Maritime Insights from St. Augustine's British Period Documentary Records

Samuel P. Turner

St. Augustine was a Spanish settlement for almost two centuries from its founding in 1565 to its cession to Great Britain in 1763. During that time, St. Augustine and its residents always had a very close connection to the sea. The sea was the settlement's principal means of communication with the rest of the Spanish world and the principal means of transportation for both people and supplies. During the eighteenth century, the Spanish trade monopoly with its New World colonies was challenged by other European powers, notably the French, Dutch, and the English. It was the English however who persisted more than any other power in pursuing a free trade policy in the face of Spanish resistance.[1] This was in part due to the advanced development of the English colonies along the east coast of North America which had the closest proximity to St. Augustine in Spanish Florida and the Spanish Caribbean.

English colonial merchants traveled to Spanish colonial ports, including St. Augustine, under the pretext of seeking safe harbor from the sea. While in port they would trade. This was almost always illegal under both English and Spanish law, but both Spanish residents and English merchants benefited from the trade. Profits made by the merchants entered the economies of their colonial home ports spreading the financial benefits to wider British colonial America.[2]

During times of war, trade was disrupted amongst all European colonies. In the case of St. Augustine, this presented a

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[1] Joyce Elizabeth Harman, *Trade and Privateering in Spanish Florida, 1732-1763* (St. Augustine, Fla,: St. Augustine Historical Society, 1969), 46.

[2] Ibid., 5-6

grave crisis as East Florida was a relatively undeveloped outpost colony and very dependent on trade for comestibles as well as manufactured goods. Consequently, the governors of Florida in St. Augustine would issue letters of marque and reprisal to privateers to go out to capture enemy shipping. Prizes would be brought into St. Augustine, and condemned and sold thus supplying the market in St. Augustine with essential goods needed to keep the colony alive. Consequently, during the course of the eighteenth century up to the conclusion of the French and Indian War (1754-1763), also known as the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), Spanish St. Augustine became oriented to the British colonial trade system and had particularly close connections with the port of Charleston, South Carolina.

Following the conclusion of the French and Indian War, Florida was ceded to Great Britain in exchange for the city of Havana in Cuba, which Great Britain had taken to hold as a bargaining chip at the end of the war. Thus Spanish La Florida passed to a foreign power after almost two centuries of Spanish settlement and culture. In 1763 Britain took possession of Florida and created the political divisions of East and West Florida, splitting the colony into two distinctive political units for ease of governance. This year marked the beginning of the British Period of Florida's history (1763-1784), a period that, while brief, had a tremendous impact on the cultural makeup of the colony that would long outlast British political control.

The cultural impact began with the relocation of the Spanish population and mission Indians to Cuba. The British established a garrison in St. Augustine early during the Spanish evacuation in order to prevent a scorched-earth policy by the resentful departing residents. Thus, the Spanish infrastructure of buildings and orchards were left intact for the arriving British settlers.
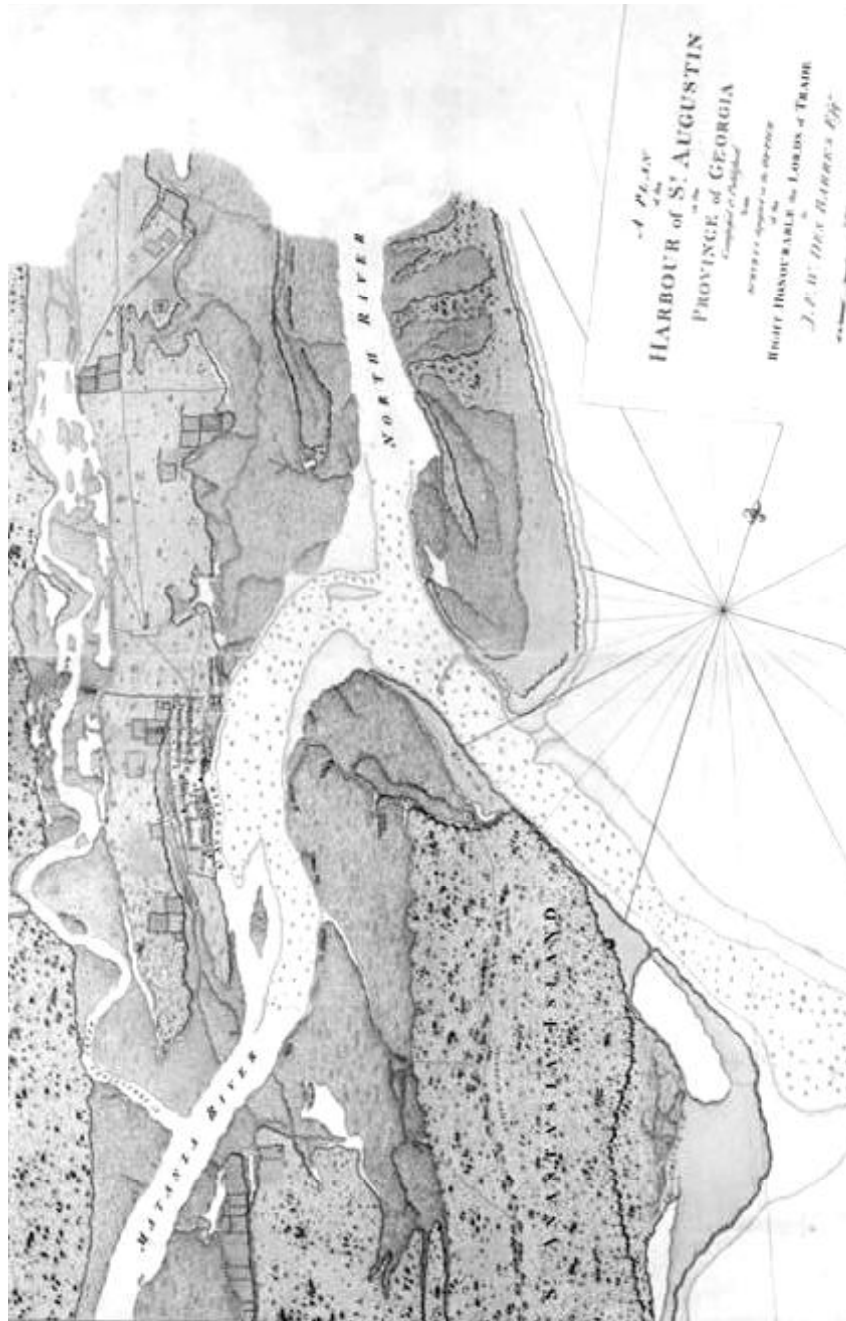
Map of St. Augustine's Harbor during the British period by J.F.W. Des Barres, appeared in the giant marine atlas, *The Atlantic Neptune*, of August 1, 1780.

British Period Archival Research

St. Augustine port records for the British Period, contained in the Naval Office Shipping Lists for East Florida in the British National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office) in Kew just outside of London cover a six-year period spanning the years 1764-1769.[3] These records document the beginning and expansion of British trade to then-British St. Augustine. The redords are divided into exports and imports and show that the majority of St. Augustine's trade during the brief British Period was with the ports of Savannah, Georgia and Charleston, South Carolina.

This comes as no surprise since these are the closest prominent ports on the east coast and, in addition, as stated above these ports had an established habit of trading with St. Augustine during the Spanish Period. These English colonial ports had established the St. Augustine market in the face of war and prohibition and so now would reap the added benefits that came with the chance of power. Other east coast ports engaged in the St. Augustine trade included Sunbury in Georgia, Port Royal in South Carolina, Brunswick in North Carolina, Philadelphia, and New York . Other British colonial ports included Pensacola, Bermuda, Antigua, and St. Kitts. European ports included Cork in Ireland.

Travel to the St. Augustine Bar

The St. Augustine inlet was a dangerous one and the port small and exposed to northeaster storms. A German surgeon named Johann Schopf serving with British forces during the Revolutionary War was making his way home after the war and took ship in Charleston, South Carolina, for St. Augustine in 1784. He recorded the voyage and impressions in great detail give the reader a vivid account of a voyage to St. Augustine from the port of its principal trading partner during the British Period.

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[3]   National Archives Public Records Office, (NA/PRO),Colonial Office (CO)5/557, (CO)5/553;
Treasury (T)1/454, T1/443.

On board a schooner of 25 tons I left the harbor of Charleston at mid-day the 9th of March; at 4 o'clock we passed the Bar without mishap and got out to sea with a light wind from the north-west . . . . Of conveniences on such small vessels there are few or none; only fine weather and a short voyage can make them bearable. Being out of sight of land, but not more than 15-20 sea-miles distant, we were entertained by the company of numerous water-fowl, dolphins, and medusa [jelly fish].

We sailed along the coast of Georgia, seeing nothing more of the land than the haze above it, or what mariners call the 'loom of the land'. On the third day (the 11th of March) we neared the coast of Florida, and in the evening found ourselves opposite the river St. John's 30 miles north of Augustine . . . . About its mouth, since Carolina and Georgia were given up by the English, many refugiés have settled and built an extensive place, called also St. Johns. A bar lies before the mouth of the river, but there is 15-17 ft. water; larger ships therefore run in here or into St. Mary's River, more easily and safely than anywhere else in this colony.

After another unquiet night, during which a hollow sea with calm flung our little schooner pitilessly from one side to the other, a favorable wind brought us in good time the next mooring to the heights before Augustine. On account of the very flat coast it is difficult to find the site of Augustine; ships are often at a loss for several days. The night was warm, but the morning cool and with a heavy dew on land. We stood off and on before the bar, waiting for the pilot, who had been signaled for and shortly came over the so-called Swash and at 9 o'clock was on board. Helped by an incoming tide and a fresh north-east wind, the most favorable for entering craft, he carried us well over this dreadful bar, which had caused our young skipper many an anxious sigh all the way from Charleston. The steersman on the other hand, quite in the indifferent manner of an old sea-farer, had been entertaining the small company on board with numerous stories of ship-wreck and loss of life, always concluding with the statement that the bar before them could not be crossed without mortal danger... Among the bars, which are so common on the southern coasts of North America, that before St. Augustine is unquestionably the most dangerous, because [its] the shallowest and at the same time exposed to the total force of the ocean playing upon it".[4]

Schopf shows that a quick and ideal passage from Charleston to St. Augustine could be carried out in four days with a good wind out of the northwest. By keeping between some fifteen to twenty miles off shore, the master of the sloop allowed for good sea room to maneuver in the event of foul weather. These travelers were very fortunate in arriving off St. Augustine and getting a pilot on board just as the necessary circumstances of wind and tide came together

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[4]   Charles A. Tingley, "Over the Swash and Out Again" *El Escribano* 45 (2008): 92-95.

to allow passage over the bar. It was not uncommon for arriving and departing vessels to be obliged to wait between one to two weeks in order to have the necessary conditions of wind and tide to cross the bar. Such a quick passage over the bar could go a long way to making a voyage profitable. The crew of a vessel required to wait two weeks without the bar would consume a great deal of provisions thus adding to the cost of the voyage. If the same vessel was obliged to wait two weeks before leaving on its outbound leg that would make a total of one month's additional provisions for the entire crew. In cases where profit margins were close, such waits could be very detrimental to a vessel's financial bottom line. Our traveler Johann Schopf also describes the bar and its channels and some of the prevailing conditions at the time.

Ordinarily there are but 3, often only 2 channels where it can be crossed, and these at ebb-tide with only 4-4 1/2 ft. of water, and at high tide with not more than 8-9. These channels which of themselves admit nothing but small and light vessels, are besides narrow and crooked, and what is worse they shift so generally after stormy weather, on account of the quick-sand which forms the bar, that a seaman, quite familiar with them, after a brief absence from Augustine cannot without risk take the old course to which he had been used. The pilots therefore, as often as they come out to bring in a ship, must examine the passage anew. Nor will they take a vessel in except at flood tide, and the tide must not have reached its height; for in case the vessel fares ill, the rising tide would float it again, unless already broken by the heavy shocks, or those on board might with the help of boards &c. swim off to shore, which is about the only means of escape, since boats can be of no use in the circumstances... It has become so common at St. Augustine to see ships aground on this bar and this coast generally, that disasters of the sort have almost ceased to arouse sympathy or wonder.[5]

Clearly the St. Augustine bar was one to be approached with a great deal of caution by shipmasters. Toward the end of the British Period in 1782 after the fall of Savannah and then Charleston to Patriot forces, a great many vessels bearing loyal British refugees, made for the loyal colony of St. Augustine. In a number of cases as discussed above, vessels had to wait offshore for the weather to improve before attempting to cross the dangerous bar into the harbor. In a number of cases, vessels were cast away when they neglected to take on board competent pilots. In one particularly horrendous case, nine transports were lost on the St. Augustine bar

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[5]   Tingley, "Over the Swash," 95.

in late December 1782.[6] Our traveler Johann Schopf reported in his journal that following the fall of Charleston over one two-day period no less than sixteen vessels bearing Loyalists went to pieces on the bar with a significant loss of life.[7]

Notwithstanding the less than ideal conditions of the St. Augustine bar, a good deal of trade came to the port during the British Period. The data contained in the Naval Office Shipping Lists for East Florida have been entered into a relational database. To date, preliminary analysis has focused on a sixteen-month period from November 1764 to February 1766 with reference specifically to outbound vessels. Analysis of outbound vessels was undertaken in order to examine St. Augustine's contribution to maritime commerce in terms of export products. This ongoing study is bound to uncover even more information as it progresses.

The Vessels

Analysis of the sixteen-month period shows that between November 1764 and February 1766 a total of 50 vessels were documented departing the port of St. Augustine. These 50 voyages were undertaken by 30 different vessels demonstrating that some vessels came to St. Augustine on various occasions and suggesting a number of shipmasters made St. Augustine a regular port of call. Of the 50 voyages, 23 were vessels that made just one port call during the sixteen-month period. Another 25 sailings were undertaken by the remaining seven vessels that frequented the port with more regularity as shown in Table 1. The prominent role played by the merchants and ship owners of Charleston is clearly shown. Of the 25 sailings listed in Table 1, nineteen or 76% were vessels registered and operated out of the port of Charleston.

Among the many details recorded in the Naval Office Shipping Lists are the places where the vessels in question were built. Usually, these locations are recorded in a very straightforward manner. They include such localities as Massachusetts Bay, Maryland, North Carolina, and Georgia. A number of vessels were

[6]   Wilbur Siebert, *The Legacy of the American Revolution to the British West Indies and Bahamas* (Columbus: Ohio State University Bulletin, 1913).

[7]   Tingley, "Over the Swash," 96.

SAMUEL P. TURNER

Table 1

November 1764 - February 1766				
Vessel Name	Tons	Master	Home Port	# of Voyages
Schooner Augustine Packet	20	Francis Goffe	Savannah	4
Schooner Queenby	20	Andrew Wells	Charleston	2
Sloop Courtney	30	John Williams Joshua Mayo Richard Henderson	Charleston	3
Schooner Margaret	20	Thomas Buckle	Charleston	2
Sloop Peggy	10	Fenton, David	New York	2
Schooner Benjamin	20	Thomas Tucker	Charleston	2
Schooner Mary	20	Adam Bachop Thomas Hardy	Charleston	10
			Total Multiple Voyages ⸗	25

Source: Britsh National Archives, Naval Office Shipping Lists for East Florida

described as "Plantation Built," suggesting that they were built in rural shipyards near or adjoining agricultural plantations. Such rural yards may have had better access to sylvan resources than their more urban-settlement or city-based counterparts. One may be tempted to assume that most plantation-built vessels were constructed in the southeastern colonies but one cannot make this assumption since the term "plantation" was also used in the more northern colonial settings of the Middle Atlantic and New England.

Some vessels were foreign built and hailed from such places as Great Britain and Bermuda but they were an exception to the general rule of American, colonial built. Some vessels were condemned prizes and as such their place of build was not recorded at the time of sale by the prize court. This omission might have been intentional to erase as much of the vessels' previous histories as possible to avoid former owners' coming forward to make claims against new owners.

Of the 50 voyages represented by vessels departing the port of St. Augustine, 21 were built in the colony of South Carolina. Sixteen of these, however, were represented by four craft which made multiple trips to St. Augustine. These were the schooner *Mary*, the schooner *Queenby*, the schooner *Margaret*, and the schooner *Benjamin*. Ten of the 21 departing voyages were undertaken by the schooner *Mary*, the most consistent trader to the port of St. Augustine. The other three South Carolina vessels undertook two voyages each.

South Carolina had been in the shipbuilding business for some time specializing in low- tonnage, small coasting craft such as those that called at St. Augustine. During the decade of the 1760s, Charleston merchants owned very few large-tonnage vessels and relied on British-made and -owned vessels for their trans-Atlantic trade. However, as the next decade began, there was a spike in Charleston shipbuilding in terms of larger tonnage. The change was due in part to the uncertainties involved in depending on British-island-owned shipping. Henry Laurens, the most prominent merchant in Charleston and himself involved in the St. Augustine trade under study, was one of the leading proponents of this expansion of the Charleston shipbuilding trade.[8]

Taking the schooner *Mary* as a particular example of a Charleston owned and built vessel, the records tell us a good deal. During the documented period she sailed under four different ship masters on two separate Charleston registries, one dated February 15, 1762 and the other dated January 30, 1765. Though the masters switch with regularity, the vessel tonnage in the documents is consistent as are the registries indicating that all entries are referring to the same schooner *Mary*.

With regard to the records themselves, the records of imports into St. Augustine from the time Great Britain took control in 1763 up to November 14,1764, are lost or in a record group not yet examined at National Archives in the United Kingdom. The same is the case for outbound or export records for St. Augustine prior to November 14, 1764. It is often the case that port records do not survive in their entirety. They all relied on individuals to assure that the transportation and curation of the documents occurred. Records could be lost in transit or be misplaced once at their destination. Even when the documents were stored in the correct place at the destination archive, events such as war, fire, and flood could also cause damage and destruction to documents making the researcher's task just that much more complicated.

The records also show other interesting facts. The owners of the *Mary* were operated under regular charter to the merchants

[8]   Joseph A. Goldenberg, *Shipbuilding in Colonial America* (Charlottesville: Published for the Mariners Museum, Newport News, Va., by University Press of Virginia, 1976), 120-21.

Thomas Shirley and Edward Martin, who most likely resided in Charleston, South Carolina. These men were listed on all the voyages, both inbound and outbound, as the owners of the voyage. In other examples, the master of the vessel was listed as the owner of the voyage, demonstrating that in those particular instances he was in overall charge of the entire business. Upon occasion, the master was listed as one of a number of voyage owners, indicating he was a shareholder acting on the others' behalf while in St. Augustine.

One of the things that immediately comes to light when one examines these records is that St. Augustine was frequented by smaller trading vessels. The great majority of these were sloops and schooners, which comes as no surprise given the description of the inlet discussed previously. The majority of vessels, 58 per cent, fell within the 20- to 25-ton range. This was the tonnage of the schooner that brought Johann Schopf over the bar in 1784.[9] Vessels as small as ten to fifteen tons also called at the port and made up eighteen per cent of departing vessels. Another eighteen per cent of vessels ranged between 30 to 35 tons. It is interesting to note that no vessels ranging between 40 and 45 tons called at St. Augustine. Since there are a few instances of 50 ton vessels calling, it seems likely that the 40-45 ton range was not commonly found in coastal trading vessels of the time (Table 2).

Table 2

November 1764 - February 1766		
Tons Burden		
10-15 tons	9 sailings	0.18
20-25 tons	29 sailings	0.58
30-35 tons	9 sailings	0.18
40-45 tons	0 sailings	0.00
50 tons	2 sailings	0.40
Undocumented	1 sailing	0.02
Totals	50 sailings	1.00

Source: Britsh National Archives, Naval Office Shipping Lists for East Florida

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[9]　Tingley, "Over the Swash," 92.
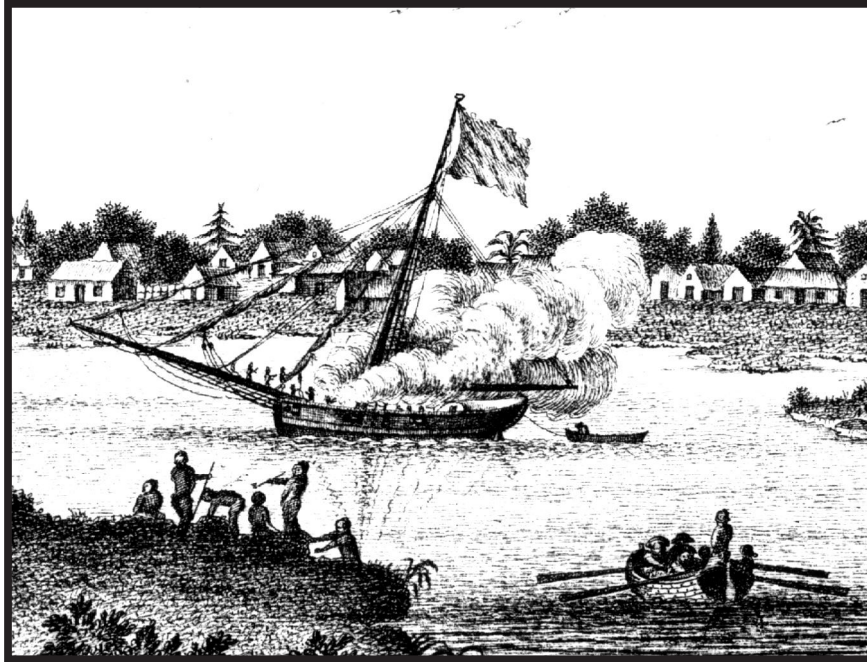
Sloop in St. Augustine's harbor circa 1750. "Vue de la ville de Sn Augustin de la Floride" (View of St. Augustine, Florida). Library of Congress.

The Products

So, what were the products of St. Augustine during the early British Period under study? The reader is reminded that the Naval Office Shipping Lists for East Florida begin in 1764, the year after Florida was ceded to Britain by Spain. It was the newest of colonies and just beginning to be organized and established. Had the British not had the foresight to place a garrison of troops in St. Augustine as soon as the treaty permitted, the departing Spanish residents, embittered by the loss of their land, would likely have carried out a scorched earth policy. As it was, the Spanish took what possessions they could and the items that were beyond their means to move often ended up in the bottom of their wells. The British garrison had stymied the burning of buildings or the destruction of orchards. As a result, there was some infrastructure in place when the British settlers arrived in the new colony.

The Spanish departed, the English arrived, and the orchards responded to the ever-changing seasonal cycle as usual. As autumn and then winter arrived, the citrus ripened. The trade in oranges from St. Augustine was long established, with Charleston being the primary market earlier in the eighteenth century when the Spanish still held St. Augustine.[10] Oranges quickly became one of the principal export products of the recently arrived British settlers. Our traveler Johann Schopf, while awaiting a vessel in St. Augustine in 1784, had occasion to explore the town and its environs and mentioned St. Augustine's orchards.

The orchards contain little besides lemon and orange trees. The latter, sweet as well as the sour, are thought to be especially good, even better than the West Indian. But the sour are the most raised. The expressed juice is sold at 1 Spanish dollar the gallon. Of both sorts there are very strong and handsome trees, yielding annually 3-4-500 oranges.[11]

At the time, the Spanish dollar was worth five English shillings and there were twenty shillings to the pound. Therefore, four Spanish dollars equaled an English pound of the time. The documents show that oranges were exported in barrels and casks or in lots of 10,000 and occasionally in lots of 1,000. These lots most likely were made up of cart loads, sacks, or baskets, that generally had a consistent number of oranges. That consistent figure was then multiplied by the number of carts, sacks, or baskets to arrive at the final lot figure.

Two kinds of oranges were documented in the records. These were "sweet oranges" and "oranges". It is likely that the term "oranges" referred to sour oranges described by Schopf above. These had value for use in the production of marmalade and as a substitute for lime or lemon juice. The export of oranges was seasonal beginning in October and running through March with the largest volume of trade done in November and December. Oranges went exclusively to Georgia and the Carolinas. No instances of the export of oranges sweet or otherwise to New England ports occurred during the sixteen-month period under study though they had been

10   Harman, *Trade and Privateering*, 16.
11   Tingley, "Over the Swash," 113.

shipped in casks upon occasion as far as New York during the earlier Spanish Period.[12]

In a few instances orange juice was shipped out in barrels. Juice did not depend on the season. Referred to as "orange juice" rather than sweet orange juice, sour orange juice with its lower sugar content probably lasted much longer than sweet orange juice. Lime juice was stored and shipped in barrels and was an important article of naval stores, used by mariners to help avoid scurvy. Indeed, it is possible that juice of the sour orange could be and was substituted for lime juice upon occasion, and therefore it's possible that the documented cases of barrels of orange juice from St. Augustine in fact may represent naval stores.

Some of St. Augustine's other principal exports at this time were cattle hides, deer skins, oysters, hogs, lumber, and live oak knees. Cattle were not as abundant as deer so the majority of animal skins or hides exported were deer skins. Both hides and deer skins came in two conditions; dressed and undressed. Dressed hides were in a more highly finished state in preparation for tanning, already defleshed and possibly lightly salted. Undressed hides and deerskins were likely well salted in preparation for export as it was necessary for all or most of the moisture to be removed from the adhering flesh and hide in order for the skins not to rot in the ship's holds before reaching tanneries at the destination port.

The shipping of lumber and live oak knees particularly was likely associated with naval supplies. Other colonies in the Southeast offered these resources as well, but a good price on a large lot, or demand, made them marketable anywhere. The same applied with hogs and oysters—some of St. Augustine's other export products.

Many vessels left St. Augustine in ballast. Of the 50 vessels departing the port of St. Augustine, 21 boats (42 per cent) left in ballast, having no export cargo on board. This severe imbalance of trade was only to be expected at the beginning of the British colonial period in East Florida as settlers moved in and established their businesses and export products. However, Charleston's customs records from the preceding Spanish Period show that vessels returning from St. Augustine also often returned in ballast demonstrating

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[12]   Harman, *Trade and Privateering*, 21.

the continuation of a previously established imbalance of trade.[13] Interestingly there is no mention in the trade documents under study of the export of indigo from St. Augustine between 1764 and 1769. This occurred somewhat later and increased in the early 1770s.

How this new British colonial economy would have evolved naturally over many decades will remain an academic issue. The costs of the French and Indian War which had brought Florida and French Canada into the British colonial system led to a system of taxation and political dissatisfaction in all the British American colonies that after two decades burst into an all consuming Revolutionary War. The second, and last, British Governor of East Florida, Patrick Tonyn, arrived in St. Augustine in 1774, the year that the Continental Congress met for the first time. The arrival of Patrick Tonyn marked a clear turning point in the affairs of the British colony of East Florida. His arrival coincided with the outbreak of war and the end of peaceful trade and commerce.

The following year 1775 saw the brewing tension break into open fighting at Lexington Green. In St. Augustine, 111 barrels of gunpowder were taken by a colonial privateer from the sloop *St. John* as it lay without the bar awaiting a good tide and wind to cross into the harbor. The loss of the powder, earmarked for an East Florida Indian tribe, caused Governor Tonyn political problems with the Indians whom he had to handle delicately in order to avoid a possible uprising motivated by illegal land speculation by a number of British colonials among others things.[14] In addition, East Florida was not without its rebel sympathizers though it remained a loyalist bastion and a place of refuge for loyalists fleeing Georgia and the Carolinas and later from New York as well. The Royal Navy was spread thin and East Florida was by no means wealthy, populous, or in an advanced stage of development. It was also well removed from most of the fighting, and therefore low on the list of British priorities for naval protection.

St. Augustine's principal trading partners had been the port cities of Savannah and Charleston. Once the royalist governments of those two colonies collapsed and rebel governments established in

[13]   Ibid.,

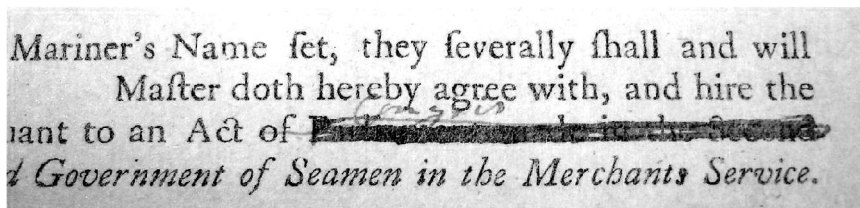[14]   Roger C. Smith, "The Façade of Unity: British East Florida's War for Dependence," (M.A. thesis, University of Florida, 2008), 36.

Certificate of ownership for the sloop *General Gates* issued by the Custom House in Charleston, South Carolina. NA/PRO T77/29.

their place, letters of marque and reprisal were issued to enterprising mariners of those ports to attack and capture British shipping in an effort to interrupt military and civilian supply lines essential to maintaining the war effort. Many privateers set out from Savannah and Charleston and made for the bar at St. Augustine, where they picked off vessels anchored offshore awaiting the necessary conditions for crossing over the bar. This had a tremendous impact on the port's economy and almost caused a collapse of trade at St. Augustine. In order to survive and procure articles and trade for the citizens of the port, East Florida's Governor Patrick Tonyn issued his own letters of marque and reprisal. These privateers sailed out of St. Augustine and preyed on rebel trade at the ports of Savannah, Charleston, and elsewhere. This brought trade items to St. Augustine that were essential to the well being of its residents.

The captured documentation from one of these prizes was recently found in the British National Archives. The vessel was the sloop *General Gates*, that had previously been taken a prize by a rebel privateer. Her Charleston paperwork relates that the vessel was a prize condemned in the Court of Admiralty of the State of South Carolina and was the property of William Valentine, John Lewis Gervaise, William Livingston, and Andrew Thomson. The issuing of documentation and certificates of ownership was authorized by an act of the Continental Congress on April 6, 1776. This authorizing legislation was printed on the certificate form, which demonstrates that prior to complete independence from Great Britain, the national government had been exercising control over vessel documentation and similar matters.

Section of a mariner's contract originally enacted by an Act of Parliament during the second year of the reign of George II, adapted by Continental Congress. NA/PRO T 77/26.

The name *General Gates* was applied by the new owners in Charleston since it is unlikely that British loyalists or even those friendly to the cause of American independence but living in a British-controlled port would name their vessel after a general in the Continental Army. General Horatio Gates had been commissioned as a brigadier general and adjutant general of the Continental Army on June 17, 1775. The *General Gates* was a sloop of twenty tons with a square stern. She was the perfect prize to get over the bar and into St. Augustine. Her master, before being taken by a privateer under a British flag and brought into St. Augustine, was Eden Rudolph. The certificate was signed and dated on February 14, 1778. Five days later the vessel was cleared by Charleston customs. Rudolph declared his outbound cargo to be 223 barrels of rice and five casks of indigo. The vessel carried no guns and was manned by nine men and bound for Cape François in Saint-Domingue (Haiti), where Eden Rudolph sold his cargo on March 24, 1778. She was apparently captured by a privateer on her return journey and brought into St. Augustine as a prize.[15]

Perhaps the most interesting document among those captured on the vessel was the instrument of agreement between the shipmaster and his crew. The document is a printed form that was filled in by the master and crew. The form was originally a British colonial document created pursuant to an Act of Parliament made in the second year of the reign of King George the Second (1728). The document was amended at the time of issuance by marking out the word "parliament" and the reference to the king. Above this, handwritten in ink, is the word "congress" so as to change the document to read "pursuant to an Act of Congress" rather than "pursuant to an Act of Parliament". These documents are a beautiful example of the transfer of authority over American trade and seamen from the British government to the new national government embodied at that time by the Continental Congress.[16]

In addition to issuing letters of marque and reprisal for privateers that were preying on rebel shipping, Governor Tonyn also created a provincial marine service. The service was dedicated to

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[15] NA/PRO T55/29.

[16] NA/PRO TI77/26.

the protection of East Florida and its trade and supplemented the occasional Royal Navy support available to the colony. The East Florida provincial marine was under the direction and command of Jonathan Mowbray, a sea captain and resident of St. Augustine. Jonathan Mowbray no doubt was issued a letter of marque and reprisal by Governor Tonyn to give him full legal protection should he and his vessel be taken by rebels. But rather than seeking rebel shipping, Mowbray was paid by Governor Tonyn and answered to him directly. His vessel, the armed sloop *Rebecca*, was at the governor's beck and call for purely military purposes along with a number of other vessels operating under Mowbray's command.

Governor Tonyn had intelligence that the Rebels planned an invasion of East Florida, which in fact occurred in early May 1777. In a letter to his superiors in England, the governor detailed some of his preparations that he made to receive the invaders and how the military operations worked out. The plan had an important naval aspect which he discussed in his letter. He wrote in part:

My instructions were that Captain Mowbray with the *Rebecca* and all the other armed ships and vessels should sail into St. Marys while the troops marched by the main scouring the islands in that march and by a well concerted attack I was certain of giving the rebels a total overthrow. Toward this object *Rebecca* and *Hawke* armed ships were ordered to fall down St. Johns River and to anchor without the bar: the *Meredith*, and the smaller armed vessels to be ready to go out and to join them on first notice. A storm of wind my Lord forced the *Rebecca* and *Hawke* to sea. The former fell in with and engaged a rebel brigantine of sixteen guns, and crowded with men, and after a brisk running fight maintained by the rebels, the *Rebecca* silenced their fire for eight minutes and was baring down on the brigantine to board, when they renewed their fire, an unlucky shot carried away the sloop topmast and rent the mainsail which gave the brigantine the advantage in sailing and an opportunity of flight. The sloop engaged to leeward and the brigantines decks were much exposed to fire from the sloop. Two men were seen to fall killed from the tops into the sea and many must have been killed on the decks. The *Rebecca* had a man killed and nine wounded. In this affaire Captain Mowbray's spirited conduct deserves uncommon applause, indeed my Lord, his zeal, activity, and unwearied industry, on all the different parts of service, in (unreadable) up creeks, assisting in erecting batteries, and cooperation on all occasions of service with the greatest (unreadable) for the good of the King's service cannot be too much commended. Lieutenant Findly of the 60th Regiment and a detachment of this garrison on board the *Rebecca*, behaved with great resolution and courage, and it is to their behavior that Captain Mowbray ascribes his superiority over the brigantine. The *Rebecca* returned in a too shattered condition to proceed to St.

Mary's and before she could be repaired to pursue the intended operations, the rebels had time to retire, after they had attempted to cut a passage through Amelia Narrows.[17]

The detachment of soldiers was probably to be landed as part of the plan to repel the invasion, but their usefulness in a naval engagement is clear from Mowbary's statements to Governor Tonyn. Shortly after the encounter with the rebel privateer a survey of damage to the Rebecca was made. An excerpt from the survey is of considerable interest:

We whose names are hereunto subscribed have been on board the armed sloop *Rebecca*, and there have taken a strict & careful survey of the hull, masts, sails, rigging, stores etc. complained of and find as follows...Viz..

Hull much damaged by having five shot between wind & water & one through the boards. Six timbers shot away above the deck, the boom shot in three different places, the topmast rendered entirely unfit for service & the mast much damaged all which must be shifted & repaired & for which we adjudge the sum of fifty pounds necessary to refit the same-

Sails at that time sett (to say) fore sail, jib topsail, mainsail, square sail, & topgallant sail, containing 1065 yards canvas was entirely shot to pieces by langridge & grape shot & in our opinions rendered utterly unfit for service for which we adjudge the sum of £209 .16 . 1 necessary to replace the same.

Standing & running rigging very much damaged being shot to pieces & otherwise rendered utterly useless since in the service and that being without the bar they were obliged for the preservation of their ship & selves & likewise for a speedy assistance for the wounded men, which was at the time very alarming, to cut their cable (unreadable) by which necessary conduct the anchor (unreadable) was unavoidably lost near the breakers outside the bar of the river St. Johns for all which loss & damage which in our opinion was undoubtedly unavoidable we adjudge the sum of £231 4. 6 necessary to repair & replace the same and that in the action with the Rebel privateer on the 26th May they had two guns, two pounders, with their carriages, damaged & shot so as to render them unfit for further service for which we adjudge the sum of twelve pounds necessary to replace the same-

And we do further declare that we have taken this survey with such care & equity that we are ready to make oath (if required) to the impartiality of our proceedings.Given under our hands on board the armed sloop *Rebecca* in St. Johns River This 28 June 1777. Sam Haycraft, John Macleod, Tho Love (unreadable).[18]

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[17]   NA/PRO CO5/557.
[18]   NA/PRO T1/528/150 verso.

The *Rebecca* suffered a great deal of damage in the fight and many of her crew were injured. There are no muster books available for the *Rebecca* nor information on the number of soldiers of the 60th Regiment who were on board. However, either as a result of damage to the *Rebecca*'s windlass or as a result of insufficient manpower to operate the windlass to raise the anchor, Mowbray ordered the anchor line cut when the wind and tide favored a passage over the bar at the St. Johns River.

Jonathan Mowbray continued to serve the government of East Florida for the duration of the war. Following the return of the Floridas to Spain, he sold his house in town to a Father O'Reilly at the beginning of the Second Spanish Period. Father Miguel (Michael) O'Reilly went on to dedicate the new parish church, which is now St. Augustine's Cathedral-Basilica.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, port records for the period 1770 forward have not been located or have not survived so we are unable to get a clear picture of how the trade from 1764-1769 evolved. We can say however, that this first documented period of commerce resembles very closely that of the preceding Spanish Period when East Florida was neither wealthy, populous, nor very developed. When the British arrived in East Florida they inherited the basic Spanish infrastructure of buildings and orchards and therefore they adapted quickly to the Spanish economic model for short term survival, exporting products of the land such as oranges, hides, and forestry products. These items were carried, as they had been in the Spanish Period, in small coastal traders ranging generally between ten and fifty tons that had a reasonable chance of surviving a crossing of the St. Augustine bar.

Indigo is not mentioned in any of the port records as an export product between 1764 and 1769 even though it is often touted as British East Florida's principal and most lucrative export. Plantations dedicated to the cultivation of indigo were not established at the beginning of the British settlement of East Florida, but in the later 1760s, after the documented period. It is clear that there was only a very brief window when regular unmolested commerce in

this commodity was possible before the outbreak of hostilities and privateering in 1775.

How the British East Florida colony, economy, and trade would have developed will never be known. In spite of remaining loyal to the British Crown, the fall of Pensacola and West Florida to Spanish forces under the command of Bernardo de Gálvez in May 1781 left East Florida isolated and militarily untenable. Consequently both Floridas were ceded back to Spain which resumed control in 1784 in the midst of the British evacuation.