trade, not only for the traders of our ports, but for these settlers, and the Royal Treasury will no longer suffer the expense of restricting trade, and contraband with the American Colonies, nor will it be necessary to keep these settlers as dependants of the Royal Treasury.³⁷

There is nothing more just for the prompt development of this Province than the piety of our August Sovereign, whose munificence may place all the products of this Province on the free list for a period of years, particularly the two activities of manufacturing lumber and resin for the new settlers. Moreover, the permission to export to the ports of Europe and

³⁵ The manuscript reads *alquitrán*, which is a species of pitch containing a mixture of tar, grease, resin and oil. The *arroba* was a Spanish measure equal to 25.36 pounds. J. Villasana Haggard, *Handbook for Translators of Spanish Historical Documents* (Austin, 1941), 72.

³⁶ Baily noted this trade from New Orleans. See *supra*, note 34.

³⁷ The search for free trade in Louisiana and the Floridas is explored in Whitaker (ed. & trans.), *Documents Relating to the Commercial Policy of Spain*; and Jack D. L. Holmes, "Some Economic Problems of Spanish Governors in Louisiana," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XLII (November, 1962), 521-43. For an earlier attempt (1758-1760) to link Florida's production of naval stores with the annual subsidy, see John Jay TePaske, *The Governorship of Spanish Florida, 1700-1763* (Durham, 1964), 107.

America, which is a similar dispensation, would stimulate active trade and foreigners will suffer an inevitable decline in both areas, and there is no doubt that they will suffer from not being able to penetrate our colonies, since this Province is sufficient to supply tar to our Royal Navy and Merchant Marine, and to all Europe, without increasing the working hands.

For the present there are no other ports but St. Mary's, the Nassau Bar, and St. John's, and no shelter for ships in case of accident or lack of supplies; for in addition to requiring a pilot for their entry, if they succeed, they find themselves at a deserted spot without the means to provide for their needs. Although it is certain that in the first and last there are two small detachments, these have no more than the necessary supplies which are sent to them monthly from St. Augustine on a regular basis for the members of its garrison. Along the same line, carpenters and calkers, if available, command high wages, in addition to the cost of having to transport them to said places from St. Augustine.

My interests in the Nation, if I have had the glory of having fulfilled the King's orders, will be my reward.

An extract of the answers which I have had from the settlers, Mr. William Pengre and Theophilus Hill, in the contract house of the tar shipwrights, which serves as a supplement to the treatise on pitch.

“In answer, I reply that I have at present 220 barrels of turpentine, each barrel containing 25 gallons (the gallon holds 4 small wine bottles, rather more than less); I do not know the weight nor can I weigh them; I can sell each barrel for 5 dollars. This number will be increased by the middle of next November to at least 500 barrels, but I have not yet begun with tar or pitch since once I have harvested my crop of rice and corn, I can easily undertake both forms of pitch or either of the two, as soon as his excellency the Governor encourages me to do it. I had considerable interest in shipping the said quantity of turpentine next winter for Cadiz, where they inform me the barrel is worth — this kind as well as tar and pitch — three pounds sterling; I cannot say with accuracy what quantity of the said pitch I can prepare hastily by Christmas, but I think that 400 of pitch and 100 of tar, on terms equal to the turpentine, and 1,200 of all kinds at equal prices in the course of the next year. I know that the prices are cheaper in the United States because of the usual development by the Motherland, as well as for

the reason that its settlements are older than this one, but I believe that it will be a short while only before it will languish there due to the lack of export and because they are applying themselves to more remunerative tasks. In the last war we sold a barrel of turpentine for 8 hard dollars. I would be happy to be most equitable in the price in order to make secure the foundation of commerce.

“Laurel Grove, July, 1787.”

REPLY OF HILL

“Humbly offers his opinion that naval stores, such as tar, pitch and turpentine, can be found in great abundance in this Province, and it is very certain that with the few hands that can leave the cultivation of their land, they can deliver at the landing of North River from 6 to 700 barrels of pitch and 300 of tar during the forthcoming year. As for the turpentine, its gathering depends in large degree on the season, whether it is rainy or dry, so that it seems to me that in an average year, we can collect some 200 barrels. As for making the barrels and delivering any of the indicated articles in good condition, he will submit it to the decision of any intelligent subject. The prices for said articles are as follows: pitch, 2 dollars fifty cents the barrel; turpentine and tar, 4 dollars the barrel, each one containing $32\frac{1}{2}$ gallons (the gallon is of four wine bottles rather more than less) or 260 pounds English net weight.

“St. Augustine, July 11, 1787.”

NOTE

The gallon is equal, with small difference, to 8 Spanish pounds,³⁸ so that the barrel of Pengre is of 8 *arrobas*, and that of Hill of $10\frac{1}{3}$. The excess in the difference of the total conforms to that which is generally sold in small quantities, as I have stated previously.

Laurel Grove is on my plan; the plantation of Pengre and the level of the North River point is that of San Diego.

Havana, August 6, 1787.

JOSÉ DEL RÍO

³⁸ The Spanish pound was equal to 1.0142642 English pounds. Villasana Haggard, *Handbook*, 79.