

# A Scottish View of West Florida in 1769

By CHARLES A. GAULD

A scholarly Scot wrote but never succeeded in publishing a 30-page "General Description of the Sea Coasts, Harbours, Lakes, Rivers etc. of the Province of West Florida, 1769." He was George Gauld, born in Scotland in 1732. He received an honorary M.A. from Aberdeen, one of the four democratic Scottish universities. As a chart-maker for the British Admiralty, his death in 1782 may have occurred in London or at sea. Gauld's charts for navigation between East Florida and the British West Indies were posthumously published by the Admiralty. That of the Tortugas and Florida Keys or Martyrs appeared only in 1815.

Gauld's two pamphlets were issued in London by William Faden in 1790 and 1796. The second, of 28 pages, was entitled "Observations on the Florida Kays, Reef & Gulf with Directions for Sailing along the Kays from Jamaica by the Grand Cayman & the West End of Cuba; also a Description, with Sailing Instructions, of the Coast of West Florida between the Bay of Espiritu Santo & Cape Sable." There was added, "by George Gaud, to accompany his Charts of those Coasts, surveyed and published by order of the Rt. Hon. the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, to which have been added a description of the East Coast of Florida between Cape Florida & Cape Canaveral (and) within the Florida Reef."

The 1796 pamphlet was consulted by Dr. Wallace McMullen in his *English Topographical Terms in Florida, 1563-1874* (University of Florida Press, 1953, 227 pp.) Gauld's 1769 manuscript is useful both for some topographical terms and for place names of the British era in West Florida.

George Gauld served the Admiralty in Florida from 1764 until 1771. In 1773 he presented to the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia his West Florida manuscript, hoping for its publication in the Society's *Transactions* along with his communication on measuring the height of Catherine's Hill and of the magnificent Blue Mountains in Jamaica. The latter was enclosed in Gauld's letter to Hugh Williamson, presumably a Scottish member of the Society, dated Port Royal, Jamaica, February 15, 1773. Neither manuscript was published in the *Transactions*. Perhaps Gauld was inspired to

write to the Philadelphia body through his associates in West Florida, Dr. John Lorimer, presumably another Scot.\*

It would be interesting to know of any relations between Gauld and William Roberts, whose *Account of the First Discovery & Natural History of Florida* (London, 1763) Gauld probably read. Also Gauld's ties in Florida with Captain Bernard Romans, author of *A Concise Natural History of East & West Florida* (New York, 1775). The American Philosophical Society has no information on Gauld, who may even have donated his 1769 manuscript while on a visit to Philadelphia. The Scottish National Library and the British Museum also lack information on Gauld's career. Aberdeen University Library stated that Gauld studied there between 1750 and 1753 and was given an honorary M.A. in 1759 while an Admiralty mathematics teacher.

We can assume that Gauld attended the East Florida Masonic Lodge meetings in St. Augustine with such Caledonians as Governor James Grant, royal superintendent of Indian affairs John Stuart, Rev. John Forbes, the Lieutenant Governor Dr. James Moultrie, John Bethune from the Isle of Skye, and Dr. Andrew Turnbull, who in partnership with Sir William Duncan, introduced Mediterranean colonists into his short-lived New Smyrna colony. In addition, Gauld may well have participated in Scottish Rite Masonic rituals in Pensacola with such Scotsmen as Governor George Johnstone, the rich Indian traders William Panton and John Leslie, and the brilliant half-Scottish leader of the Creek Nation, Alexander McGillivray.

There follow passages of interest from the two-century old manuscript. Gauld began, "The Province of West Florida (is) the frontier of the British Dominions in America," extending some 350 miles west of the Apalachicola River nearly to New Orleans. He foresaw great advantages from the region's possession by a maritime commercial nation. He admired a unique red bluff near Santa Rosa Island at the entrance of Pensacola Bay. Chart and navigation conscious, Gauld cautioned of dangers from shoals and the lowness of the treeless island, hard to distinguish. He described anchorages in deep water protected from storms for vessels seeking the hard-to-find mouths of the Mississippi River, an area as fertile as the Nile delta. "Vessels that draw above 11 feet cannot enter the Mississippi's passes without being lightened."

Gauld then decribed bays, estuaries, lagoons, creeks and rivers of West Florida. Choctaw Indians were killing the cattle of the few settlers on St.

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\* Alabama professors Robert Rea of Auburn and Jack D. L. Holmes of Birmingham plan research on Lorimer, whose letter of April 21, 1769 appeared in the *Transactions* (I: 250), according to Gauld's pamphlet of 1796.

Louis Bay, forcing them to leave in 1767. He visited some new settlements on the Pearl River where tobacco, indigo, cotton, rice, corn and many vegetables were raised in rich soil. The indigo rivalled that of Guatemala. The settlers planned to make barrel staves of white oak. Gauld lauded the timber available for masts and shipbuilding. Further west he noted that French settlers were raising cattle and were clandestinely making pitch, tar and turpentine, and selling these naval stores very profitably in New Orleans to France and Spain "as we have no army posts or vessels to prevent them."

Johnstone in Pensacola in 1765 ordered the construction of Fort Bute on the Mississippi. "But after Governor Johnstone's departure it was abandoned and demolished by order of General Gage in 1768, the consequence of which measures are already obvious. . . . Had it not been for the withdrawing of the British troops from the Mississippi, that country would in all probability have been well settled by this time (by Britons). During the late disturbances at New Orleans, a great many of the French inhabitants were desirous of settling on our side of the river. Some of them had actually embarked with their families, Negroes and effects on the arrival of the Spanish troops, but afterwards allowed themselves to be dissuaded, partly because Irish-Spanish General O'Reilly gave them assurances that everything would be forgiven." Many French, with no British presence, suffered greatly in the New Orleans area, according to Gauld. "The French in general in Louisiana have an utter abhorrence of the Spaniards which will probably last for generations."

"It would be of great advantage to British West Florida to have one or two small armed vessels" cruising between Pensacola and New Orleans. Gauld saw them preventing clandestine activities in naval supplies and helping to secure to Britons a considerable trade with the aborigines.

Gauld noted that Nassau Road, west of Pensacola, was named by "Dr. Daniel Cox, an adventurer about the time of King William III." Nassau Road was termed one of the best anchorages for large ships in all West Florida. Another was Ship Island with its "high hummock" and ample fresh water and cattle for beef. He found a few French at Biloxi raising cattle and producing pitch and tar despite the troublesome Choctaws. Shallow Biloxi Bay abounded in excellent oysters as Father Charlevoix also observed. Gauld mentioned the Pascagoula River mouths and estuary as virtually paved with oysters. He saw some farms but learned that the red men killed the cattle. "The Choctaws were always firmly attached to the French (in) Louisiana, and it will probably be some time before they are thoroughly reconciled to the British."

The observant Scot carefully described navigational matters for all West Florida such as channels, shoals and deep, protected anchorages as well as soils and forests. On Dauphin Island he pondered the age of overgrown shell mounds. He said that Hawkes Bay was named for the British armed schooner "Hawke" used in his surveys. The bay had been choked by a hurricane.

Gauld wrote, "Mobile is a very considerable place (with) a small fort, formerly called Fort Condé, now called Fort Charlotte, built of brick, and a neat square of barracks. The town is pretty regular, of an oblong shape on the west bank of the river by the bay. Several of the richest of the French left Mobile on its being given up to the English, but a great many still remain in the town and at their plantations on the river and on both sides of the bay. There is a considerable Indian trade carried on. Mobile (under us) has sent yearly to London skins and furs worth £15,000. At present this may be called the only staple commodity in the Province."

He ascribed summer fevers and agues in Mobile to the many marshes and lagoons rather than to mosquitos. He referred to the Spanish River and the "Alibama" River near Mobile, and to the chief settlements of the Upper Creeks and "the French fort at Alibama evacuated in 1763. "It has not since been garrisoned by us." Gauld mentioned the Tombébé (Tombigbee) River in the country of the Chickasaws. The British commander at Pensacola in 1767 ordered the Tombébé fort abandoned. Good soils for rice, thick cane brakes, and fine stands of cypress, elm, ash, hickory and red and white cedar were listed.

Gauld explained that the Perdido River was named because a Spanish ship was lost (*perdido*) near its mouth. Canoes were portaged from the Perdido Bay to a coastal lagoon leading to Pensacola. He added in the margin, possibly in 1773, that at a narrows in Perdido Bay "a ferry has been established and a new road opened (which) cuts 20 miles from the land journey and saves a day between Mobile and Pensacola. A sawmill had recently been erected nearby." The Perdido was formerly the boundary between Spanish Florida and French Louisiana, Gauld added.

He described the Pensacola bar approaches as involving sightings of the red cliff and "Reid's tree," and predicted that the Indian name Pensacola would endure. Gauld reviewed French and Spanish contention over Pensacola and its Fort San Carlos in 1719-22. The Spanish "signal house" on Santa Rosa Island was "greatly improved of late by General Haldimand." Spanish

Pensacola was on the island until inundated by a hurricane about 1754, when it was moved to its present site.

Governor Johnstone considered moving the tiny, ramshackle Pensacola to another site on the bay. It had just been abandoned by 600 Catholic Pensacola Indians (and mestizos?) whom Spain moved to Veracruz, Mexico.\* But he decided that its present site was best and had the British town "regularly laid out" early in 1765. Gauld described it as stretching about a mile along the bay and a quarter mile inland. At the west end was a fine stream for filling the water casks of ships. Nearby was a naval reservation with "garden, storehouses, hospital etc." He added that the military garrison had a reservation of 200,000 square yards in the middle of Pensacola, dividing it in two. "It can be of no great service for defense (against) either savages or a civilized enemy." The hill behind town was named for General Gage, who later fought American colonists seeking independence. "The hope of a Spanish trade induced many Britons to settle here at great expense. It has not yet answered their expectation. The principal objectives ought to be the Indian trade (plus) indigo, cotton, rice, hemp, tobacco and lumber, the natural products of the country."

Pensacola's sandy soil could be made to produce lettuce, tomatoes, turnips, carrots and potatoes, along with oranges, figs and peaches. "Provisions of all kinds are now very plentiful. His Majesty's troops and ships are always supplied with fresh beef (from around Mobile?), and the inhabitants buy it for half a bit a pound."

Near Pensacola was "an iron mine where a large natural magnet was lately found." Gauld later added, "now in the possession of Dr. Lorimer."

Near the mouth of the Escambia River lay "Campbell Town, a settlement of French Protestants, about ten miles from Pensacola by land and 13 by water . . . unhealthy because near marshes." Several French died. Great Britain had settled them there in to produce silk, but the effort failed. Gauld spoke of the Escambia valley's good soils, vegetation and tall pines, fine for masts and yard arms for the royal navy. "Many other vessels have been supplied from them." He listed a thousand-acre reserve on the large peninsula in Pensacola Bay with its stands of live oaks and large pines for firewood for the navy and army. Possibly it was part of the reservation for naval supplies set aside by President Monroe and unfortunately abandoned. Nearby another

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\* Robert L. Gold, "The Settlement of the Pensacola Indians in New Spain (Mexico), 1763-70," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 45, no. 4, Nov. 1965, pp. 567-76.

British naval reserve was created at a former royal careening place where in 1766 a wharf was begun by order of Sir William Burnaby, then commander-in-chief in Jamaica. Nothing had been done with these reserves as of 1769. There was a private careening wharf, apparently near Deer Point and the Santa Rosa Channel.

Santa Rosa Island extended east nearly 50 miles, "very remarkable for its white sandy hummocks." Choctawhatchee Bay was called by Gauld St. Rose's Bay, with an entrance barely five feet deep. Into it flows the "Chactahatchi" River. Some 35 miles upstream lived "Coussa Indians who have joined the Creeks and sometimes bring provisions and wildfowl to Pensacola in their canoes," although generally too lazy to do so as required by treaty.

Gauld wrote of the St. Joseph area, deserted by the Spaniards about 1700 only to return in 1719 after Pensacola protested a French fort there in 1717. He thought the bay ideal for making salt for curing bass, red cod and other abundant, excellent fish. His final word to Britons under full sail at night off West Florida was to beware the many logs disgorged by the Mississippi in flood.