

SAMUEL TOUCHETT'S FLORIDA PLANTATION, 1771

By James C. Frazier*

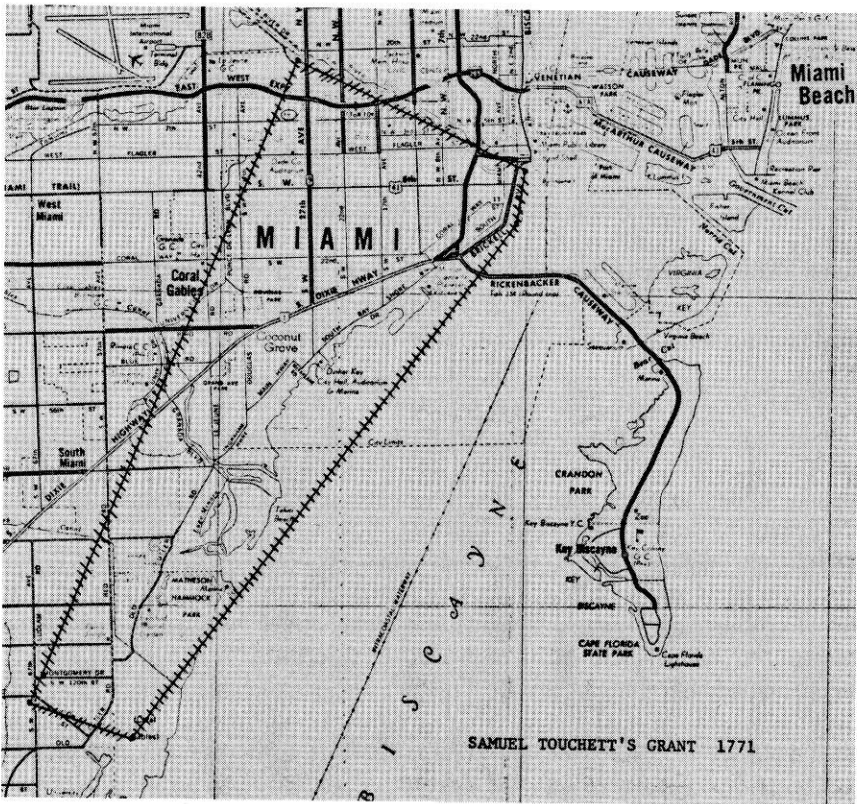
During the short British period in Florida, 1763-1783, the government went to some lengths to develop its newly won lands. As is described earlier in this issue of *Tequesta* headrights were given to responsible individuals and families who would settle and cultivate them. Grants in 20,000-acre units were offered to men of means who would bring in laborers and establish plantations.¹ The Englishman Samuel Touchett² secured the preliminary papers for such a grant on Biscayne Bay in 1771. His stated intention was to grow indigo, sugar, rice and anything that would grow on the supposedly fertile soil up the river and in the marshes along the Bay. The land was surveyed, but no effort at settlement was made because of the outbreak of the American Revolution. Our interest here is in the survey made by Bernard Romans and the location of the grant in present-day terms.

The existence of the Touchett grant first came to light locally in 1955, when a Mr. Forest H. Sweet of Battle Creek, Michigan contacted the Dade County Courthouse with the photostat of a survey sketch by Bernard Romans, Deputy Surveyor to the British Crown. His letter asked for help in locating the survey of 20,000 acres in relation to modern towns, rivers and other features. The clerks in the Courthouse took one quick look and spotted the River Raton on the sketch, connected that mentally with Boca Raton and mailed the request to Palm Beach County. The county engineer in Palm Beach examined it and with no difficulty ascertained that it belonged in Dade County. Three items on the sketch made its location positive; distance south of St. Augustine - 270 miles, latitude 25°40' and the name on the bay, Biscay Sound.

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Mr. E. A. Anderson, the Dade County Engineer at that time, wrote and asked Mr. Sweet if he could send the original sketch since the photostat attached to the original letter was of very poor quality. Mr. Sweet obliged by sending the original of which a high quality photostat was made. Mr. Sweet's basic questions were answered after which he offered to sell the original for \$15.00 but this offer was unfortunately refused. Some years later an effort was made to contact Mr. Sweet without success and the original is now in the Yale University Library at New Haven.

How this document has managed to remain intact for over two hundred years is not known; many modern survey sketches are lost or destroyed in less than a generation. What is known is that Romans was not paid for the survey and Samuel Touchett, the prospective grantee, may not have gained title, much less developed the grant. Provincial Governor, James Grant, wrote that the Surveyor General



Touchett's map superimposed on map of present-day Miami

charged £29³ for a survey of 20,000 acres but this must have been near St. Augustine because the charge made by Romans for the Touchett survey was £71 and that for another survey in what is now Dade County by Frederick George Mulcaster was for £100 19s 11d.

Romans' description of the Touchett grant gives as a point of beginning; "A mastic tree with three blazes at water's edge of the River Ratton" (Miami River). This point would be on the south side of the river at about the present-day NW 27th Avenue which would have been at that time the general location of a falls where the water from the glades spilled over a rock ledge and in effect marked the beginning of the river. The line of ownership then ran down the river to the bay and cornered on "A Broad Leaved Coccoloba tree opposite the old fields of Pueblo Ratton" (downtown Miami). Over one hundred years later this corner would be the site of Brickell's trading post. The next course ran southerly along the bay and cornered at the beginning of "a rocky steep bluff." This corner would be in the vicinity of today's Point View section. The next course meandered down the bay, on anything but a straight line, along the "shoals, sands and mud flatts of Biscay Sound" and cornered on "a Cephalanthus tree in a small hammock in a marsh." This course would have passed by Vizcaya, Coconut Grove, and Gables Estates, and terminated on the shore in the vicinity of Shoal Point opposite Chapman Field. The next course ran inland in a westerly direction to somewhere in the vicinity of Ludlam Road and was marked by a stake with three blazes in a heap of stones. The last course ran northeasterly through rocky pine land, was marked by many blazed pine trees and terminated at the Mastic tree at water's edge on the Ratton River.

Prior to running the above exterior traverse, Romans for some reason saw fit to make an exploratory line diagonally through the property. This line is mentioned at the beginning of the description thusly: "Began at a Mastic tree by watersedge (same tree as in main description) and surveyed a traverse line to inspect the situation S 10° W throughly blazed, not to be mistaken for ye boundary." The amount of work entailed in cutting and blazing over 8 miles of line for exploratory purposes would indicate that he must have been instructed to include only high and usable land in the grant and to keep out of the glades.

The technical aspects of this survey are somewhat confusing in that it does not balance geometrically but with certain reasonable assumptions a pattern can be developed to arrive at a solution. Once this solution is reached we can plot quite accurately the boundaries of Touchett's grant. Basically we have a five-sided figure, two sides of

which were not traversable i.e., the first course down the Miami River and the third course through Biscayne Bay. These courses were run by meander lines and a straight line and distance then calculated and therefore suspect. The other three sides were actually run on true line and therefore less likely to err, (Appendix B).

The point of beginning up the river can only be at the falls on the north fork. This proves true by scaling and was without a doubt, then as in later years, a valuable site because of the power available from the waterfall. The point at the mouth of the river can only be Brickell Point for only from there can the next point," the beginning of a steep rocky bluff" be seen. There is only one other geographical feature which can be used and that occurs on the south line where the line run from the bay inland intersects "a steep precipice of rocks." This is the sharp drop on the eastside of Old Cutler Road just north of the U.S. Plant Introduction Garden, a part of former Chapman Field.

Two discrepancies occur on the three "so-called" good sides, one of which can be resolved while the other can only be given as most likely. The line from Brickell Point to Point View (2nd course) is shown as S 10° E but it can only be S 10° W since this is a solid rocky shore and lies on this bearing. The last course, terminating on the Mastic tree on the river, is given as 810 chains in the description but 820 chains on the sketch. The larger distance is chosen since it more nearly agrees with the course south through the bay, (Appendix C).

There is no reason to believe that Samuel Touchett, the grantee, ever visited his estate in Florida. He had received his Order in Council for the grant in June 1766 but it was five years later that the survey was finally made, at which time he would have been 66 years old. He was active in both commerce and politics but his business, and it was worldwide, was conducted through agents while he stayed in London.⁴

He had begun his career along with two brothers, sons of Thomas Touchett of Manchester, in the family business of manufacturing cotton and linen textiles at which they were very successful. Prior to 1740, Samuel moved to London, probably as a representative of the family business and by the 50s had blossomed forth in many directions. His textile trade was with the Continent, the West and East Indies, America, and West Africa, but he also became a shipowner, insurance broker, speculator in naval prizes, sugar merchant and slave trader. As was only natural for a man with such far flung enterprises, he was drawn into politics; first as a government contractor supplying garrisons of the expanding empire, loaning money to the govern-

ment, and finally as a member of Parliament from Shaftesbury, 1761-1768.

Sudden financial success of this magnitude most certainly indicated a high degree of rapacity even in an age noted for that quality but in Samuel's case it seems to have been overdone. He was repeatedly accused of trying to secure monopolies in raw materials. A try for that in raw cotton and Senegal gum from West Africa is understandable since they both tied in with his family's textile business but why try for an exclusive government charter on furs, whale bone, fish and masts in Labrador or late in his life, an exclusive charter, in a group with Sir Edward Walpole as figurehead, on all mines and minerals in the Lake Superior region. Is it possible that this group foresaw the Mesabi Range in 1768?

Other reasons for criticism was the fact that during his term as MP, he went bankrupt but escaped the normal penalties because of his "parliamentary privilege." Then there was religious opposition to him since he and his brothers were Dissenters. It is probable that they simply did not recognize the Church of England; not the best formula for social and political success at that time.

From the autumn of 1763 till his death by hanging (suicide) on May 28, 1773, he lived under reduced circumstances compared to his former affluence but curiously even his enemies and detractors of better days were not vindictive and numerous writings of the time refer to "poor Touchett" and a note of sadness prevailed.

As a final note on Touchett's possible influence on North America, mention should be made of the fact that he was often consulted by people in high positions in the government. Although his financial bubble had burst, his contacts in far places remained and his ability to sense where profits lay was still respected. The North American colonies continued to be looked upon in certain circles as an insufficiently tapped source of government revenue. Their raw materials were appreciated by the merchant classes but cash revenue was what the treasury understood. And so in the spring of 1767, we find Touchett advising Charles Townshend, in writing, as to which specific items would bring the best returns in the form of duties to be imposed. Here are the seeds of the coming revolution and "poor Touchett" is knee deep in the affair.

Should the Touchett and other plantations have come to fruition, Touchett would have had as neighbors the Earl of Dartmouth and the Cape Florida Society to the south and a German of long residence in England to the north across the Miami River. What little is known of the grant to the north is found in the claims made against the British government after Florida was ceded back to Spain in

1783. Parliament passed an act which appointed commissioners to inquire into losses suffered by colonists in East Florida and to make payments on legitimate losses.⁵

One of these claimants, called memorialists in the proceedings, was John Augustus Ernest,⁶ a German of 22 years residence in England who had never been naturalized. In his claims for recompense, he states that his land was 20,000 acres "In pine, marsh and savannahs, situate on Gulph Sandwich, bound by Rock Bridge River, North; by a Fresh Water River, South — by Biscay Sound, East; — & by Vacant Land west; distant from St. Augustine in said Province of East Florida, about two hundred and Ninety Miles, South."

This description can only be interpreted as running from Arch Creek (Rock Bridge River) south to the Miami River (Fresh Water River) since these grants were relatively narrow coastal strips due to the then undrained Everglades and the Fresh Water River can hardly be today's Little River and still encompass 20,000 acres.

To further bear out the probable location of this grant, the amount of pine land shown in the following schedule of property, indicates it was high land and didn't include much, if any, of the Everglades.

*Schedule of the Property of John Augustus Ernest Esqr.*⁷

<i>Pine Land</i>	<i>12,000 acres</i>
<i>in Marsh Land</i>	<i>3,000 acres &</i>
<i>Savannah</i>	<i>5,000 acres</i>
<i>For which the proprietor refused to receive t 2000 from</i>	
<i>Mr. Wm. Roberts of the late Plantation Office.</i>	
<i>Mr. Ernest therefore values his loss at</i>	<i>t 2000 Os Od</i>
<i>Actually disbursed by Mr. Ernest for Patent Fees,</i>	
<i>Surveying, taking possession & other contingencies.</i>	<i>400 Os Od</i>
	<i>t 2400 Os Od.</i>

The following three paragraphs, extracted from Mr. Ernest's memorial to the claims office, is all that is known of his grant at this time, including whether or not he was paid the above sum, which is unlikely.

Says that he never cleared any land or paid any quit rent nor complied with any conditions of the Grant. That he intended to have settled the Land with foreign Protestants, but was prevented by the breaking out of the War. That in 1777 he engaged 17 Swiss and German Protestants, 8 or 9 of Whom he sent for over [sic] and the rest of Whom he agreed with in England to go over to his plantation. That they were detained in England 3 months and more and that he was at the Expense of about t 281 1d in maintaining them, which he states from memory only and not from any written documents.

That he applied to L^d Geo. Germaine for passage for them, Who refused it on Account of his Agent Mr. Turnbull being disaffected to Government, That he thinks he paid t 18 in fees for the Order of Council but has no receipt or Memorandum to produce for it.

That he paid Mr. Mulcaster t 100 19s 11d for locating and Surveying his tract of Land and produced a rec^t from him for that Sum by a Bill of Exchange which appeared to be paid. That his Land was never appraised.⁸

APPENDIX A

Certification of Survey by Bernard Romans DS for the Samuel Touchett grant—1771, as it appears in longhand on the face of the original document.

East Florida

Pursuant to a precept from Frederick George Mulcaster Esq^{re} Surveyor General for his majestys said province Directed to any Deputy Surveyor bearing date this tenth day of December 1770. I have admeasured and laid out unto Samuel Touchett, Merchant, a tract containing 20,000 acres of land situate in the province aforesaid upon Ratton River. Distant South South Eastward from Saint augustine, Two hundred and seventy miles. Bounding South & West on vacant lands, North on said Ratton River & East on Shoals Sands & flatts of Biscay Sound & hath such natural and artificial Marks as are in the annexed Plott represented.

Certified this 30th day of March 1771

B. Romans DS

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APPENDIX B

Cadastral notes and boundary description by Bernard Romans DS for Samuel Touchett grant—1771, as it appears in longhand on the reverse of the original document.

The Place A contains about 250 acres of as good ground for a plantain walk as the West Indies afford and alone is capable to maintain 1500 Negroes in that breadkind alone. The situation, as well as the soil pointing it out for that use & it,s remainder also is fit for guinea or Indian corn, yams, cassado, Eddas or potatoes. B is Hammock Land, exceeding good for Indigo. The marsh and Buttonwood swamps will certainly produce Rice & if drained, no doubt, Beet Sugar. The growth on the Hammock Land is some few Live Oaks, some Turkey Oak, a good deal of Sweet Bay. Besides much Broad - Narrow & Oval leaved coccoloban, some Bastard fustick, much Mad tick Egyptian Bean Trees called Doctor Long a Species of Calabash & many other trees to me wholly unknown. The swamps produce some Cypress, some Dwarf Elder, many Maho trees, the bark of which is excellent for rope, many cocoplumbs & those near the sea are edged with Buttonwood, also many of the West India wild cane with many trees and plants to which I am a stranger. The roks are all a Lime Stone.

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*Began at a Mastick Tree by Watersedge &
Surveyed a Traverse Line to inspect the
Situation S 10° W 660 Chains*

*Then returned and thro' the several windings of
the River, made a traverse which gives a strait
line of 310 chains on a course S 71° E and there
cornered on a Broad Leaved coccoloban and an Egyptian
Bean Tree opposite to the old field of Pueblo Ratton
at the mouth of Ratton River in Lat 25° 40'
then along Biscay Sound S 10° E 63 Ch. to a point near
Beginning of a Rocky Steep Bluff.*

*then along sands and flatts of Biscay Sound
thro' several coves a course of S 33° W 800 Ch.
where cornered on a Cephalanthus in a small
Hammock in marsh, then thro' marsh to a steep
precipice of Rocks N 71° W 44 Ch.*

*then thro' Rocky Pine Land N 71° W 80 Ch. to stake 3X
in a heap of stones, then thro' rocky pine*

<i>Land N 21° E to a pine</i>	<i>80 Ch.</i>
<i>to a do</i>	<i>92 do</i>
<i>to a do</i>	<i>74 do</i>
<i>to a do</i>	<i>79 do</i>
<i>to a do</i>	<i>83 do</i>
<i>to marsh</i>	<i>357 do</i>
<i>to creek</i>	<i>11 do</i>

<i>to Mastick 3X on River</i>	<i>-34 do</i>
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in all N 21° E 810 Chains

Which compleats the Survey

APPENDIX C

The following list will show the original deed calls by B. Romans—1771 for the Touchett grant and the adjustment thereof to agree with known geographical features as explained in the text. The directions or azimuths on the original were taken with a magnetic compass and are subject to considerable fluctuation both from mechanical errors within a compass and from changes in magnetic declinations since 1771.

Original calls	Adjusted calls
# 1 S 71° E 310 ch = 20460 ft.	S 65° E 19200 ft.
# 2 S 10° E 63 ch = 4158 ft.	S 10° W 4158 ft.
# 3 S 33° W 800 ch = 52800 ft.	S 36° 14' W 50158 ft.
# 4 N 71° W 124 ch = 8184 ft.	N 71° W 8184 ft.
# 5 N 21° E 810 ch = 53460 ft.	N 22° 30' E 54120 ft.
or 820 ch = 54120 ft.	

The acreage from the above calculates as 17,860 acres, so Mr. Touchett was being a little shortchanged on his 20,000 acres. Additionally, a considerable amount within the figure is made up of water in Biscayne Bay along the course southwesterly from Point View.

Notes

1. Mowat, *East Florida as a British Province*, p. 54.
2. Romans spelled the grantee's name Touchett throughout his survey sketch but used Touchet in his writings at New York in 1774 which is also the spelling used in Parliament. For consistency's sake we are using Touchett.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
4. Namier, *The History of Parliament*, Vol. III, p. 533. I had tried unsuccessfully for quite a long time to discover the needed information on Samuel Touchet to round out the history of his land grant in Florida. I hereby wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Patrick Lipscomb, Assistant Professor of History at Louisiana State University for providing the required data.
5. British archives 20 George III c. 75.
6. Siebert, W. H., *Loyalists in East Florida*. Vol. II, p. 51.
7. *Ibid*, Vol. II, p. 52.
8. *Ibid*, Vol. II, p. 53.

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